

Taking care of our own



Nov. 19, 2019

By Nate Smelle

Our love for one another as human beings shines through in many ways. Through acts of kindness, compassion, generosity and love we define our values and share our intentions with the world.

As actions themselves, our words also have the power to communicate our values and shape the world we are a part of. When shared on a one-on-one basis, our words create a ripple effect within our personal social circles ? inviting our families, friends and associates to respond in one way or another. When published or broadcast to the masses what we have to say takes on a deeper meaning.

Basically, the bigger the audience receiving our words, the more power they possess to inspire others to act.

As a longtime hockey fan, I, like many Canadians have tuned into Hockey Night in Canada for as far back as I can remember. Growing up with an uncle on the coaching staff of the Toronto Maple Leafs during the Wendel Clark-era of the late 1980s, I had the privilege of spending a fair amount of time at the old Maple Leaf Gardens. On a few occasions during this time period my cousin and I found ourselves in the care of Don Cherry and Ron MacLean in the Hot Stove Lounge while our parents enjoyed an after the game beverage in the dressing room with the team. I have fond memories of sitting there eating french fries listening to the two banter just as they have on Coach's Corner for decades.

As a fan of the game who believes hockey without fighting is like toast without bread, I have admired Cherry's outspoken defence of old time hockey. While I still see eye-to-eye with him on this level, my admiration is now gone. Hearing the man I once looked up to use his public platform to insult newcomers to Canada and sow the seeds of division among Canadians is more than just an extreme disappointment. It is also an eye-opener to the fact that racism is more pervasive in this country than we as Canadians are willing to admit.

For more than a decade now I have known that my political views were at opposite ends of the spectrum compared to Cherry's. Still, I considered myself a fan of his when it came to hockey. When I learned that he had been fired for his remarks I decided to take a deeper look into where his comments came from. Looking back on his personal history of controversial comments I realized that this was certainly no slip of the tongue. Following a brief online investigation I learned that Cherry has used his platform to: insult Indigenous people; make derogatory remarks toward women; promote climate change denial and insult Dr. David Suzuki; and, take aim at cyclists who he called ?left-wing pinkos? during a speech in support of former Mayor of Toronto Rob Ford.

Since the recent federal election Ontario's Premier Doug Ford ? another climate change denying, anti-immigration politician Cherry supports and believes will one day be Prime Minister ? has been going on about how he has never seen the country so divided. In light of his claims that he wants to be the uniting force to bring Canadians together, I challenge Premier Ford to step up and tell us how he truly feels about his friend's recent comments. Do they serve to unite us, or divide us?

Ironically, despite his attack on immigrants, Cherry, like Ford and US President Donald Trump for that matter, is only here in North

America because his ancestors crossed the Atlantic Ocean in hope of finding a better, safer life. The next time any of these men choose to open their mouths and speak disparagingly about immigrants I hope they take the time to look through their family photo albums first. I hope they think about what their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents went through to give them the opportunities they have had in their lives. Just because some immigrants have different coloured skin or practice another religion doesn't make their struggle to find peace, health and happiness any less important.

If we as Canadians are going to stand up to such racism and xenophobia we cannot remain silent when it rears its ugly head. It would also be wise to remember that as author, social activist and Second World War veteran Harry Leslie Smith said 'We have to learn to live with each other. There is not that much difference between us. We all have to eat to live. We all have to work and have a job.' When we understand this, we also realize that taking care of our own means taking care of each other, no matter where we came from.