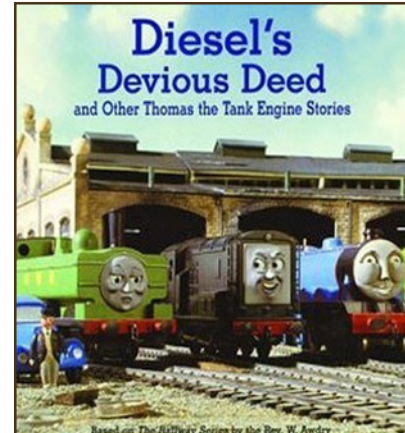


Cathy Crowe Newsletter # 44 - April 2008

You can view Cathy's previous newsletters at her website or subscribe if you are not receiving it directly at: <http://tdrc.net/index.php?page=newsletter>.

In this newsletter:

- 1. Home is more than four walls.***
- 2. Stephen Harper and Stéphane Dion - Put down the Guns and pick up the Hammers and Nails!***
- 3. Who's Hot, Who's Not!***



1. Home is more than four walls.

I was reading children's stories to my 2 year old grandson last week. I now know more than I ever wanted to about '**Thomas**' the train! In fact, I now know the books, the songs, the YouTube site, the TV series and the website. However, assuming you might not, let me fill you in.

According to Wikipedia, Thomas the Tank Engine is a fictional anthropomorphic tank locomotive created by the Rev. W. V. Awdry for his English 'Railway Series', a set of books about a fictional railway station on the fictional island of Sodor and the fictional engines that live on it. I'm all for anything that makes a child want to read and something about these brightly coloured and usually happy-faced trains and their struggles with adversity seem to capture children's attention and improve their language skills.

However, having said that, I don't think I was prepared for the intensity of some of the lessons and the language in the **Thomas** series. Many of the stories carry a moralistic tone, reinforcing the Protestant work ethic: engines pushing up the hill, facing adversity, being told "you can do it" and if you can't, someone will push you along.

In **Diesel's Devious Deed**, the new engine Diesel is sulking because the freight cars had been taunting him. Various engines intervene: **Duck**, who is horrified, orders the freight cars to shut up and bumps them hard. He apologizes to **Diesel** who replies it is all **Duck's** fault because he made the cars laugh at him. Then enters engine **Henry**, who declares:

"We engines have our differences, but we never talk about them to the cars. That would be

Disgraceful, said **Gordon**,

Disgusting, put in **James**,
Despicable, finished **Henry**.”

At the heart of the story is an emphasis on fault, lies, bullying, name-calling and retribution all packed into a moral lesson. I asked myself, are the words disgraceful, disgusting, despicable appropriate words for a children’s story? I noted that the word ‘despicable’ seemed fun to pronounce for a two year old (who knew?). I couldn’t help but think that these words more aptly described a situation I had been dwelling on – the recent freezing death of Robert Maurice, an Aboriginal man, widely considered homeless, on a -27 degree Celsius night in Toronto.

Disgraceful, disgusting, despicable are perfectly appropriate words, in my opinion, to describe the actions and the attitudes of bureaucrats and City Councillors, the media, police and the Coroner’s office, who have all but ignored the death of this man. These individuals and organizations who hold positions of authority and whose mandate is to protect and advocate for the public and for the truth, chose to do anything but in recent weeks.

Important evidence was ignored by bureaucrats and the city councillors who sit on Toronto’s social services committee. Extreme, graphic and disturbing evidence on the crisis in shelter, food and homeless services was presented to this committee in the form of expert deputations, as recently as one week prior to Robert Maurice’s tragic death. Deputants, including nurses, harm reduction workers, outreach workers, agency board members and homeless people left disheartened. These individuals had literally begged for help, but to no avail. City Hall’s response: ***Disgraceful.***

Media - missing in action. Despite a standing room only committee meeting that day, the media were nowhere to be seen. After the freezing death, and only in reaction to cries of outrage from homeless advocates including myself, what I can only describe as a ‘posse’ of journalists suddenly appeared showing every intention to obsess on their definition of homelessness to prove to us the error of our ways. After all they pointed out, Mr. Maurice had a room and there were shelter beds that night.

In a letter to several media outlets I wrote:

“While house fires have remained a major news story this winter, quite rightly so – fire marshals and firefighters who are professionals and speak the truth about their concerns are seen as a credible voice, the same does not hold true for people who provide services to the homeless and who are similarly raising life and death issues.”

Weeks after the death there remains a vacuum in media coverage: ***Disgusting.***

Police (mis)communications. Police efforts to provide the media with information, which was sketchy and inaccurate, seemed to have trumped the usual focus on locating the deceased's family or communicating with social service agencies that would have had his personal records or ID.

