

Cultural Creatives Supporting Our Soul-Challenged Lives

Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - October 2025

Over several decades I have listened in on essentially the same circle of conversation over politically created familial, local, Canadian or international challenges.

However, my present worry is over rapidly increasing malicious political and environmental situations, where self-serving personalities are gaining control, destroying years of dedicated forward thinking and implementation. Much has been, and continues to be broken.

News reports syphon off the increased heightening of fear invading the public mind-set, so instead of looking forward to an evolved future, through suppressed inaction, there has been a push toward the re-creation of myelinated racial, financial and intellectual division, repetitive pollution, and lamenting over the cost of going ‘green’.

Especially concerning is the speed in which the silencing of intellectuals, scientists, economists, medical research personnel, teachers, preachers, mothers and fathers, and media is occurring. It’s frightening how a difference of opinion can erase the strength of conversation.

While I have learned that two opposing people can both be correct, equally true is how censorship, especially banning speech, cleverly hides hideous behaviour from view. Oppositely, those who dare to voice what is correct according to current empirical research in areas of medicine, science or social practice are being ‘cancelled,’ or worse, fired.

None of us are immune to global systemic cultural constructs, as we watch victors gloat over inhumane crimes, suckling off what is left on the bones of genocide, either cultural or battle-spoils. Or how partition snakes its way up through to ‘polite, genteel’ society, when a smile, and an ‘ever so sorry, but...’ slices away potential opportunity.

The axiom to conquer rather than cooperate being the purported normal way of life—where value is based on the accumulation of material goods, or the plus or minus of numbers on a balance sheet, is proving false in relevance to the majority. Competition between the ‘have a lot, have some, and have nots’, where personal defence of ‘place’ requires absolute certainty, leaves no room for two of my favourite words—‘maybe love’, is turning vicious.

I’ve been reading Morrissey’s autobiography, and was struck by this quote: “This is the Manchester school system of the 1960s, where sadness is habit-forming, and where shame is cattle-prodded into kids who are in pursuit of bliss amid the unrelenting disapproval. Look around and see the gutter-breed--all doing as well as they can in circumstances that they are not responsible for, but for which they are punished. Born unasked, their circumstantial sadness is their own fault, and is the agent of all of the problems.”

Squeezing wages is no doubt linked with the increase of homelessness and despair. And what should be a lesson in unchecked greed is the collapse of the condo housing market. Initially created as a realtor’s game, and speculator gamble, condominiums built without family living in mind, contain floors of empty, unsold apartments, while hundreds of thousands go without affordable shelter.

Yet despite it all, I’ve seen that ordinary people can, and do, extraordinary things. People who slowly, quietly, through their own initiative are continuing the transformational progress toward an inclusive, healthy community, through creative thinking, a lot of hard work and personal financial investment.

And Sarnia is home to many whom I’ve identified as the ‘cultural creatives.’ Not relying on government policy to ‘fix’ things, many residents are cultivating creativity to address serious issues and ease Sarnia along in a good way.

I’ve met cultural creatives within small businesses that not only support local food production and commerce, but in many cases offer venues for artists to display their work and musicians to sing to audiences. In galleries, theatre, libraries, farms, legal and service offices, front-line workers in medical, shelters and other social caring fields—as everyone looks to do more with less.

And then there are the volunteers who sit with the dying at hospice, save abandoned animals or defenseless children, or raise fish at the hatchery and repopulate our Great Lakes. There are the gardeners and apiarists saving the bee population. Groups such as the Southwest Ontario Gleaners, who dehydrate vegetables donated by farmers, distribute soup mixes through organizations such as Chatham’s Loads of Love, providing millions of meals easing hunger.

The opposite end of the community’s spectrum of creativity includes construction workers turning earth inside out to repair severely damaged roads to pristine geometric perfection. Still others work in the infrastructure sector replacing sewer pipes, keeping our water clean and electricity running. Corporate giants, such as Cabot, who through environmental innovation will without doubt change the manufacture of carbon black throughout the globe.

True enough, life can stack up against a person well before adolescence—investment in prevention being worth more than money. I will go as far to say that systemic issues stretch far beyond the womb, when parents’ despair, lack of nutrition and daily stressors invade the very essence of life: their ovum and sperm—once fertilized, the energetic memory of life’s myriad unresolved tragedies transfer into the zygote, birthing the next generation of soul-challenged people.

Despite the negativity, I draw solace and hope in the continued efforts by residents who aren’t relying on government policy to initiate change, but transforming day-to-day living, one creative act of kindness at a time—making at least my own soul-challenged life just a wee bit easier.

Thank you for that.