

Perhaps there is hope after all

And now, some good news. Or at least some better news. It seems that despite the fact most provinces don't bother to teach Canadian history - a situation which is likely unique in the world - it seems that some young Canadians are at least learning something about their own country.

Not much, mind you. At least to the extent one accepts the findings of the latest national survey of 18-to-24 year-olds conducted by the Dominion Institute. Imagine asking American kids if they know who George Washington was, or Abe Lincoln, or any number of major figures in that country's history. Chances are the overwhelming majority would know.

Here in Canada, alas, a mere 46 per cent, less than half, of the 1,004 young people asked a series of 30 basic questions about Canada had no idea who Sir. John A. Macdonald was (which is eight percentage points LESS than a decade ago) and only 38 per cent knew that Newfoundland was the last province to join Confederation, down from 51 per cent who knew that in the 1997 survey. Worse, only 26 per cent knew that 1867 was Confederation year, a drop of nine points in a decade.

Not very encouraging stuff wouldn't you say?

Not all is complete despair, however. Given that we just recognized Remembrance Day on Sunday, there was a slight improvement (even though the numbers are still pathetic) in those who knew that Nov. 11 marked the end of the First World War, a jump to 37 per cent, up four points.

Overall, just 18 per cent of these young people knew enough about their own country to score a meager 16 or better out of the 30 question. Worth noting is that twice as many males as females passed the test, 24 per cent compared to just 12 percent of the young women.

Is it any wonder that in most elections in this country the number of people bothering to vote continues to fall?

Hell, some of these people probably don't even know there's an election on, let alone having any interest to walk a block or two and cast a ballot.

Surely this lack of knowledge and/or interest in our own country is a serious failure of our education system and of the politicians who won't make history a mandatory topic in most of the provinces.

Rudyard Griffiths, co-founder of the Dominion Institute, was quoted saying, "Both the major levels of government in our country, provincial and federal, have done little of any substance to tackle this issue in the last 10 years."

He's got that right.

One of the problems, of course, is that in our country we often find the elites deliberately distorting our actual history in the interest of their own short-term political interests.

A case in point - given the aforementioned Remembrance Day on Sunday - is this oft-repeated notion that Canada is the world's leading "peacekeeping" country. We're not. Not even close.

There was a time - since former prime minister Lester Pearson is the guy credited with the idea in the first place - but that was a long, long time ago.

Worse, our young people - and our not so young people - have been told by anti-military political types (read: Liberals and NDP) for years that Canada's history is on of peace keeping. No, it's not. And to claim that does a terrible disservice to the one million Canadians - 45,000 of whom died - who served in the Second World War, not to mention the hundreds of thousands from the first war and Korea and, currently, those in Afghanistan.

If you are led to believe that Canada has avoided war throughout its history, then those who oppose us doing our duty on the world stage can make a stronger argument against things such as Afghanistan.

And they can do so with impunity, knowing that most Canadians - not just the young ones - have very little idea of the history of the country they were either born in or came to live in.

That's just one reason among many why it's important to know your own history. It's about time we started learning it.

To end on a positive note, however, your correspondent was at a Remembrance Day ceremony Sunday in the east end of Toronto and was duly impressed by the number of young parents who not only came out to show their respect for the veterans but brought their young children along with them.

There is hope after all.



National Affairs

Claire Hoy

What do we really need?

Despite the harsh economic winds that seem to be blowing outside, one thing has become clear, as crystalline as the ice patterns building up on our windows.

For most of us, we really don't need or even want anything this holiday season.

That realization could help save a life, literally.

I've said this repeatedly for the past couple of years, on my birthday and as Christmas approaches.

Apparently, I'm not alone. While it's understandable that households earning more than \$100,000 annually don't really need anything, those in the lower income brackets seem just as comfortable.

Canadians admit the greatest necessities are health care, food, education and shelter - things we take for granted, but are mere dreams for millions of souls around the globe.

I can't fathom such disparity. We can spend trillions on war and space exploration, yet we can't stop millions of preventable deaths from hunger and disease.

It's not right. And I think we need to do more than just shake our heads and pucker our lips at such daily tragedies.

