

Ways to cope when the world had gone mad

Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - March 2025

I have been ill with a repeating respiratory virus that has absorbed my voice. And while my husband has not seemed to mind, my line of work requires a voice. Not being able to speak meant interviews were cancelled, and emails became my communication.

Being without speech brought to mind that in March, Canada has slated days that deal with communication through inclusivity: World Wildlife Day, Alexander Graham Bell Day, International Women's Day, Commonwealth Day, International Day to Combat Islamophobia, French Language Day, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, International Transgender Day of Visibility and on the 31st the month ends with National Indigenous Languages Day.

And when considering their commonality being the voiced expression of life experiences, representing either human or protection for species within the animal kingdom, the importance of having a safe haven to live, and the ability to encourage communication offers opportunity to express diversification of our collective experience. Yet, I recognize that without consistent support we could be in danger of losing this collective intelligence through legislated silence.

Draconian measures put forward through the newly elected U.S. presidential office, our 'big brother' neighbour to the south is disturbing. Case in point: there is now a 14-day decree sent out via Washington to ban all diversity, equity and inclusion at schools.

Apparently, this decree went out in a four-page letter by the U.S. Department of Education to campuses and states across their country. This sweeping presidential order applies to every aspect of educational life, and has prompted widespread panic and confusion among administrators at K-12 schools and colleges.

As each presidential edict is signed into existence, deeper cuts are silencing the American public, and that that erasure's consequences are spreading over the border.

While listening to the CBC, I listened as National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists must have governmental permission to speak with our own collaborative scientists, workplace DEI initiatives are eliminated, as are global humanitarian supports through USAID, and the spread of misinformation regarding Ukraine is unnerving to say the least.

Additionally troubling is the 'othering' of transpersons, especially aimed at refusing medical treatment for trans-children in the United States as male and female genders are recognized, nothing in between. The medical definition of a female is an organism that produces eggs, or ova, and is capable of bearing children. Hormones determine that in men a Y chromosome and testosterone are present, and most females having two X chromosomes rely on estrogen. However, the honest reality is that being born human occurs within a spectrum of many variations.

Potentially hundreds of different identities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, queer, and more, with the + sign representing all other identities not explicitly listed in the acronym; essentially, the number of expressions is considered to be fluid and constantly evolving.

Parents of gender-fluid children know there is a difference between what is being stated, and what is actually truthful of their own family member's identity that may not be what was assigned at birth.

Over millennia parents have raised children asking the same questions: "What if I had done this?" "If only I had done that." Or, "Could I have done more to prevent or relieve my child's anguish?" And, just recently, prior to the reversal of access to medical care for these children, the answer was probably yes. It has taken decades, centuries, for people to feel safe enough to offer their personal truths to our collective intelligence. And society has moved forward with an increasingly honest representation of ourselves.

And because of open voices Gen Z have grown up with the ideal where equity, equality, humane intersectionality and queerness are spoken with ease.

Additionally, more people, through inclusive conversation understand religious doctrines as historical, life-moral philosophies, allegories that offer practiced kindness and inclusion rather than exclusion and damnation. That friendships can and do reach across pulpits. Education of varying sacred religious texts can be met with curious interest, and to honour the faith of our neighbours, friends and family members in no way diminishes one's spirituality and worship.

Admittedly anxious about the rise of 'otherness' and political bifurcation, I am placing hope in the cultural awareness that has been encouraged over the years will mean there is no turning back to naïve acceptance of the ignorance of my youth.

Who we are and how we want to have our 'place' within the world and be treated by others is of utmost

importance. The underbelly of racism, erasure of women's rights exist—however, these issues have been moving forward through progressive practice, with attitudes and behaviour morphing into an era when the strength of all includes removal of culturally imposed lines dividing all 'others'. But in order to be included, first you must have a voice that can be heard.