Editorial

A eucatastrophic nation

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Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

In a lecture at the University of St Andrews, British fantasist J. R. R. Tolkien posited an antonym for catastrophe – that just as there is catastrophe, the sudden change from good to bad, there is also eucatastrophe, the sudden change from bad to good.

Tolkien gave that lecture in March 1939. He wasn't talking about reality in that lecture, but it is difficult to think reality didn't influence him at least a little. Tensions were rising in Europe with the old enemy and just a few months after his lecture, England would declare war on Germany and many of Tolkien's young students at Oxford would go off to France to fight – something he himself did when he was a young student at Oxford during the First World War.

When September rolled around and tanks rolled through Warsaw, did Tolkien think about eucatastrophe? It must have felt uneasy at that point. Gut-wrenching. It must have felt like history repeating itself.

In November, history repeated itself on our continent when Donald Trump was re-elected as president of the United States – though his short tenure so far has been anything but a repeat of his last time in office. Along with some questionable domestic actions, he has violated the trade agreement his own administration signed in 2018, ignited an on-again-off-again trade war on the continent and has made repeated threats to our sovereignty in Canada.

Even worse, his supporters have latched onto the idea of the "51st state" and whether because they think it's funny or they think it's a good idea, Trump has not been the last to make the suggestion.

What a catastrophe.

Yet, coast to coast to coast, the reaction has been anything but a catastrophe. I ask anyone reading, have you seen our country so united behind Canada? I haven't. Not recently and certainly not in my lifetime.

What does it say about us that we have a word like catastrophe so common in our collective lexicons, when hope is all around us and the goodwill of our neighbours can so often be seen in this country. Here in Stratford, we at the Times chronicle this goodwill bi-weekly on the local level, but nationally, we have known eucatastrophe before.

Vimy Ridge, Terry Fox's run, Laura Secord's walk, Sidney Crosby's 2010 Golden Goal, Connor McDavid's recreation just last month in the 4 Nations Face-Off, Gander's hospitality after 9/11, the Kitchen Accords, Banting's breakthrough in my hometown of London, Ont.

Tommy freaking Douglas.

Our nation has seen eucatastrophe before but it has never, ever, ever happened on accident. We have never just stumbled into it. Eucatastrophe has only ever been possible because when Canadians have been face to face with catastrophe, they have fought against it. This time around, as we face a catastrophe like never before, we can't just sit and wait for the sudden change from bad to good. That's not what Canadians have done in the past and that is certainly not what Canadians want to do now.

A catastrophe may be around the corner for us. In fact, it is hard to imagine that catastrophe won't crash into our world – yet eucatastrophe might also be in our future if we fight for it.

It's a moot point at this point, when Canadians are so united already, but it needs to be said regardless:

Elbows up everyone.

Letters to the Editor

City short on details related to annual event's impact

To the Editor.

Stratford Live Music & Food is planning to come to town from June 9-22 and the City of Stratford seems poised to, yet again, welcome this event with open arms. But citizens who care about the parks, air quality, access to city streets and parking spaces should be concerned about the lack of information that the impact this four-day event has on the downtown.

The only notice for this event is a flyer I received March 1 from the organizers for an exemption to the city's noise bylaw, as I live near the bandshell on Veteran's Drive. There are many other residences, condos, apartment buildings and houses on both sides of Lake Victoria that suffer the disruption, pollution and noise until 11 p.m. Not all of them got the notice.

The event involves closing Cobourg Street, Veterans Drive, part of Erie Street and the entire York Street parking lot for four days. Eighty metered parking spaces, including three handicapped spaces, are hooded. Public parkland is restricted and the rib vendors – who are not local businesses but travel throughout Ontario leaving unknown, if any, economic benefit behind – generate air pollution, as greasy smoke wafts east over Lake Victoria and its parkland.

City staff tell me this will be considered on a "consent agenda" at council, the date not yet set. But staff, nor the organizers, ever bothered to inform residents that the request for a liquor licence had already been on a council agenda a week before the notice I received. This year, as last year, the event was rubber-stamped at the board of park management as an "annual perpetual event in the park system" without public notice or input. When the noise bylaw exemption does go to council, it would be respectful for citizens to know that members of council, whose businesses may be sponsors (as was the case last year), will recuse themselves from voting. Last year, the city itself was advertised in this paper as a sponsor. One wonders how any voting can be done objectively if members of council are sponsors.

After last year's iteration, my request (through an FOI) for a debriefing of the event from city staff yielded none. It is in the public interest to know the costs and benefits, if any, of an event which is so disruptive to its downtown. Such a review should be done prior to any voting.

Like when the circus comes to town, an event like this should be held outside downtown Stratford. There, parking would be plenty, it wouldn't occupy public streets and parks, food vendors would have a captive audience and the noise and greasy barbecue rib smoke would affect fewer residents of Stratford.

Here are the contacts for the event, city staff and council.

• Stratford Live Music and Food committee, stratfordliveinfo@gmail.com

• Mayor and council, https://forms.stratford.ca/IT-Services/CAO-Mayor-Council/Email City-Council

• Tim Wolfe, director of community services, twolfe@stratford.ca

I urge you to contact the city and ask for a review of the costs and benefits of this event.

Robert Lemon, Stratford

Conservatives promise lower taxes, but at what cost?

Dear Editor,

The leader of the Conservatives has declared that, if elected, he will cut taxes on lower income earners.

I wonder what social programs, benefits, and other services essential to these people's lives Pierre Poilievre would ax, if elected, to pay for these cuts?

Sincerely,
Julia Schneider,
Stratford

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