

Youthful transgressions be forgiven?

A lright, hands up to any reader who has never said or done anything stupid and inappropriate in his or her life.

Unless you're on a direct track to sainthood - or you're a bald-faced liar - obviously you didn't raise your hands. None of us could. Not if we were being honest.

Which brings us, as you may have suspected, to the recent hullabaloo over some insulting, and apparently booze-infested comments made about homosexuals by Saskatchewan Tory MP Tom Lukiwski in October 1991, nearly 17 years ago.

At the time, Lukiwski was at a party with a large group of, shall we say happy, Conservatives late in the third week of an intense election campaign featuring Grant Devine against NDP leader

Roy Romanow and Liberal leader Linda Haverstock. Lots of really, really stupid things were said at that party - which we now know because a video of it was taken by one of the celebratory participants and said video was recently made public by Saskatchewan deputy NDP leader Pat Atkinson at a news conference in Regina.

Atkinson, appropriately scandalized - as only socialists can be - described Lukiwski's remarks as "hateful ... disturbing ... homophobic," and it wasn't long before federal NDP Leader Jack Layton was demanding that Prime Minister Stephen Harper be booted out of the party.

Nor did it take the Liberals long to try to exploit something that happened 17 years ago. Liberals quickly issued a release which they called Lukiwski's "career lowlights," chief among them his being sued for libel by former Liberal Treasury Board president Reg Alcock for wrongfully accusing Alcock of giving his former campaign manager a Canadian Wheat Board job. That accusation turned out not to be true in that case, but Liberals handing out jobs to their friends - along with Tories and New Democrats too - is hardly something that is revolutionary or completely unheard of in the political process.

There is no doubt that Lukiwski's comments were crude and just plain wrong. He referred to homosexuals as "faggots with dirt on their fingernails that transmit diseases."

But it is also instructive that every news organization which carried this story - and the Globe and Mail, a self-described "national" newspaper felt it worthy of the front page - made sure to report that Lukiwski was among the majority of Conservative MPs who opposed same-sex marriage, as if there is some parallel between his crass 1991 comments and those who hold the legitimate view that marriage as an institution should be retained as between a man and a woman.

For his part, Lukiwski issued an immediate, and obviously heart-felt apology - indeed, he issued several apologies - and, much to his credit, made no excuses for his piggish behaviour 17 years ago.

He said he was "ashamed" of the comments and "If I could take those comments back I would ...They do not reflect the type of person that I am."

For Harper, that's the end of it. For many Liberals and New Democrats - many of whom should look in the mirror at their own history - an apology, even one that is meant, just won't do, particularly if they can use an issue to smear Conservatives in general, not just Lukiwski in particular, by suggesting that Conservative concerns about marriage and other issues are based on hate rather than a different sense of social morality.

As a journalist during the controversial years in the 1970s and 1980s when the homosexual community was actively tossing around its' political muscle, I can tell you that I used some language to describe their efforts that I would not use now.

That's because this issue, like all issues, evolve. What was common 17 years ago and part of every day speech, is no longer widely acceptable. But that does not mean, not for a second, that there is only one acceptable view on this and other issues of social significance. It is one thing to apologize for being crass and ugly in your comments. It's quite another thing to disavow your core beliefs on the basis that these beliefs are not universally held.

And for those who can't find it in their hearts to forgive Lukiwski for his youthful transgressions, they should be reminded that it was the late great Mahatma Gandhi who said, "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong."

Amen to that.



**National
Affairs**

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Hoy**

It's not as acceptable as it once was

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and school board meeting rooms. I covered the meetings of the Peel Board of Education (as it was called in those days), and remember the meeting in late 1985 when one of the trustees put forth a notice of motion to ban smoking in the board room.

"Those things never pass," my editor at the time told me, with a slightly dismissive tone in his voice.

It did pass, destroying my belief in the infallibility of editors. That belief was restored the day I became an editor.

The gradually dwindling

areas where one could smoke was what really prompted me to try and quit, along with the fact it was becoming a strain on my wallet. As well, the information about the health implications, which seemed to be growing exponentially, was a factor.

