

POLITICS AS USUAL: First World Problems

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Pain, they say, is relative.

Everyone feels it differently. What one person might experience as a minor annoyance, another will find excruciating agony. Myself for example, I have little or no trouble with my quarterly blood tests, this despite the fact that they take many, many vials each time. Most find this horrifying. I am used to it, so it doesn't bother me. On the other hand, anything dental ? and I mean anything ? and my pain receptors go off like crazy.

Everything seems to hurt from basic cleaning to taking x-rays, I need to be scraped off the ceiling (thank goodness I have a fantastic dentist, Dr. Goodlin, or my teeth would fall out as I'd never be able to get them cleaned).

It is the same with ?problems.? Some see day-to-day problems for what they are ? minor hiccups in the rhythm of our lives and are unperturbed as a result. Others, well, they conflate the day-to-day issues into national tragedies requiring a Royal Commission. Watch a grocery store lineup ? or worse, a Starbucks lineup ? and you will see what I mean.

Some will use the time to answer emails on the crackberry, others will just stand patiently looking off into the distance, but others will huff and puff, shifting back and forth on their feet, theatrically checking their watch every few seconds as if to say, ?I have somewhere important to be and you are wasting my time?.

They are the ones that angrily demand the manager ?DO something about this situation?? as if waiting an extra three minutes for your mocha, choca, no foam, skinny latte is a tragedy of epic proportions. (Full disclosure here ? I am an ordinary coffee drinker and find the crazy complicated coffee orders of others to be eye-roll inducing ridiculousness.)

Newspapers are crowded with reports on horrific events such as the train crash in Lac-Megantic, or the siege of the shopping mall in Kenya where over a hundred people lost their lives. Pain and problems may indeed be context specific, but real tragedies are universal.

The papers are also chock full of other ?serious issues? that are not so universal. Take the city of Toronto's Golden Chairs fiasco. The City spent \$75,000 on a few replacement chairs in the councillors lounge ? this in the same week that Ontarians were faced with a report indicating that with youth employment hovering at near 20 per cent, economic recovery had passed them by.

So, whoever signed off on that crazy purchase should have his or her head examined. Is it a ?big issue?? It is for Torontonians.

But what about locally? At the regional or municipal level, local papers dutifully report on the activities of Council and the ?burning? issues for their communities. If one is to measure relative importance by time spent in council debate, then one is faced with a rather curious list of matters of ?importance? in municipal politics.

And just what are our important issues? Accessibility of Social Services? Affordable housing? Equal play opportunities for all our youth regardless of economic circumstances? Traffic and gridlock?

Well, apparently, in Aurora, it's the disposition of three unremarkable trees. Thus far, these trees have warranted the full attention of multiple staff at senior levels, multiple hours of Council debate (replete with the requisite hand wringing and accompanying hyperbole) at two separate meetings of Council ? with more to come.

Yes, folks, despite all that, Council deferred their decision (!) to wait for yet another staff report and then decide. For three trees.

One has to ask, what important issues are gathering dust in the dark while Council wrangles this ?important issue?? What community initiatives remain trapped in the doldrums, while the Council's agenda is hijacked by non-issues? Perspective has been lost, I'm afraid.

It's as if they have lost sight of the forest for the trees (oh come on?you knew I had to say it?).

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because, this is after all, Our Town.