

?The best way to fight injustice is to pay attention?

By Brock Weir

There was once a time when ?just checking another box? was the last thing Radu Parvulescu wanted to do.

It was one thing to volunteer for a cause you believed in, but to contribute 40 hours of your time just to graduate high school was another matter all together. Or, so he thought when he was making his way through Aurora High School.

This early cynicism, however, turned out to be an ?eye-opener.?

?It was bigger than checking a box, it was about caring for your community,? he says.

This concept of caring for the community has stuck with him through the years, but was recently tested to the limit while working on a research project in his native Romania.

Now a student at Cornell University working towards his PhD in Romanian parliamentary democracy, he was caught up in a massive anti-government protest earlier this month in Bucharest that left over 450 people injured and needing medical treatment.

At issue was what protestors say is systemic corruption within the current government. Their message was aimed at the Romanian diaspora around the world, but particularly within the European Union, to come home and take peaceful action for the good of their country.

?At this protest, I arrived around 8.30 and went to the front line, convinced that a calm presence and civilized discussion with the police officers there would bear fruit,? wrote Mr. Parvelscu in a letter sent to the Canadian Consulate and shared with The Auroran.

?I had previously participated in the 2012 Quebec student protests in Montreal?and had seen the great power of non-violent assembly, especially in the frontlines.

?After consistent tear-gassing and the removal of metal barriers separating the protestors from the police, at around 9 p.m., the situation around me became increasingly chaotic with what sounded like sound grenades being lobbed from the police cover into the protestors and police with shields and gear closing ranks and preparing to move. More than ever, I considered it important to calmly stay my ground.

?Shortly after I heard more noise from my right and the police line began advancing ? once more I stood my ground calmly while the police shoved me with shields. Then, from behind their line, I heard in Romanian, ?Enough. Take him, goddammit.' The police line in front of me split and a large officer grabbed me by the shirt behind their line.?

After tearing off his shirt, he says he was trying to pull away and another officer in full gear hit him in the ribs. He says he felt other blows, hair pulling, being pushed to the ground, and an officer telling him that if he didn't get up that he would break his arm. He then recalls being dragged to the lawn next to the nearby palace where the beating continued. He was then ?handcuffed, insulted and had my hand stepped on by a big military boot? and he was subsequently loaded into a van with others, told by police he had ?incited violence.?

?The number one agenda item of this current parliament has been to change the criminal law to make it easier to commit acts of corruption,? Mr. Parvaulescu contends, speaking to The Auroran. ?To get true party leaders off the hook for things they're currently under investigation for, as well as to make it easier to keep having a bribery system be perpetuated.

?We wanted the diaspora, people who have left the country and gone overseas, to come back and protest the conditions that made them leave in the first place. Nobody wants to leave their homeland unless they are really forced to. We want to try and make Romania a place where people don't want to leave anymore, where you can just live your life like you do in Canada.?

A native of Romania himself, Mr. Parvaulescu spent his formative years in Aurora, taking French immersion at Aurora High School. He achieved his volunteer hours, that dreaded checked box, through tutoring local kids in a variety of subjects, children from families who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford tutoring programs. These are lessons, he says, that have held him in good stead as he has pursued his post-secondary career.

When asked why he wanted to share his story of demonstration with readers back in his hometown, his answer is simple.

?The best thing to fight injustice is to pay attention,? he says. ?The worst thing against it is silence and it is the same in Canada and the same anywhere. When injustice happens, people need to know about it. You have to keep fighting for what you have. Canada got that way because a lot of people shed blood, sweat and tears so it could be one of the most peaceful, prosperous countries in the world. There have been periodic and systemic attempts to take away those rights?and I urge people in Canada and Aurora to count their blessings and be thankful for them.

?But I also want them to be vigilant because there are always opportunists and there are always people who want to break the system in their own favour. It takes a democratic country to keep itself democratic ? it takes the people.?