

# Whatever love means

by BROCK WEIR

Feb. 14 is just around the corner and love is in the air!

At least, that's what Valentine's Day enthusiasts will have you believe.

Don't get me wrong, I have no objection to Valentine's Day in and of itself ? it's a chance to celebrate the individuals you love, however you define the feeling.

It might be romantic love, familial love, or even the bond that exists between a human and their pet ? and all that is to be celebrated.

To borrow a phrase from the iconic theme to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, love is all around and celebrating it shouldn't be concentrated to one day in the year like so much frozen orange juice they're promising to pry from our cold, parched hands.

Personally, I'd be happy if people spread the effort they put into Valentine's Day out a little bit more liberally throughout the remaining 364 days a year.

Nearly 45 years on since the infamous engagement interview between the then Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer when the now-King Charles III responded to the concept of being in love with the famous three words, 'Whatever 'in love' means,' I think it's a valid question in our current context.

Love can be defined in many different ways, whether it's spelled out by a dictionary or a very personal and individual definition you hold close to your heart.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary has no less than 14 definitions of 'love' ? and that's strictly its use as a noun; the list is far longer when we add verbiage into the equation. So, in the sake of brevity, among the nouns are as follows: Strong affection for another rising out of kinship or personal ties; attraction based on sexual desire, or affection and tenderness felt by lovers; affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests; an assurance of affection; warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion; the object of attachment, devotion or admiration; a beloved person (SEE: Darling); an informal term of address; unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another, such as the concern of God for humankind ? empath, concern or care for others; a god (such as Cupid or Eros) or personification of love; an amorous episode; sexual intercourse; and a score of zero (SEE: Tennis).?

When it comes to the strict definition of love, it really can be a Choose Your Own Adventure, but it's one definition above, succinctly boiled down by the unlikely source of dictionary.com on which I'd like to zero in on this week: 'active, self-giving concern for others.?'

While we're fortunate to live in communities where active, self-giving concern for others is exemplified every day by active and engaged neighbours, it's something that feels to be in increasingly short supply in the wider world.

Sadly, we're seeing examples of this every day, whether it's the systemic denial of basic human rights ongoing in some parts of this world, the exclusion of certain individuals or groups from the table of public discourse for reasons as numerous as they are nonsensical, and examples enough that could fill this entire column space.

But suffice it to say that Minnesota's Mary Richards might have had a different reception today had she stood in the middle of a busy crosswalk throwing her hat in the air with joyous, reckless abandon.

One example I find particularly galling is the lack of love for one's country, a very different thing from hyper patriotism and

nationalism. Sure, the ongoing trade wars between Canada and the United States, plus several other factors south of our border, have seen a renewed wave of patriotism. Yet, in our alarmingly hyper-partisan world, it seems that all too many are rooting for our current leaders to fail in the face of these challenges simply for validation and the ability to say, "I told you so" rather than helping move the dial forward in a positive direction.

Rooting against the country in the interests of partisanship benefits no one.

As I started to write this week's column, I admit that I was feeling in a bit of a negative mindset about the state of the world and the direction that so many of the constants in our lives seem to be going. I have to say, however, as the week drew to a close, I was feeling far more wind in my sails.

The first instance was a sit-down Q&A with former Prime Ministers Jean Chretien and Stephen Harper at the Royal Geographical Society. While the duo traded the usual mild partisan jabs here and there, they were united in their message: unity in the face of challenges presented to us by the United States.

Themes of collaboration and unity were only underscored through the balance of the week as I had the honour of attending a number of Black History Month events throughout the community.

While the different events approached the subject from their own unique angles, they too were united in the idea of unity and in looking forward.

Heck, perhaps it's a sign of the world we're living in where a simple remark by Brampton MPP Charmaine Williams, the Progressive Conservative Government's Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Development Opportunity at Saturday night's Black History Gala hosted by the Aurora Black Community Association paying tribute Liberal cabinet minister Marci Ien and her myriad accomplishments was nothing short of a heart-warmer.

For Williams, it might just have been a matter of giving credit where credit was due, but, as someone who actively follows politics, it was a nice change of pace and sadly refreshing at the same time.

Themes of unity were also underscored by Ghanaian cultural leader King NanaYaw Osam I.

"We must rise above the voices that seek to divide us and instead embrace the power of unity and inclusivity," he said. "I urge each of you, as leaders and as members of this great community, to reach out to one another with open hearts and open minds."

"Let us lift each other up, support each other's dreams, and champion the cause of justice and equality wherever we go," he continued. "Let us create spaces of belonging where no one is left behind and every voice is heard. Our future depends on our ability to work together, to share our knowledge, our resources and our love. Let us be bold in our activities of progress, fair in our commitment to inclusion, and devote our dedication to the legacy of our ancestors."

"Together, let us be the architects of a new era, one defined not by fear, but by hope, not by doubt, but by determination, not by exclusion, but by unity."

His message may have been framed for Black History Month, but, as is the case with Black history, it's a universal theme.

And we can all take it to heart.

While I started the week feeling slightly disheartened, these instances and these poignant words helped lift the cloud and give me a bit more optimism.

Love might not necessarily be all around at this particular moment in time, but to borrow another quote from Mary Richards, it just

might be nearby.