HOW THE WORLD CAN DO BETTER IN 2017

BY CRAIG AND MARC KIELBURGER

At “Have you tried switching 2016 off and back on again?” says an IT guy in a meme sweeping Facebook. Also making rounds online is a 2016 dumpster fire ornament. Festive and topical.

As 2016 draws to a close, social media is alight with jokes and posts lamenting a year that will not go down in history as one of humanity’s finest. Civil war kept Syria and Yemen awash in bloodshed. Politics in the US and UK plumbed new depths of divisiveness, spawning a rash of hate crimes. Beleaguered Haiti was smashed with yet another natural disaster (as were Louisiana and Fort McMurray). And the world lost so many brilliant lights, like Leonard Cohen, David Bowie and Muhammad Ali.

Years ago, Archbishop Desmond Tutu counselled us not to get discouraged by disheartening news headlines. Instead, think of them as a to-do list for changing the world, he said. As we look to 2017, we’re taking that advice, focusing on positive outcomes and galvanized communities instead of lamenting past events.

With any luck, our list gets shorter in 2017.

When the carnage in Syria sparked a global refugee crisis, Canada’s to-do was opening its doors. So far, we’ve welcomed some 30,000 refugees. They are enriching our communities, boosting our economy, and helping out their new neighbours in times of need, like during the Alberta wildfire. Every Canadian can help: there are still many opportunities to support our new citizens.

The US presidential election shocked the world with its bitter vitriol. Yet one incredibly positive breakthrough went almost unnoticed. In addition to Hillary Clinton’s historic nomination for presidential candidate, the US Senate set a new record for the number of women representatives. It’s hardly full gender parity, but the progress is undeniable. It makes Clinton’s to-do for young girls, offered in her concession speech, resonate even more. “Never doubt that you are valuable and powerful.”

The shocking announcement of singer Gord Downie’s terminal cancer moved many Canadians to early grief. Downie decided his to-do-list for his remaining time includes raising awareness about the legacy of residential schools. We’ve been amazed at the response to Secret Path—Downie’s musical tribute to Chanie Wenjack, an Ojibwe boy who died escaping a residential school in the 1960s. "Wenjack Walks" have sprung up across the country, honouring the fallen boy and all residential school victims. There is a new willingness to confront this dark part of Canada’s history. It gives us real hope that, in 2017, Canada will move closer to reconciliation between our Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Even in the worst of times, great things can be accomplished. New medical breakthroughs in 2016 promise a better life, and even eventually a cure, for those living with Alzheimer’s. Scientists found the Earth’s ozone layer is healing itself. New plant technologies could increase crop production, fighting world hunger in the face of climate change.

So forgo the reboot, and don’t deck the halls with dumpster fires. Instead of a list of woes, make a to-do list. We can do better in 2017.