

The lies we sometimes tell ourselves

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

Is it just me, or does it seem that Canada is a country perpetually standing at a crossroads?

Maybe it's because we're a relatively young country as far as us settlers are concerned. Maybe it is because we're living next to a behemoth of a nation and, whether we're conscious of it or not, constantly comparing ourselves to our rebellious big brother in the south.

Over the past five years or so, we've liked to position ourselves very much as an 'other' compared to the very strange and dark era said big brother is trying to pull itself out from, but do we have the firmest of footings to do so?

While we usually like to think so, reality isn't too far behind ready to smack some sense into us.

We have had some time to contemplate these realities more often than is comfortable for some over the last decade or so, including apologies for past wrongs issued by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as well as his predecessor Stephen Harper and even further back.

We had cause to reflect in 2017 during the sesquicentennial of Confederation when plans for celebration rapidly shifted to commemoration as tough questions were asked on just what there was to celebrate. Were we celebrating a strong, united nation built from coast to coast through the innovation of the railroad, or were we supposed to be celebrating what was almost tantamount to a house of cards built on a foundation that was swampy to begin with?

Just a few months before Canada Day 2017 rolled around, former MP Dr. Kellie Leitch raised questions of her own during her brief run to replace Mr. Harper as the leader of Canada's Conservatives, suggesting a 'values test' for newcomers to this country. This lead, of course, to the inevitable question of just what constitutes 'Canadian' values? Nothing valuable or constructive came out of that debate.

Last month's horrific discovery of the remains of 215 children in unmarked graves on the grounds of a former residential school in Kamloops reminded us of a very dark 'and alarmingly recent' chapter in our collective history, while the tragic terrorist act in London, ON, last week, which saw a Muslim family almost completely decimated while out on a stroll simply due to their religion, has underscored another part of our national story. But whether it is the beginning, middle, or end of a chapter is yet to be determined.

If any answers were provided by our nation's leaders in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, I think the sharp and poignant words of NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh struck a chord with many Canadians, regardless of what political stripe they subscribe to.

Perhaps it also made many further Canadians uncomfortable, but that is not necessarily a bad thing.

'Today is a hard day,' he said, standing up in the House of Commons after moving messages were also shared by the Liberal leader and Conservative leader Erin O'Toole. 'We think about what this means to Muslims and their families across this country. We have heard people mention this, but it is so common. All of us have gone for walks with our families in this pandemic because there is nowhere to go' to think that a family going for a walk could not make it home, that a casual walk around the block in our neighbourhood would be one's last, that one cannot walk safely down one's own street, we need to think about what that means for a Muslim family. Right now, people are talking to their families and saying maybe they should not go for a walk. There are people literally thinking about whether they should walk out their front door in our own country.

?Some people have said that this is not our Canada, and I think about what that means when people say this is not our Canada. I love this place but the reality is this is our Canada. Our Canada is a place where 215 little kids were found dead in unmarked graves. Our Canada is a place where people cannot walk down the street if they wear a hijab, because they would be killed. This is our Canada. We cannot deny it. We cannot reject that, because it does no one any help.

?Innocent people were killed while praying in a place of prayer, in a mosque in Quebec, gunned down. A Muslim man in Toronto was knifed and killed. In both of these incidents, we know very clearly that it was directly because of hate. There was so much hate towards people they did not know, just because of who they were, how they prayed, and what they looked like. That is a reality. People live with that every day. They walk down the streets wondering if they will be attacked, just because of the way they look, not because of an enemy they have or because of someone who has a problem with them. Will I be attacked today just because of the way I look? That is a real question people ask.?

Mr. Singh ended his remarks with a call to action. What happened in London, he said, was an act of violence, an act of terrorism and an act of hate ? acts which need to be confronted directly.

?We have to make this a moment when we decide to do something differently as a country, when we come together and say that we are going to put an end to hatred, that we are going to put an end to violence and that we're not going to allow political leaders to use this type of divisive hatred to gain political points,? he said. ?We have to be serious about this.?

How seriously this is taken is up to each and every one of us.

We are lucky to live in Canada for many reasons, but it serves no one to turn a blind eye to harsh realities if it doesn't fit into the vision of who we are as individuals and as a country, one that has been sold ? and spoon-fed ? to us for the last 154 years. To do so is to let ourselves stagnate, back away from moving the needle forward, and truly be the country we think we have ? and are.

And Mr. Singh is right: the time to face up to these harsh realities and cast aside the lies we tell ourselves, is now.