

What's on your mind?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Most days there are so many things roiling around in my mind it's hard to maintain a focus on any one thing. COVID-19 hasn't helped. Recent events in the news haven't helped either. I have read so much in the last few days, most of it sickening, that I just don't know what to do with the information. I don't know how to help, or even if I am the best person to attempt to help. Surely there are more articulate people than I who can address, and actually have an impact, on the frightening discourse that is happening right now, mostly south of the border but understandably, here too. And yet, if not me, who? If not now, when? It's time. It's time we all speak up and whether we have an impact or not, we HAVE to try. It's incumbent upon each and every one of us to DO something. SAY something. What's on your mind?

What's on my mind is that the events surrounding the death of Mr. George Floyd were nothing better than a modern day lynching. The police officer that murdered him did so casually, with his hands in his pockets, and despite the pleas of both the victim and bystanders to stop, he continued to kneel for at least two minutes AFTER Mr. Floyd was rendered non-responsive (a total of 8 minutes and 46 seconds). There was, and there never will be a reason for his death to have occurred. Same for Mr. Ahmed Aubrey who was simply out for a jog in the neighbourhood he lived in. There is no reason for these senseless killings, unless of course you consider the colour of one's skin a reason, because that appears to be the one defining difference between these two men (and the many other victims we could name) and their killers ? the colour of their skin. Lori Lain Hutherson, in 2017, wrote; ?If you've never had a defining moment in your childhood or your life where you realize your skin colour alone makes other people hate you, you have white privilege.? If you have to read that sentence again and don't understand it, you have white privilege. If you read the stories (as I have been reading) of the many US citizens (professors, appliance repair technicians, students, simply put - people) who describe their encounters with the law as they go about their daily lives and you shake your head in disbelief that these encounters occur so regularly, to people of colour, then you have white privilege. What do we do then? We have to speak up.

If you think there is no Canadian connection, or indeed no Caledon connection to this story, you'd be wrong. Incidents of employees berated by customers, teenagers working a part time job and who were being told to ?go back where you came from? happen here. Casual comments on social media about ?who? was driving the car every time an accident occurs also happen here. A recent article in The Toronto Star profiled Dr. Chika Oriuwa MD, as ?the only black student in a class of 25, and now graduating as valedictorian after being selected by (her) peers.? This is an amazing achievement by any measurable standard. Yet, the very next morning she received this tweet: ?I would never let her treat me.? Really? Wouldn't you? Apparently there are still some folks out there who would rather die than be treated by a person who graduated at or near the top of her class, is well-respected by her peers and who was flawlessly trained in a top medical school. Dr. Oriuwa admits to thinking, ?there is a misconception that once you've attained a certain level of success, education and accolade as a Black person you would somehow become immune to racism??.? Sadly, this is not the case. There are still so many who see colour, and only colour. What's on my mind? How sad it is that this systemic, casual and chronic racism continues to exist.

South of the border the situation will only continue to escalate when you have a Commander in Chief who tweets, ?When the looting starts, the shooting starts.? Really? This is the same President who did and said nothing when masses of gun-toting American citizens, largely white, converged on several state capitols demanding their right to go and get a haircut during a pandemic. People of colour continue to relive the trauma of past oppression over and over again, seemingly without end and without meaningful change. Has there been some violence associated with the demonstrations taking place over this past week? Yes. But when even peaceful protests outside of the White House are broken up by tear gas and rubber bullets ? all for a photo op with the President waving a Bible in the air, is it any wonder there's no faith that systemic racism will ever end? Watching Breakfast Television the other morning resulted in a powerful moment when one of their presenters, visibly upset over recent events, reminded us that even peaceful leaders, like Martin Luther King Jr., were gunned down.

I'm not sure what the answers are. I just know that we all have to start talking about racism. We ALL play a role in its deconstruction. We must educate ourselves constantly. We must start talking to our children from infancy. We must call out

microaggressions, (the casually racist joke for example) and use our white privilege to aid in the fight. When we see a lack of diversity at the Board table, in our community representation, in our organizations and in our schools we must strive for better. We must read stories to our children that represent the lived experiences of every person. I'm encouraged by some conversations already happening in some communities on the issue of how to address and explore diversity here in Caledon. For those who say "Yes, but protesting is resulting in damage," we must change the narrative. I read this recently: rather than saying "It's horrible that an innocent black man was killed but destroying property has to stop." We should be saying, "It's horrible that property is being destroyed, but killing innocent black men has stop."

It's time. Silence is being complicit. Education is the responsibility of us all. We must DO something. We must all SPEAK UP. That's what's on my mind.