Not wanting anything should not be construed with having everything. My family is far from well off, so there are things that would definitely help our situation. We're trying to teach our children about the importance of caring for others and the global realities. They are involved in every school and community fund-raiser that comes along. It's important for everyone.

"We all have the means to bestow on others the most lavish gifts; love, joy, peace, hope, kindness, acceptance, encouragement, laughter, forgiveness, time. The more you spend, the wealthier you become; yet nothing will cost you more than what you freely possess to give."

Eden Eliot

To understand a greater,



Mark Pavilons

universal need is worth its weight in goats, chickens and clean water.

I guess you know what I'm getting at here.

World Vision Canada is hoping the majority of Canadians who say they don't want or need anything this year turn their attentions outward. The majority of civic-minded Canucks also prefer to share a meaningful gift with the less fortunate.

That's very encouraging.

In fact, 86 Bolton residents last year spent a total of \$13,289 through World Vision Canada's catalogue to help less fortunate people in the Third World. While encouraging, that number represents only three-tenths of one per cent of Bolton's population. More of us complain about traffic on a daily basis.

We likely throw away a veritable fortune in Third World equivalents on a monthly basis. We don't give it much thought in our unfulfilling, disposable society. And that makes me sad, too.

I wonder what percentage of the local population buys a coffee each day; plans to buy a new vehicle, or will opt for a top-of-the-line plasma TV this holiday season.

The comparable life-saving values are incredible.

Yes, a new digital camera would be nice, even though it may be out of date in a year or so. That \$450 camera would feed 300 hungry children for one month!

And that \$4,000 TV and entertainment centre would

build a home for children orphaned by AIDS.

Wait, for the more budget-conscious among us, there are some real bargains in World Vision's catalogue.

For \$30 (a new DVD release), you could provide a teacher with a set of textbooks to teach an entire class for one year. Another \$75 would outfit that same class with desks and chairs.

For \$200 (the cost of a nice dinner out) you could provide two families with roughly 150 eggs a year, from eight hens and four roosters. You could provide access to medication to help three HIV-positive mothers avoid infecting their babies, plus clothing for 50 children.

For \$2,000, roughly the equivalent of a nice piece of workout equipment like a treadmill, you could stock 20 medical clinics with vital supplies, including syringes, IV kits, painkillers, bandages and medicines.

How about mosquito nets, warm blankets and antibiotics (\$10 each)?

Hard to believe, isn't it?

I've found it very unnerving that we in the west get fatter and richer, while the plight of the less fortunate

hasn't changed one iota.

I would think that the more wealth there is to go around, all would benefit. Why would we keep it all to ourselves and not share with our brothers and sisters? Do we really need more and more?

I am at a loss to explain this aspect of our society. In my household, I remind my kids every chance I get. They will only read about depressions, post-war struggles and being born into poverty. They need to feel it in their hearts.

It's estimated there's enough gold in our oceans to give each human being nine pounds of the stuff. At current prices, that's more than \$110,000 apiece. Can you imagine the dent that would put in world poverty?

We are in an era of the have-nots and have-mores. No one said life was fair.

Tell that to goopy-eyed African toddlers; emaciated Asian single mothers or an entire Latin village.

Don't reach for your remote. Reach for phone, or hop on the computer and visit World Vision's Web site at WorldVision.ca.

Nominate Junior Citizen of the Year

There's an old Irish proverb that says: "Praise youth and it will prosper."

The Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards are here to ensure young people are recognized for their contributions. This recognition can help kids realize they are making a difference in their community, and by celebrating it we might inspire a lifetime commitment to community service.

As your local newspaper, we are proud to offer the 2007 Junior Citizen of the Year Award so we can recognize the outstanding contributions and achievements of young people in our community.

Any Ontario resident aged 6-17 is eligible. Nominate an individual in one of four categories:

- * A person involved in worthwhile community service.
- * A special young person contributing to their community while living with a physical or psychological limitation.
- * An individual who has performed an act of heroism in the past year.
- * Good kids who show a commitment to make life better for others and do more than is normally expected of someone their age.

Coordinated by the Ontario Community Newspapers Association and supported by TD Canada Trust, this program recognizes all young people nominated for the award. Nominations will be accepted until Dec. 28. For forms and further information, call our office, online at www.ocna.org, or by call the OCNA at 905-639-8720 ext. 228.

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