The Coroner's castle. There is a big moat around the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario and across that moat there are tall and thick walls. It is very, very hard for me to comprehend how this institution, with all of its resources, was unable to implement an adequate communication strategy to contact Robert Maurice's family after his death. Five days later, at the request of Street Health's Gaetan Heroux, I left a message asking to speak with the Coroner. I explained my role, that I was a nurse and had contact info for the family. I was called back by secretarial staff and told the coroner was very busy, could she help me. Yes, and I provided her with some sense of the issue and the urgency but I wanted the Coroner to return Gaetan Heroux's call so he could provide the link to family in northern Ontario.

The interest of officials in the death of this man and their concern for his family: ***Despicable.***

In the aftermath of a horrific winter, that included the freezing death of an Aboriginal man only a block from Bloor and Yonge Streets, there is a background story that remains: ***disgraceful, disgusting, despicable***

The 'Back Story' includes:

- shelter conditions in Canada's largest city that leave people to face disease such as tuberculosis and untimely and agonizing deaths;
- the loss of over 300 emergency shelter beds in Toronto since 2007;
- an increasingly hostile and dismissive climate at City Hall towards homelessness and front-line workers;
- systemic racism in government institutions that includes a rejection to acknowledge the impact of residential schools and poverty on First Nations peoples;
- widespread denial, even in 2008, that a home is more than just 4 walls.

The weight of those three words in that children's book remains with me.

2. Put down the Guns and pick up the Hammers and Nails! ***-speech at Pan Canada rally- Toronto, March 15, 2008***

HOUSING NOT WAR!! I am a Street Nurse. Street Nurses and outreach workers and homeless people all know that bandages, triage on the street or in a drop-in centre, mash unit style, is not enough. Not for 1 year, not for 5 years and not for 20 years. People need homes!

10 years ago, we formed the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee and declared homelessness a national disaster, in response to refugee like conditions across the country after our national housing program was killed. We called for the 1% solution: an additional 1% of the federal budget to be allocated each year to a national housing program and we also said we needed immediately money for disaster relief here in Canada!

10 years ago, the mayors of Canada's biggest cities agreed with us and they also declared homelessness a ***national disaster***.

10 years ago, the United Nations agreed with us and said that the state of homelessness in Canada should be considered a ***national emergency***.

Where are we today? **10 years** have passed and the federal government – both Liberal and Conservative, failed to reinstate and fund a national housing program.

Three days ago Miloon Kothari, the UN Rapporteur on Adequate Housing reported on his recent fact-finding mission in Canada.

“As a very wealthy country, with significant surplus in federal budget, immediate attention is required for the most vulnerable part of the population living in inadequate housing and living conditions. There is no justification for not massively engaging in the improvement of the situation of all those that face inadequate housing and living conditions throughout Canada.” March 12, 2008 - Geneva

We asked ourselves at TDRC “Where was the money going?” We’re not economists, but we went on the money trail.

We know of course that a chunk of money has repeatedly been given as tax breaks for corporations or put towards deficit reduction.

But we wondered “Where was the rest of the money going?”

Was the money going to Home Care or Pharmacare?	NO
Was it going to a new national child care program?	NO
Was it going towards education or to help reduce tuitions?	NO
Was it going to help provinces raise welfare rates?	NO
Was it going to improve and expand employment insurance?	NO
Was it going to increase old age pensions?	NO
Was it going to provide better security for injured workers?	NO
Was it going to make sure we meet Kyoto standards?	NO

Well, it sure as hell wasn't going to housing. There was NOTHING in the last federal budget for renewal of two programs – the national renovation program (RRAP) and the homeless disaster relief program (HPI), due to expire in fiscal year 2008. There was NOTHING for a national housing program.

Now that may be because as Minister Monte Solberg told TDRC's Beric German on a national radio debate that the numbers of homeless people:

“have been going down in the last few years” NOT TRUE!

He also left us speechless, declaring that his government is:

“spending more money today on housing than any (Canadian) government in history!” NOT TRUE!

What we discovered is that ten years after homelessness was declared a national disaster the Harper government is spending more money on the military, (not housing) than any government in history! This fiscal year a whopping \$18 Billion will go towards the military. That is 8.5% of our federal budget.

They say that if you spend money on armaments, sooner or later you are going to use them. The military brags that Canada fired 4.7 million bullets in Afghanistan in the past two years.

And in Afghanistan, one of the poorest countries on earth, we are spending \$100 million dollars a month on war – only 1/10th of that is aid, and only 1/10th of that aid even gets to the people.

We are told that the Karzai government, which our government sides with in the civil war, is fighting for democracy and helping a downtrodden people. Oh, and we are helping establish women's rights. Therefore, Canada is on the right side of history.

DOWNTRODDEN PEOPLE

This war in Afghanistan, which has gone on longer than WWII, has left the people of Afghanistan poorer than the day the war began. And General Hillier says that the war could go on for generations.

