

We need to douse the fuse of hatred

by MARK PAVILONS

?It's obvious you hate me, though I've done nothing wrong?

?I've never even met you, so what could I have done?

?I can't understand

What makes a man

Hate another man

Help me understand ...?

A very poignant message from one of Depeche Mode's most famous singles.

It rings true today, just as it did in 1984. Just as it will forever.

The question is rhetorical, of course. I don't think most of us can ever understand the hate that's been embedded in some cultures, religions and countries.

Canada welcomes everyone of all ethnicities and countries of origin. We are considered a ?cultural mosaic,??unlike the American ?melting pot.?

That's what makes our country really interesting, and attractive to many nations around the globe. By coming to Canada, you don't have to give up your culture, religion or predispositions.

In fact, you can embrace them and share them. We encourage it.

That's not to say hatred hasn't stowed away somewhere in the ?baggage??of immigrants.

Current conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine are poignant reminders of hatred. I?can't debate it or go over the arguments on both sides of these hostile ?coins.?

What we see are the nightly news reports, showing air strikes, drone attacks, and the loss of lives. Cities reduced to rubble. Men, women and children killed. Aid workers killed, and yes, even dozens of journalists who risked their lives to report the ?live??action.

Unless you are Israeli, Palestinian, Ukrainian or Russian, I don't think you have the entire picture. I?don't think we can fully appreciate the emotions, history and yes, hatred being expressed.

And the TV snippets don't do the entire subject justice. It's almost impossible to explain decades of history, rights and wrongs, and previous conflicts.

Bottom line is we just don't get it.

I?think the only way we Canadians can get an idea is to talk, and listen to those involved. And that means all sides. Understanding an issue, as painful as it may be, is only possible when you sit down with someone and look into their eyes.

In my 30-plus years in journalism, I don't think I have had many close encounters with antisemitism or Islamophobia until recently. I still don't understand it all.

What I can do is draw upon some of my own family history, and experiences shared with me.

During university, my wife worked with Holocaust survivors and those experiences changed her forever. The stories relayed by these seniors profoundly impacted my wife. Hearing those tales gave me a bit of a better understanding of this reality.

My mother was of Polish and German descent and lived through the Second World War. She told me she knew very little about the concentration camps and the scale of the genocide. But she mentioned a story of her family harbouring a Jewish family who were making their way out of Germany. Helping them put my mom's family at great risk. To be discovered would mean severe punishment, maybe even death.

After the war, German citizens in the East had to basically fend for themselves. She shared several stories of how she and my uncle (her youngest brother) had to scavenge for food.

Their prime targets were supply trains stocking food for Russian soldiers. My uncle jumped on board open rail cars and began kicking off bags of potatoes to my mom waiting below. The Russians had no mercy, and shot at both of them on several occasions. It's only through luck and perhaps divine intervention that they survived.

My mom's dad, who worked in public works in Berlin, was interrogated and beaten to death by the Russians after the war ended. They were looking for German sympathizers and possible hideouts in the underground.

She lived it and yet didn't fully understand the tragic circumstances. She fled the East as soon as she could, at great peril. Her journey was also filled with danger and she was assaulted at the hands of Russian soldiers.

During my youth I seldom discussed these things with my friends. I even shied away from telling them my mom was German, to avoid the stigma of being called Nazis.

My dad, as a teen, escaped Latvia once the Russians occupied his native land. He witnessed atrocities by the Soviets, too, and developed a profound hatred for them all the years his homeland was under Communist control. It was only after the Wall fell that he was able to return home to see his only living relatives one last time.

That journey wasn't pleasant. He mentioned it was like going back in time because the country hadn't progressed one iota under Soviet rule.

I share these stories because this is my family's perspective on war, tragedy and hatred. This is one side of the story of what makes a man hate another man.

As a teen myself, I suppose I absorbed some of this animosity. It seems the Russian rulers, even today, are still bent on conflict and aggression.

I can sympathize with the Ukrainian citizens and those tens of thousands displaced by the war.

I have no idea how the country or its people will recover, rebuild and regain a sense of hope. There's no doubt this renewed hatred will live long in the hearts and minds of Ukrainians for decades to come. Sad.

This seems to be a destructive cycle for humankind. Have we learned nothing from our past?

I don't have any answers or even suggestions. Like everyone else, I hope tensions, death and calamity will all come to an end soon.

We don't need to add fuel to the fire, or perpetuate this hatred here in our country. I realize it's difficult for those whose friends and family have been killed to simply forgive and forget.

We didn't start the fire, but we're all watching the fuse burn.

But maybe it's up to all of us to try to curb this vicious cycle. Any ideas?