

Comment

by Bill Jackson - The Regional

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From the beginning of the Douglas Creek Estates land occupation our paper has taken a stand against the lawlessness, two-tiered policing and injustices facing Caledonia and Haldimand County. It has always been my belief that other media outlets that didn't do their job as society's watchdogs should be taken to account for failing us. Finally, some seem to be getting the point and it's better late than never.

When the Ryerson Review of Journalism interviewed me back in 2008 about our coverage of the issues, I remember stating that our paper simply wasn't able to serve as a comprehensive chronicle of the vast number of occurrences that, by the time our weekly paper hit the press during the height of the occupation, were often six days old. Often serving as the sole assignment editor, reporter, photographer and columnist here on a day-to-day basis, I certainly didn't have the time to cover the history of native land claims; in any case that was under the jurisdiction of the federal government. What was predominantly facing this community in the present, I thought, was a land occupation, as well as road blockades, volatile confrontations, robbery and threats of violence and war. I tried to be timely and present a new angle to the events when our paper came to your mailbox each Wednesday and, given the ambivalence of other newspapers, that wasn't too difficult.

Others interviewed by the Ryerson Review lauded themselves as hard working, conscientious stalwarts of journalism and others voiced near-slanderous opinions, referring to us as the 'anti-native' publication. I tried to remain steadfast in my approach to providing a voice for this community.

Anyone who has frequented the downtown core of any major city has probably come across a few religious fanatics on the street from time to time who think they're the Messiah or some kind of divine prophet sent here by God. I always maintain that if someone really was the second coming of Christ that it would be pretty important news and should be reported. But because most people on an even keel can weed out the crazies, such hysterics don't make it to print, or even onto a pad.

I often thought about that analogy while covering the DCE debacle. I wasn't about to give someone wearing a balaclava and toting a baseball bat the same amount of ink as many Caledonians who were threatened by such an ominous presence. No one trying to inflict such fear using illegal means should be given the ink to rip the town to shreds with illegitimate, unfounded accusations of racism, while at the same blaming present-day Caucasians for land claim issues that are centuries old. Yet bullies on a soap box often got the most coverage by some of the major media outlets. Not only did they get ample ink, news stories were often slanted, seemingly justifying such extreme antics.

We chose not to fall into the trap of the apathetic Canadian way defined by the so-called political correctness and "balanced reporting" that is all too often a synonym for being scared to convey the truth, for fear of retribution. And although many of the reporters from outside the area got to go home, we stayed right here in the thick of things.

Chris and Kevan Pickup, the owners of this publication, have put their business on the line by also allowing members of the community the chance to write and vent their frustrations over the past five years when no one else would listen. In my opinion they deserve utmost recognition. They've done it for more than 35 years.

To this day, I don't believe that we particularly deserve accolades. However, it was an honour on behalf of this newspaper to accept a commemorative rendering of Barb Patterson-Tuck's artwork symbolizing the town's struggle, from The Canadian Advocates for Charter Equality (CANACE), at the kick-off to Christie Blatchford's new book entitled *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy and How the Law Failed All of Us*. CANACE and its leading members including Gary and Christine McHale, Doug Fleming, Mark Vandermaas, Merlyn Kinrade and Jeff Parkinson have been on the front lines in this ongoing battle. We've only been following them in their pursuit of justice.

Yet what is perhaps the biggest vindication for both CANACE and our newspaper is the fact that someone like Christie Blatchford is finally on the same page with her take on the past five years. Her well-respected status as an award winning author and journalist is telling Caledonia's story and is changing minds on a much broader level than our paper is capable of. I like to think it is also lending credence to our position. We couldn't be more excited that the truth is finally being told, and that people are finally listening.

The discouraging part is that some people, including members of the First Nations Solidarity Network and McGuinty government, still seem to justify lawlessness with unresolved land claims and perceived injustices that were endured by the aboriginal population, decades and centuries in the past. As Acting Premier Dwight Duncan sated in the Ontario legislature last week, the government is committed to building a better future for First Nations and all Ontarians without the use of police. That doesn't bode well for the future unless all sides hold to the law.

For now, here in Caledonia, as Blatchford so eloquently describes in her book, the present calm is "fragile." The only positive is that others outside the area are now starting to listen to Caledonia's side of the story and speak out.