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Please think before you speak

Cory Bilyea
Column



I got into journalism in 2019 after many years of reading, watching, and hearing the majority of Canada's and the United States' mainstream media repeatedly get it wrong when reporting on Indigenous People.

Frustrated by the lack of proper information reaching the non-native world and provided with a unique opportunity to speak to a large audience of primarily Caucasian descent, I began to tell you our stories, our struggles and triumphs, and most of all, the truth.

If you don't know the truth or have all the information, you can't make an informed decision or form a healthy relationship with the thought of Truth and Reconciliation.

Until recently, I thought I was doing an excellent job providing you with the kind of information I thought was essential or my readers inquired about.

I have been approached by numerous people, including the Wingham and Area Historical Society, Maitland Valley Conservation Authority, and local libraries. Even local politicians and dignitaries have reached out for information and collaboration ideas, making me extremely happy that people are listening and making positive changes in their respective lives and workplaces.

Part of forming this healthy relationship with Truth and Reconciliation requires the ability to change your thought process; how you think about the Original People of this land depends on what you know and what you have been taught.

History is always fascinating, and people love to learn about it. It's taught in schools, and movies and television shows depict historical moments that people tend to believe. Up until recently, the very limited historical references to Indigenous People were incorrect, stereotypical, and, at times, blatantly racist.

Work is being done at all levels, from grassroots organizations to top-level

government officials, to correct the history books, school curricula, movies and television shows, and the news you read/watch/listen to.

The battle is slow, an uphill battle with many hurdles, but the work is progressing, with more and more people showing up armed with the truth and changing their words to reflect a more accurate depiction of this country's history, specifically its relationship with the people who were already here, the people who were displaced to make room for the influx of newcomers.

The recent presentation about the history of the railroad in Wingham brought many people of all ages and backgrounds out to the tiny train station on Josephine Street, which I was very much looking forward to.

I was thrilled to see the interest in history as the room filled up and people of all ages greeted each other and took their seats; I could feel the sense of community and camaraderie.

The presentation was about trains, the railroad and its connection to Wingham. I thought I was going to hear more about things like the Wingham Salt Mines, the industry the railroad brought, and maybe a bit about who was instrumental in bringing the rails to the community, and that may very well have been the case, but I had to leave.

I left because I was sick to my stomach and very, very upset with what I was hearing. I packed up my stuff and walked out the door with tears running down my cheeks, so full of disappointment and, quite truthfully, rage.

Why, you ask?

The speaker wasn't talking about trains or Wingham, he was reading from

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Time to end the code of silence

It took the police over two weeks to release information that most people who had heard or seen the news report had already figured out. The killer of a woman and her two children in Harrow, Ont., was the woman's husband and the children's father. The Walsh family died of gunshot wounds, the man's self-inflicted, on June 20. It was not until early July that the killer's identity was revealed.

The question on a lot of minds is, why the delay?

It is a given that police had four shooting deaths to investigate, and details may not have been as straight forward as people imagine. They rarely are.

However, members of the public had 16 days to fill in the blanks. The rumours were pretty accurate, as it turned out.

Intimate partner violence and murder is not new and, sadly, not rare. The Government of Canada HELP Toolkit states that between 2014 and 2019, there were 497 victims of intimate partner homicide; over 80 per cent were women.

Facts would probably have been less painful than 16 days of speculation, to those who are all too familiar with intimate partner violence – family, friends, co-workers, social services people, nurses, doctors, police officers, acquaintances who urged someone to get out and get help before it was too late, and survivors who did get out in time.

They battle not only the danger of a devastating tragedy, but the code of silence that seems to surround intimate partner violence.

We no longer blame victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) for

Pauline Kerr
Off The Record



“airing dirty linen in public” when they seek help, instead of suffering in silence and protecting the “sanctity of the family” (i.e., the perpetrator). However, the code of silence persists.

Unlike violence from a stranger, victims of IPV have a relationship with their abuser, perhaps even a mostly loving one. They may depend on their partner for financial support for themselves and their children, fear – quite rightly - that “getting the person in trouble” will put them and their children at greater risk, or come from a culture where leaving an abusive partner is not an option.

Canada's housing crisis has kept people in abusive relationships – looking for an affordable apartment for a single parent with three or four children, is roughly akin to seeking the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Add to that the economic stress on a lot of families caused by higher interest rates, increased food costs and massive rent increases. Also add the fact that a lot of families do not have a regular health-care provider – someone who might question bruises that could be caused by abuse.

