

Shame on them *The future of aye serene*

Letters

Taking chances

While Ontario Premier Doug Ford was begging Ontarians to follow COVID-19 guidelines and meeting with his senior ministers to unveil a 28-day provincial lockdown and criticizing the federal government for allowing 64,000 people to fly into Pearson International Airport each week, it seems his then Finance Minister Rod Phillips was sunning himself at the tropical dream destination of St. Barts.

Talk about mixed messaging. It makes you wonder not only what Mr. Phillips – who resigned as finance minister on his chastened return to Toronto – or Mr. Ford – who knew his finance minister would be one of those 64,000 flying back into the country – were thinking? As the former finance minister told reporters, he simply wasn't thinking.

The timing of his trip was especially misguided, for it came just as Ontarians were told not to visit Grandma over Christmas or have Cousin Tom in for Christmas Eve, much less the new neighbours down the street for some eggnog.

However, before we are too hard on Mr. Philips, who is in his first term as an MPP and brings to the job an impressive resume as well as a high-flying background which he seems loathe to give up since he was also in Switzerland in late summer, it must be acknowledged elected officials from all stripes and all levels of government decided the "guidelines" simply did not apply to them.

At the provincial level, various MLAs in Alberta were in Hawaii or Mexico enjoying some much-deserved rest. One was in the UK at a time when a new variant was just diagnosed there. Two MLAs in Quebec were caught on overseas trips. One was in Barbados on vacation, the other in Peru visiting their spouse. On the federal level, a Liberal MP travelled to the US for a funeral. Another Liberal was in Delaware to visit a sick relative. An NDP MP went to Greece to visit her dying grandmother, and a Conservative MP was in Palm Springs – another pricey destination – to deal with real estate matters. He travelled there twice during the pandemic.

If we are truly in the greatest crisis our nation has encountered since World War II, then it should be all hands on deck and everyone in charge staying put instead of gallivanting off to sunnier climes as in other years. The federal government urged Canadians only leave the country for essential travel and the longest undefended border in the world was closed to vehicular traffic for "non-essential" purposes for most of 2020.

Yet these elected officials have chosen to travel while the vast majority of Canadians obeyed the mandates and not only stayed put in their country but did not leave their homes to socialize over Christmas.

Was any of this essential travel? Some of it could be considered compassionate travel and all of us understand the desire to visit an ailing relative, attend a memorial service or be with a spouse separated by miles. Yet all of us also understand the heartache in Canada of people hospitalized alone, the lack of visitors allowed in long-term care homes, the cancellation of baby showers and the impossibility of family gatherings at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Those are sacrifices millions of Canadians have made. Countless others are worried about their jobs, their small businesses, their health and the upcoming vaccine. They are tired of lockdowns, masks, physical distancing, curbside anything and no social gatherings, celebrations or festivities. They would like to escape too to a sunny destination or to visit a loved relative. Yet the vast majority did not. Many have postponed weddings or not had a large family birthday party to celebrate their child's first birthday. Most Snowbirds are not flying south this winter. The folks who wait all year for that two-week vacation in Cuba are not booking it this year.

They are making these sacrifices because they have believed the public messaging about sacrifice, obeying the rules and sticking together in the hopes of coming out of this pandemic as unscathed as possible.

Many Canadians feel distanced from the political elites who do not understand the struggles of the working class and the reality of those making difficult decisions to keep financially and physically safe. This arrogant disregard for provincial and federal guidelines to stay home unless "absolutely necessary" has not only undermined the credibility of various levels of government and political parties but has weakened the resolve of the rest of us to stay the course, do the right thing and keep COVID at bay.

Shame on you Mr. Phillips, your conspirators and your cohorts for betraying the public trust in such a callous way.

*Rain drops of melancholy dim the eyes,
To shortly dry, hiding the Past and Present,
'Neath bright starry thoughts --
Suggestive of a Future aye serene.
- Walt Whitman*

Much as one tries to focus on the "future aye serene" on these first days of 2021, the reality is that many are feeling raindrops of melancholy at the losses, both real and intangible of this past year. On New Year's Day we put the hectic holiday expectations aside in favour of a quieter return to normal life. We finish off the cheese and crackers, the shrimp ring, pour the dregs of the midnight champagne into the morning orange juice and call it breakfast.