In Afghanistan, 3 million people are displaced – made homeless, forced out of their homes (UNHCR) – by bombing from air and tanks. And there is famine - 7.5 million people on the verge of starvation. Thousands of Afghans killed, hundreds made homeless by the war froze to death this winter.

Well, we know about downtrodden people. We see people begging and hungry and dying in every city and town in Canada. Each year, 300,000 people are

homeless, displaced in Canada. And we know about freezing deaths, that officials refuse to acknowledge, like the recent death of Robert Maurice, an aboriginal man.

All this, while our young soldiers are being brought back badly maimed or transported in coffins along the Highway of Heroes.

And still our government wants more war – two more years.

Their slogan must be ‘War not Housing!’

WOMEN’S RIGHTS

And what about women? I am a woman. I am now a grandmother. I care about the thousands of homeless women and their families, their children, in Canada and I care about the women and children in Afghanistan.

So let’s listen to the voices of women you seldom hear.

There is a media truth-telling voice:

Cathy Gannon is a journalist who worked in Afghanistan for over 15 years. She says that the Karzai government is the largest collection of mass murderers you’ll find in one place.

Perhaps our soldiers should have been arresting them and taking them to The Hague for trial – instead of propping them up.

There is another woman’s voice – a clear and brave voice:

Malalai Joya. She is the young, Afghan Member of Parliament who was illegally ejected for criticizing the warlords that surrounded her. Then it got worse. She had four assassination attempts on her life. Her home was blown up and she was assaulted and threatened even inside the parliament chamber. The Karzai government took away her security protection.

Joya, you see, speaks out against the abuse of women and for human rights.

About women, she says, “their position is catastrophic. The Northern Alliance are made up of fundamentalists, just like the Taliban were, and they oppress women in horrendous ways. As a result, suicides are more numerous today than ever before.”

And we should note that back at home the Street Health Report has shown that homeless people’s health is deteriorating too and many are attempting suicide.

Joya runs the Hamoon Clinic in Farah province - the only health care centre in the area that offers free services, including medication, to its patients, who are mainly women and children. She reports that the Northern Alliance warlords, who we help control much of Afghanistan: "kidnap girls and women and rape them regularly."

"We need the material support of Canadians for health and education in Afghanistan, not for the warlords, druglords and criminals."

She also advises us to take heed: "The US and Canada are supporting the sworn enemies of our people. If they continue this wrong policy, one day they will be faced with the massive resistance of our people, as our history shows."

We must be brave like Joya and honest like Gannon. We must roar against the Conservative and Liberal vote that extended Canada's mission to 2011.

We must bring our young soldiers home safely. Canada must give real aid – and reparations – to Afghanistan, and we want aid in the form of housing in Canada.

Stephen Harper and Stéphane Dion - Put down the guns and pick up the hammers and nails!

Housing Not War for Canada and Afghanistan!

The TDRC Housing Not War campaign is one expression of what Canadians want – housing, childcare, education, improved care for our seniors and attention to the environment. Please go to our website and sign our declaration!

www.housingnotwar.ca

3. Who's Hot, Who's Not!

Who's Hot?

Federal NDP leader **Jack Layton** and housing activist **Michael Shapcott** for dedicating a good deal of time and energy and care in preparing a newly revised and updated book on homelessness. I had the great honour of writing the forward. **Homelessness, How to End the National Crisis**, is in paperback and at a reasonable price of \$20, published by Penguin Canada.

The **3,000 plus anti-war resisters** who turned out March 15 for a spirited Housing Not War rally in Toronto, to protest Canada's military effort in Afghanistan.

Ontario NDP MPP **Cheri DiNovo** for introducing a bill in the Ontario Legislature which would enshrine in Ontario law the right to housing.

Who's Not!

Margaret Wente, Globe and Mail columnist who, in the aftermath of Robert Maurice's death, actually wrote that although Mr. Maurice had a home "... he preferred the streets." She later adds: "*Homeless people can be awfully hard to help,*" and she encouraged everyone to watch a CBC reality show that paired 'helpers' with 'the homeless' (full article from March 18 can be seen on G&M website).

Ontario Finance Minister **Dwight Duncan**. Once again, no money for new housing in the government's budget. Meanwhile they sit on \$165 million in unspent federal housing money from 2006, of that \$80 million that is targeted for off-reserve aboriginal housing.

The security guards at 38 Avenue Road, the Prince Arthur private residences, for not allowing me to finish a cell phone radio interview about the provincial budget when I wandered into their courtyard/driveway to avoid the background noise of Avenue Road. Maybe they thought I was homeless!

Cathy

Thanks to Bob Crocker for editing, Dave Meslin for image, and Anthony Rapoport for layout, design and web support.