

2025 was a year of change reflected through the south-end's love language

Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - December 2025

It's times like now when I miss my father the most. Dad's intelligence was ferocious. Before entering any political conversation I had to have my facts in order or he would cut through to the bone any statement with an accuracy sharper than the point of a triangle.

And just when I thought I had put forward an adequate answer, he'd have this 'taunt-like' twinkle in his eye, and abruptly turn the conversation which slid me down another side of his ever-rotating triangle. With Dad, a person had to think quick, because his mind moved faster than lightening.

During this past year, never before have I been more attentive to finding facts—searching out and reading political authors, internet sites, and community news. Or watching international television broadcasts. And, dare I say that even my father with his analytical mind would be amiss to make a concise conclusion about any news item this past year.

Some nights I wake, eyes to the ceiling, fretting over how the Canadian economy is at the precipice of significant power shifts. That AI, in the control of a few corporations is stepping over, without passported authority, battle-formed borders that are losing their relevancy in dividing billions in digital currency from global populations.

While alive, Dad cautioned about the concentration of wealth to the few. He said we would see consequences from massive debt being carried by the majority of countries that would run alongside policies belittling the importance of labour while reducing wages—and when money is scarce, it loses its value as people turn toward sharing—bartering the essentials in order to survive.

Sure enough, that pyramid, trickle-down theory where the creation of wealth did rise to the top, and although money was supposed to trickle down to the majority, has, especially during the last two decades, swivelled into droplets. Creating significant droughts in personal bank accounts with more people being hard-pressed to replenish savings, cupboards or fridges.

When first moving here nine years ago I was taken-back by comments like, "You're just too confident for this area. ... from Toronto, eh? How you treat me, I'll treat you." Or, "oh, you live there? We never go to the south-end."

Having moved from a rented Scarborough bungalow located next to a drug-infested park, we found ourselves living in an historic area, with streets of individualized homes, graced with mature tree lined avenues.

Noticing from our upstairs bedroom window, gardens of exquisite beauty hidden behind modest home frontages gave me my first indication about residents' quiet pride. Demonstrated by the work behind putting shovel-to-ground, hand-in-earth, for decades home gardeners have nurtured personal oases of multi-coloured foliage and vegetables.

And for those who listen, the south-end sings with Sunday morning church bells, trains, the thud of hammers, the sound of power-saws, lawn movers, snow blowers—and laughter of children out and about—many heading to the skate park. And it's within these sounds and actions that I have begun to understand what Sarnia's south-end's love language is actually about.

Penned by Vagdevi Meunier, Psy.D., the five love languages are: acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, words of affirmation and physical touch. In relation to the south-end, it might be worthwhile considering that NIMBYism is not what actually lies at the heart of resistance of proposed projects such as Indwell, but rather in the dismissal of the south-end's love language.

For here, there's an unspoken code: household pride in working for their living, earning what they own.

Meaning: rejection is more the result of an angst, at times disgust of having been witness to those whom they observe behaving as 'takers.' This lack of positive contribution being considered a form of thievery within a neighbourhood culture where people are doing the very best they can, with what they earn.

Case in point. A friend's forever home burned down a few weeks ago. Their neighbours, being shift workers, came home in the early morning hours and saw fire engulfing the back of the home. Without hesitation, they banged on the door, shouted alongside what were fast-spreading flames until they woke my friend and her family and helped get them out.

Miraculously, no one, not even their pets died.

Speaking through tears she said: "I don't care what they say about the south end, I've never been more loved and helped by our neighbours. Some men have even gone up to my husband, put money in his hand and said, 'here's a little bit of help to take care of your girls.'"

Within a few hours neighbours began to share: an extra couch, beds, kitchen dishes, toddler toys. Now in a rental, they have most of the basics.

That is the south-end's love language: acts of service, albeit reciprocated. When a household is trying, earning what they have, in times of crisis, those who adhere to this code of conduct can depend on help arriving in a heartbeat, even if it means neighbours running in beside those flames.