In organized households, many a child wakes to the dispiriting sight of mother disrobing the Christmas tree of its glitter and promise. Life resumes the ordinary. If only it were so this year! Wouldn't we love to set out cheerfully to visit friends, don our gifted Christmas clothing for a noisy restaurant brunch or greetings on the church steps or bring our potluck casseroles to our traditional party or gathering?

Each winter, I looked forward to the annual New Year's Day levee hosted by friends at their home along the Bonnechere. It's a truly eclectic gathering of back-to-the-land

A View from Bulger's Corners (and Wilno and Douglas and Barcelona)



Johanna Zomers

friends, musicians and Stone Fence theatre people, of veterans of numerous political campaigns, both local and provincial, of colourful characters from near and far -- an old-fashioned kitchen party with cerebral undertones. Amidst the fiddles and the food there was often also the real sense of the friends lost over the past 12 months, a sort of belated lively reminiscent wake for the ones no longer here.

Communal acknowledgement and sharing of loss is an absolutely vital part of our lives. This past year gave us the first great shared universal experience of grief in our collective human history. Unlike deep

personal grief which sets us down like a derailed train on a siding while the oblivious world streams on by, the losses of COVID-19 are shared across our planet. A villager in distant India, South America or Australia felt the disruption, fear and uncertainty of 2020 in the same visceral way that we did.

If we were personally lucky during 2020, we lost only our innocent expectations that our world is familiar and predictable. If we suffered greater losses such as the deaths of a spouse, child or parent, of close friends or family, we had to make do without the comforting rituals and closure of sharing our sorrow in the customary way. Even our celebrations during the past year were tinged with loss as we watched weddings, graduations and birthdays on a screen. We are all now experiencing what is all too familiar to those who are lonely, abandoned, living without the warmth of home or the comfort of friends and family.

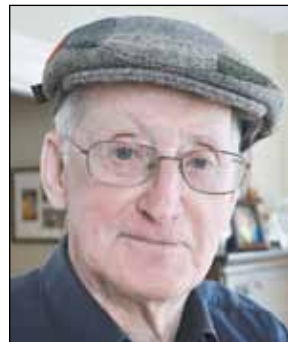
As we move forward, let's acknowledge the immensity of these losses, personal and collective. Too often we try to not "feel our feelings" because it makes us sad and our culture leaves little space for sadness. In the end, acknowledging our sadness at the changes in our lives makes us more human. If nothing else, this past year has proven that we are indeed all in it together!



This is truly one to remember

An Old Man's Opinion

Not Necessarily Ours



Al Donohue

Most of our dreams happen when our mind is wide awake while our tired old body is sound asleep. Without exception, mine are only about dead people, some dead for decades.

One of my old holy aunts told me that their souls need our prayers, but most of the ones I dream about are in heaven within minutes of their death. I hesitated for a couple of years about telling this story, then after spending four days in the hospital, not knowing if I would come out dead or alive, I better not put it off much longer. We never know the day or the hour, and with COVID-19 reaching our peaceful Cow Pie Valley it will be a bad time to celebrate my departure.

I must be a strange old man. I can't remember what I had for breakfast but I can remember dates and phone numbers for more than half a century. On October 15, 2018 I was working at something that a blind old man should not be working at. That night I crawled into bed, dead tired, and soon the fun began. It was 65 years since I worked in Labrador, but I found myself heading back there, dressed in my fur lined underwear wading through 60 cm of snow. My first stop was the carpenter shop where I helped my old chum, Carpenter Foreman Percy Inglis, for a few hours, building one of our huge

convey sleighs that we used to haul our heaviest equipment like cranes, shovels and bulldozers.