One Sunday night, in January 1989, for no good reason, I decided to see how long I could go without a cigarette. The answer, somewhat to my astonishment, was about six months. But before you get too impressed, I should mention that I still smoked Colts (little cigars) in those days, so I hadn't really kicked the

habit. Still, it was an accomplishment in my eyes, and in the eyes of some of those around me.

I eventually did quit altogether, sometime in the spring of 1994.

Although the cravings for tobacco have never completely gone away (I've sparked them up in a major way just by writing this piece about smoking), I have found them fairly easy to resist.

Being the man that I am, I know I don't need the crutch of tobacco to get me through the day. Besides, my wife won't let me start again.

Since the spring of 1994, I have smoked exactly one

cigar, bestowed upon me by the proud father of newborn twin boys a little more than four years ago (said father is probably reading this). The cigar was excellent, although I had to smoke it outside, while doing yard work (my wife wouldn't allow it in the house).

But the point is I, along with a lot of other people I know, have successfully quit smoking, and if we make it too expensive, a lot of young people will never start.

So yes, let's go after the illegal trade in smokes, but let's go after the legal trade too.

I'll bet even Runciman would go along with that.

Our Readers Write

Water or gravel?

In a recent report on a massive new quarry proposal in Ontario, an international mining company has purchased a large parcel of land on the pristine and fabled north shore of Lake Superior with plans to extract stone for use in American road building.

This is just the latest in a list of proposed or newly expanded quarry operations in unspoiled wild and rural areas of Ontario. Other sites include several on or near Ontario's famous Niagara Escarpment (a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve) and within Ontario's newly designated Greenbelt. Recent expansions or applications to expand quarries at

Mount Nemo, Milton and Acton threaten groundwater and the natural environment.

The proposed Rockfort Quarry in Caledon threatens to destroy the rural character of the area and disrupt the water table in the neighbouring environmentally sensitive lands of the Niagara Escarpment. The applicant proposes to blast a massive open pit mine hundreds of meters deep into fractured, water-saturated limestone.

Aggregate companies paint a rosy picture where nothing will go wrong, where troubles will be sidestepped by "mitigation" and "adaptive management," but huge mining operations situated in close proximity to

complex and fragile ecosystems are bound to upset the balance and damage will be done. "Unexplained" shortages of groundwater have been experienced near the recently expanded Acton Quarry.

Yes, society needs aggregate, but a reliable supply of clean water is even more essential.

For generations, the people of Ontario have invested in the preservation of conservation land and rural areas. The North Shore of Lake Superior, the Niagara Escarpment and Ontario's Greenbelt are a priceless heritage. Can we afford to risk such a legacy by designating these lands as new

areas for industrial use? Are the hopes for commercial profit of a few individuals worth what may be lost to future generations?

It is not too late for us to stop and reassess Ontario's land-use policies. The Ontario government clearly wants to be perceived as environmentally responsible, but if recent initiatives, such as the creation of the Greenbelt, are to be proven as more than mere window dressing, Premier Dalton McGuinty must reassess land-use policies effecting industrial development in environmentally sensitive areas.

Jim Reid,
Caledon



POPE JOHN PAUL II CELEBRATED EARTH HOUR(S)

Earth Hour turned into Earth HourS at Pope John Paul II School in Bolton March 28, as lights, computers, and other equipment were switched off for one or more hours. For many students, like Mrs. DeAngelis's Grade 7 class, the hour became a full-day event, with awareness activities focusing on conservation of electricity, water, and paper. Pyjama spirit day was also being held and an unusual, quiet calm settled over the school. Staff and students were amazed at how easy it was to save electricity. Total electricity conservation for the day has been calculated at 175 kWh, the equivalent of burning 16 litres of oil. Teachers and students are now in the process of pledging to continue to conserve electricity as well as water and paper for the remainder of the year. Don't forget Earth Day is set for April 22. There are plans to do a school-wide yard clean-up that day.

Submitted photo