

In proximity to peace



By Nate Smelle

Sitting on a slab of rock, watching the sunset decorate the surface of Bay Lake with every colour in the rainbow. The relatively still waters serve as a Tibetan Buddhist Sand Mandala of sorts, reflecting all of nature's evolving beauty in a flash of light, before vanishing into the wind.

Slipping into the water from the shadowy shoreline, a beaver adds its touch to the unfolding masterpiece, replacing the lake's stillness with movement as it heads out for an evening swim. As the sun dips below the horizon, a pair of loons call out to one another, seeming to signal the coming darkness.

In the night's fading light, I could still see the ripples in the water behind the beaver as it crossed the lake. Repositioning myself to get a better angle on the scene through my camera lens, I slipped on the rock and spooked the creature, which immediately slapped its tail on the surface and dove out of sight.

Appreciating the moment and how it couldn't possibly be any more Canadian, I thought of how lucky I am to live in a place where I can immerse myself in such peaceful experiences so conveniently. As every newscast reminds us, for many people around the world do not have the privilege of living in proximity to peace.

Currently, there are five ongoing "major wars" being fought around the world. A so-called "major war" is considered to be an armed conflicts in which there have been 10,000 or more combat-related deaths in the past year. Since 1948, people in Myanmar have been living in a war zone. During this more than eight decade long conflict, they have watched as an estimated 150,000 to 210,000 of their family, friends, and neighbours have been killed.

Another 1,450,000 to 2,084,468 people have been killed as a result of a series of wars waged in Afghanistan since 1978. The Yemeni Civil War that began in 2014 has stolen the lives of another 377,000 people. This past March, the Globe and Mail reported that the Tigray War being fought in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan since 2020 has killed up to half a million people from violence and starvation. Already in the short period of time since we began observing the Russo-Ukrainian War in our daily news last February, it is estimated that up to 85,000 people have been killed.

Imagine how each of the statistics above come with a name; a name that was given to them by their loved ones. For what reason were these individuals' lives cut short? Who benefited from their deaths, and how did they profit?

Sure, war does put profits in a few folks pockets. However, as our history has repeatedly shown us, when we waste lives, time, and resources on violence, in the end we all lose.

So, now that we see war for what it is ? a colossally catastrophic waste of time ? how long will it take us to realize that this viciously self-perpetuating cycle of violence is counter productive to our survival?

Recently I learned of a group of activists in the Barry's Bay area who have been working to bring Ukrainian refugees and families to Canada. For the past few months they have been raising funds and helping refugees find safety here in Cottage Country. Last Sunday, the group held another fundraising event at St. Mary's Church in Wilno. For more information on the fundraising campaign; or to make a donation, contact Tetyana Moiseyeva at: tmoiseyeva@bell.net; or (416) 460-6377. More information on their campaign for the Ukraine can also be found at www.weloveua.ca.

Peering out over the calm moonlit waters of Bay Lake, I couldn't think of a better place for those escaping the horrors of a war zone to find peace than here.