After leaving Percy I stopped to visit another old friend, General Foreman, Barney Brindal. We shared a coffee, had a tremendous visit, and then the impossible became possible. I must have travelled by spacecraft and dropped out of the sky, wearing a short sleeved shirt, sandals and something else in between. Facing me when I landed was a massive glass building, stretching over several football fields and full of people. The proper word for what happened next

is probably hallucinating but to me it will always be part of the Dream of a Lifetime. Out of that glass building walked five dead men, all dressed in white silk or satin suits and I recognized all five of them, even the fifth one whom I had never met. They were my father-in-law, Stan Poole, my brother, Urban, cousin John Valiquette, long-time friend, Charlie O'Brien, and U.S. Senator John McCain. They beckoned me to follow and led me to a fruit orchard that can only be found on a Heavenly Planet. It stretched as far as the eyes could see. It contained every kind of fruit that we can imagine. Every tree was exactly the same height, same diameter and same colour of bark. As we picked each item it replaced itself immediately. All of a sudden my companions disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. I have no idea how long I spent in the Land of Dreams. All I know for sure is that I woke up in my cozy little bed still wearing my fur lined underwear.

By the time this copy of the *Leader* arrives in your mailbox we will be starting a brand new year, reminding me to wish all our faithful readers a heartfelt happy and healthy New Year. 2021 will be exactly what we make it.

Thought for the day: If we take care of each other, God will take care of us.

Dear Editor:

In his letter published in the 22 December 2020 edition of the *Leader*, L. J. Helferty begins by questioning the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

For the 10,000 to 15,000 who have died daily worldwide since mid-November – and the meter is still running – COVID-19 has turned out not to be very safe either. I don't know about Mr. Helferty, but I, as someone with the pre-existing conditions of being 77 years old and having Parkinson's Disease, I prefer to take my chances with the vaccine as soon as it becomes available to me, rather than with COVID-19.

Since Mr. Helferty is all over the map in his letter, I'll indulge myself in a digression of my own. I am disturbed at the element of victim-blame inherent in suggestions that deaths from COVID-19 are somehow acceptable in the elderly or in those with other pre-existing conditions.

Personally, rather than feeling that, because of my age and other condition(s), death from the virus is what I have coming to me, I feel that having lived this long is an achievement of sorts and I deserve credit for having at least done something right.

I do hope such cavalier dismissal of COVID-19 deaths in the elderly or in those with pre-existing conditions is not carried out by anyone who, in other contexts, self-identifies as pro-life.

I don't know who the Klaus Schwab to whom he refers is, but if his biggest claim to fame is the conclusion that the old normal is gone, I must congratulate him for contributing a blinding flash of the obvious to the discussion.

As to the angst about Prime Minister Trudeau's use of the term "great reset," I don't understand all the fuss. To me it's glaringly obvious that a great reset will be required to get hard-hit economies functioning adequately again once the pandemic is under control. Or not? What am I missing?

I hate to break it to Mr. Helferty, but pinning for the "old normal" is a futile exercise. As a Christmas greeting from one of my friends read in part: *Life is a journey. We can't know what's around the next bend in the road until we travel there.*

Mr. Helferty says over 90 per cent of US deaths attributed to COVID-19 had other causes listed on the death certificate. I didn't know it was multiple choice with only one right answer.

He goes on to quote a local man who told him his father had Stage 4 cancer but his death certificate said COVID-19. The point seems to be that the cause of death should have been listed as Stage 4 cancer. Which makes me wonder: if that same person had died after being run down by a drunk driver or attacked by an axe murderer, should the cause of death still have been listed as Stage 4 cancer?

Marie Zetter,
(LaPasse) Westmeath

Racism does exist here

Dear Editor:

I would like to commend and thank Johanna Zomers for her excellent column on racism (Dec. 16, 2020). The murder of George Floyd this past summer mobilized people all over the world to rally and speak out in protest.

In Renfrew County, it is no longer possible or acceptable to hide behind the fantasy that racism does not exist here. In October 2020, the mayor of Pembroke organized a Roundtable Discussion on diversity. This forum gave a much-needed voice to people of colour to talk about their lived experience. Most were heart-breaking. There is currently an anti-racism group in Pembroke, people of courage, who would welcome support, and more importantly, allies, in their efforts to speak out. In peace,

Candace Woolley, MSW,
Eganville

More letters on Page 18

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"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

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