And then there is that code of silence. There is a strong hesitation about intervening in family matters

unless there is an obvious criminal act occurring or about to occur. Neighbours may not call police, thinking the yelling may just be from someone's television set. Respecting privacy is important.

Then again, lives might be saved if people were a little less respectful of privacy.

Some are claiming that announcing the facts of the murders in Harrow sooner, while the community was still reeling in shock, might have provided the impetus for a victim to reach out for help, or for a neighbour or relative to reach out to a possible victim.

The code of silence sends a clear and harmful message that certain issues are not to be talked about. It is about time IPV is discussed, openly and honestly. Only then will appropriate resources be devoted and action taken to assist victims and prevent further harm.

Treating the subject like a shameful secret virtually guarantees there will be more tragedies like the one in Harrow.

If you or someone you know is being abused, there is help. Call 911 if you are in immediate danger. Call 211 for community, social and health services. Young people needing help can call Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 or visit their website. Women in need of help can contact a shelter near them – check the sheltersafe website.

Local shelters include: Women's House Serving Bruce and Grey at 1-800-265-3026; Optimism Place, Stratford, 1-800-265-8598; and Huron Women's Shelter, 1-800-265-5506.

The Advance Times welcomes your submissions and letters

As The Wingham Advance Times works to provide an interesting and accurate reflection of Wingham and the surrounding area through our news pages, we urge local citizens to ensure that their community organization is represented through submissions of news tips, articles and photographs. The contributions are appreciated

and, although we can't promise publication of all submissions, every effort is made to ensure those that arrive make our print and online editions.

Our reporters provide coverage of local councils, schools, service clubs, hospitals, community events, sports and more.

However, we can't be everywhere, so it's important to see that numer-

ous stories and photos in each edition have been supplied by dedicated correspondents or interested community members. We truly appreciate and support your efforts to make the Wingham Advance Times your own.

Submissions and news tips are welcome at editor@midwesternnewspapers.com or you can reach us at 519-291-1660.

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Corporate Challenge a ‘huge success’

HURON COUNTY - Last month, 87 eager and energetic folks from across Huron County gathered at Bannister Park in Goderich for the second annual Royal LePage Heartland Realty Corporate Challenge.

Sixteen teams representing 14 local businesses used their brawn and their brains to complete ten fun challenges. Ultimately, the team from Jokey North America was victorious after a three-way tiebreaker with the teams from Coldwell Banker and Huron Commodities.

Participants enjoyed a BBQ lunch provided by Harbour Hill Retirement Community, and local craft brewery Square Brew was on-site with their “tap trailer”.

Zehrs Markets donated fruit and snack bars, while Culligan Water ensured that every participant stayed hydrated on what organizers say was “a very hot day.”

“The Corporate Challenge goes back decades in Goderich and we are so proud to

have partnered with Engage Goderich to bring it back and expand it to our members across Huron County,” explained Huron Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Colin Carmichael.

“For the participating businesses, this is more than just fun and games; it’s an opportunity to build a culture of teamwork within their organizations. It also allows owners and employees alike a chance to socialize in a business context, which is a key aspect of Chamber events.”

Jeff Bauer, co-owner of title sponsor Royal LePage Heartland Realty, agreed, “The networking aspect of the Chamber is huge for business-to-business. Chamber events give us an opportunity to chat with other business owners, let them know about our services, learn about other services, and create that Chamber family.”

The third annual Corporate Challenge will take place on June 20, 2025.

Bilyea: Please think before you speak

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some obscure book, which, in his own words, was likely the only copy left in the world.

Most people will give a warning, some heads-up that they are about to repeat words that aren’t said in today’s polite society or something along those lines, especially when youth are in the audience.

This did not happen.

The first reference to the “Indians” made me cringe. The way he said it was like he was spitting something foul out of his mouth while telling the audience about how “dem Indians” stole the horses from workers building the railway. (The truth is, yes, horse thievery was a thing in the 1800s, but not just the “Indians” participated in that activity. And in all fairness, their land was being stolen).

The second reference talked about how “dem Indians” used to eat the “whole dam animal, head and guts included,” creating a picture in the minds of something disgusting. (The truth is that the Original People don’t waste any part of the animals they hunt, but they don’t eat every part: clothing, bedding, housing, medicine, oil for lighting, etc.).

