

The 'village' is here to help one another

by Mark Pavilons

We're all familiar with the phrase, 'it takes a village to raise a child.'

And it's here to help adults, too.

Originally an African proverb, the phrase picked up steam here in North America following Hillary Clinton's 1996 book, 'It Takes a Village.'

The former First Lady says it's about our network of relationships and values that connect and bind us together.

But what does it really mean? Well, it's a message about a communal, shared responsibility applied to parenting. We've expanded it to emphasize that a child's upbringing goes beyond the family unit, and includes neighbours, the community at large, teachers, etc.

'We are a tribe of future makers. So, let's support each other,' said Marissa Hermer.

I've always believed moms are the strongest humans on the planet. It takes someone very brave to be a mother and someone special to love someone else more than herself.

While references to this phrase centre around child-raising, it goes beyond our little ones.

The 'village model' has expanded to become a partnership in independent living communities for our senior population. For those who are familiar with retirement facilities, it's like a micro-community where everyone shares, gathers, chats over communal meals. It's about camaraderie and looking after each other.

That's something many typical communities or even subdivision neighbourhoods have forgotten.

I grew up in rural Caledon just outside Bolton and we tended to know our neighbours and visit them regularly, often to see if they needed anything. When I moved to Bolton, I carried that sentiment with my apartment building neighbours, always being cordial and well, neighbourly.

It even permeated our first community, a townhouse condo complex, where we often gathered with our neighbours and friends.

That has waned over the years and other than pleasantries and waves, our current neighbourhood isn't as cohesive and bonded.

My father-in-law mentioned they used to have neighbourhood BBQs and even street dances 'back in the day.' They would close the street and all the neighbours would gather, celebrate and catch up. A great idea, one that needs to be resurrected today.

It's hard to pin-point where it all changed and when we all parted and went our separate ways.

Sure, raising children is a consuming task and, in our case, we relied on friends, family and the trusty 'What to Expect' series of books. Early tribulations were quickly handled because doctors were more accessible and even emergency departments were fast and efficient, especially where children were concerned.

The care in this province is exceptional and yes, we were part of that proverbial village.

Being a community journalist, I've always felt connected to the areas I've served. In reality, I work for the residents and respond to their

needs, not unlike a civil servant of sorts. I did even run for Peel Regional Council back in 2010 and finished second in a four-person race.

Through my work, I fostered many connections, links and ties to various groups, associations, local volunteers and average citizens. Still to this day, people approach me and my wife, commenting on my weekly column (that appears in both the King Weekly Sentinel and Caledon Citizen).

It's in King that I had a sort of homecoming. That community has made me feel welcome from day one, and I worked hard to gain people's trust and respect. I think I have done a decent job.

When I received the Non-Resident Volunteer Award in 2023, I felt particularly honoured.

I mentioned in my thank-you that I'd become an honorary King citizen in a heartbeat.

When I attended the recent awards gala put on by the King Chamber of Commerce, it was a bit bittersweet. I hadn't seen many of my regulars since I began my chemo and people seemed genuinely happy to see me. I have represented the paper at this event for more than a decade, and I wasn't going to miss this one.

The evening was great, but when I saw some photos of myself taken that night, I felt old, worn, and a bit of a dunsel. I hope my mug didn't ruin any official photos.

That feeling from my own self-esteem and not from anything else.

I have openly written about my cancer journey in my column for more than a year. I have received many emails, calls and posts on Facebook. These earnest sentiments went beyond the typical be strong cliches to offers of help, support, even drives to appointments.

Some of these were unexpected and I was actually taken aback. I didn't know how to react to such expressions of compassion and, well, love.

One local volunteer powerhouse calls me frequently, offering help. He has said, more than once, that the community has my back.

Cancer is much more than an inconvenience, one that requires all hands on deck.

There are times when I'm surrounded by positive energy and the recipient of thoughts and prayers. And there are other times when I'm alone in my own head, pondering whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles ...?

All the positive thoughts and you can do it attitude won't change the outcome. All the supplements, tuning fork sessions and electrical frequency gizmos may not turn the tide of this sea of troubles. Sometimes, it's like I'm in a row boat, battling the waves in the middle of a dark and threatening ocean. The best I can do is keep rowing.

And yet, I'm reminded by local residents that I'm on a much larger vessel with a bigger community. I'm at the captain's table, sharing a meal with my friends, acquaintances and loved ones. I'm on a pleasure cruise, not a voyage of the damned.

Every little morsel helps.

I thank everyone who thinks about me and has offered words of encouragement. You don't know how much that means.

And I will be forever grateful.

It takes a village to shore up the sea walls and stand, arm-in-arm, in support of one another.