The third reference is the one that made me sick. When he spoke about how the workers were leering after a “beautiful Indian girl until she picked up a buffalo intestine and sucked the juices right out of it, and then they didn’t want her no more,” he laughed.

Then, the entire audience laughed and laughed.

Truth: More than 1,000 Indigenous women and girls were killed or went missing between 1980 and 2012, according to the

RCMP, but experts believe the true number is closer to 4,000, according to the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC).

Stereotypes. Incorrect information that is created to dehumanize and demoralize an entire race of people. Information designed to justify the never-ending kidnapping, raping and murdering of our women. Because look at the history told! We are described as animals. Chattel for the taking.

And they laughed, knowing that I was standing right there—one of the Original People, an Indigenous woman standing right there.

One more lie about how “dem Indians” used to kill all the buffalo “just for the one or two they needed” and leave the rest to rot. Lies, more stereotyping, and I had enough.

I hope the rest of the presentation was about trains. I hope the laughter I heard was a nervous tic kind of thing. I hope this column will help you understand how hurtful this type of behaviour is. Maybe next time you listen to words like these, step up, speak up, and correct the stereotyping and racist rhetoric before the next generations repeat the same lies.

Miiigwetch. All My Relations.

Cory Bilyea is an Indigenous journalist currently working for Midwestern Newspapers. She is a member of the Six Nations of the Grand River, better known as Onkwehonwe, the original people. Cory is a survivor of intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools. She can be reached at cbilyea@midwesternnewspapers.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Alice Munro tributes shouldn’t change in Wingham

To the editor:

I have never been so sick of the media as this past week. My phone rings all day and on two days they were at my house. Most were very friendly but they had the same motive, what dish can we find about Alice Munro.

They missed the message from Andrea - child and women abuse goes on daily and society needs to do something about it.

The need is for victims to come forward and convict these monsters.

Instead they are asking if we will make changes to the Alice Munro Literary Garden.

What kind of a stupid question is that?

No is the clear answer. We honoured Alice for her great achievements as a short story writer, not as a mother.

The abuse issue is a mother and family affair.

Her Nobel Prize and recent death has given the media the opportunity to cut Alice’s fame to shreds. They were not interested in Andrea’s court case in Goderich when she took Fremlin to task. She tried, but they

weren’t interested.

I was pleased to hear the reeve from Central Huron and my own reeve Paul Heffer tell the media no changes would be made. They know this was a stupid media question.

I sincerely hope Andrea gets the help, love and support of the family and her message - incest is not allowed and women are not going to stay silent anymore - is heard loud and clear.

All tributes to Alice Munro in Wingham will stay as they are, we are still proud of her accomplishments as the greatest short story writer in Canada and the world.

Verna Steffler
Wingham

(Editor’s note: a statement from the Township of North Huron indicates officials would be discussing recognition of Munro’s accomplishments in light of recent events. Central Huron Reeve Jim Ginn said he would consider changing his stance “if public outcry mounted.” See story on pages 1 and 2 of this weeks’ Advance-Times)



Cory Bilyea photos

On July 10, a large backhoe (bottom) sits silently beside the Howson Dam, a sign of the upcoming work to remove the crumbling structure. The impending removal of the dam has caused debates and division in the close-knit community for years now, and not everyone is happy about the upcoming construction. Others look forward to the plans to return the river to its natural state. Top: A view of the Howson Dam looking down from the old CNR bridge on July 10 along the Wingham Community Trail.

To the editor: homecoming

Dear Editor:

During our recent Homecoming long weekend the residents (and past residents) of Wingham came together once again to reminisce and to recognize the merits of living in small town Ontario: friendly neighbors, a quiet lifestyle, fresh air and wide open spaces.

A great many local groups and volunteers came together months ahead to host a variety of events to showcase and celebrate the unique characteristics of life in Wingham. None of this would have been possible without countless hours of work and dedication from our community’s volunteers.

Wingham citizens were able to see and to be reminded why many have chosen to live and thrive in this beautiful area.

The true value of volunteerism and the qualities it promotes in our community were on display throughout the weekend. Homecoming was a refreshing opportunity for all to see what Wingham has to offer. Thank you to all who contributed to a successful Homecoming reunion. Special thanks go to Joe and Heidi Carter for their unwavering leadership with this project.

Bill Farnell
Chair, Wingham Historical Society