

Opinion/Letters

Plays reflect changing Canadian value system



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



It's a New Year. Time to make those resolutions about quitting smoking or losing weight — resolutions that may or may not make it past Valentine's Day, what with pressures from a recession that might last another year, and, for those lucky enough to have a job, more demands to work smarter and longer hours.

It will also be a year when Canada decides once and for all, whether we want to be a country or something else. Perhaps, like the now defunct Soviet Union, we will become a "Commonwealth of Independent States." Quebec's ultimatums and deadlines, combined with growing indications that aboriginal demands for real self-government will no longer be ignored, have forced those of us who live in R.O.C. (the "Rest of Canada") to hurry up and decide what we are, and what we want to be. Quests like that call for a discovery of our underlying community values — beliefs we can accept as fundamental to the society we want to be, regardless of our individual differences over religion or politics.

Plays challenged audience

During the last two months of 1991, I experienced two plays which speak volumes about those values. Both were written by the northerners who performed them, and both plays challenge the audience to think about beliefs and values. Remarkable, the plays were written and produced by generations at opposite ends of the age spectrum. COPA (the Council on Positive Aging) produced *Helping Hands*, a light-hearted look at care of the elderly over several generations. Eleanor Drury Children's Theatre produced *Toy Dreams*, a Christmas musical about materialism and manufacturing ethics.

In *Toy Dreams*, Santa Claus has been getting his toys every year from the North Pole Toy Factory, managed by a woman named Dollie. At Dollie's factory, the elves are happy well fed, and highly motivated. Their manufacturing philosophy is summed up in this exchange between two elves:

Elf 1: "Our toys last for a long time."

Elf 2: "I think kids are happy with just a couple of good toys."

Dollie's competition comes from that evil place, Toronto, in the form of the *More is Better Toy Factory*, owned by the Evil Toy Maker, Quanto. Quanto's elves are a surly lot: poorly fed, worked long hours for low pay, and kept in line with threats of physical violence. Quanto summarizes his philosophy in a speech to a Toy Buyers' Convention: "The secret to our success is we make our toys only so good, so they will break or wear out soon after the kids get them, so they will be back at your stores wanting more toys not long after Christmas so you can sell lots more toys all year round!"

Dollie eventually triumphs over Quanto and his *More is Better* philosophy, in true story book style. The play ends with an enchanting solo, providing that kids (at least the ones who wrote this play) want one, quality toy for Christmas — one that will last, and have meaning for years to come. At the other end of the generation spectrum, COPA's play is designed to provoke discussion about changing sex roles, and our systems of caring for the elderly.

Helping Hands

Helping Hands is a series of four vignettes. The first is set in a rural Ontario farm kitchen around 1890, the second in a wartime house in 1943, the third in the present, and the fourth beams you into the 21st century. In all four a family must deal with aging parents and grandparents, with the themes of the role of women and the nature of services for the elderly taking centre stage.

In the 1890 farmhouse and in the 1943 wartime scene, the youngest daughter must stay home from school and sacrifice her chances of improvement to help her mother look after aging grandparents. By the last scene, set in the future, the total reversal of gender roles and total coordination of seniors' services is completed. Tom Miller plays the part of a doting, emotional husband who, like all men of his generation, has stayed home to look after the children and support his wife in her career.

Betty Coates, who plays the all-powerful Service Co-ordination Agency counsellor, visits Miller using a Star Trek beaming device to make sure all required services will be in place for the next morning, when Miller's wife will come home from the hospital. Coates consoles Miller with the best line in the play: "You mustn't feel badly. You have a lovely home here. And you've supported your wife in a good career. Our first woman chief of police! You know, you illustrate that old saying . . . behind every successful woman, there is a humble, caring nurturing man!"

Miller, a retired Lakehead University historian, says "the human species is

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Environmentalism starts at home

By Lorraine Payette

Special

The other day I was walking my dog on a road near the mill when a flash of silver caught my eye. There in the snowbank someone had dumped two Christmas trees. I shook my head and wondered at the mentality of that person or persons. Why drive all the way out there to trash those trees when the township would have disposed of them? Did this person(s) not want two dead trees on their lawn for a few days before the township took care of them? Did they think they were being environmentally responsible by this thoughtless action?

The tinsel left on those trees can cause harm or death if ingested by the local fauna. Many creatures are attracted by bright, shiny objects. Ignorance is bliss they say, and this person(s) will never know the consequences of their actions. Too bad. There is nothing more heartbreaking to witness than some helpless creature suffering a lingering death as a direct result of our throw away mentality. I've seen it and the feeling of absolute helplessness and powerlessness to alleviate the suffering drives me to tears of impotent rage.

Doesn't make the front pages

The issue of littering and indiscriminate dumping doesn't make the front pages. Too bad for it's pollution all the same. I walk this area and everywhere I go, the signs of man's attitude toward nature pops up everywhere. Beer cans, broken bottles, pop cans, juice bottles, derelict cars, chocolate bars — you name it — are out there in various stages of decay. Each season brings fresh outpourings, but winter seems to be the worst.

Not too long ago I was walking along a trail to Jackfish. A few snowmobiles had stopped for a beer or two, and the cans and the bag the beer was in was left behind. Closer to home, at the ski hill I noticed a bunch of empty pop cans on the snow — oddly enough, within a few yards of a shot riddled sign that read, "Dumping rubbish prohibited."

What's the problem here? I was raised to respect nature and to believe that the wilderness is God's backyard and home to countless creatures. We don't throw our garbage into our neighbour's yard, so why do we feel free to abuse our communal backyard? I was taught that if I can carry it in, I can carry it out.

People like to blame tourists for litter, but I think it's time to take our fair portion of responsibility. I don't think tourists ditched the derelict vehicles at Hayes Lake. Most tourists I've met over the years are pretty conscientious — they seem to appreciate what we take for granted.

The media focuses on larger companies as the major polluters. They are starting to do their part in changing but are we as individuals doing our part? Every time we casually toss litter over our shoulder, throw something out of a car window or leave trash at a campsite, we are creating pollution and environmental hazards.

As an individual I can't do much about saving dolphins and tropical rainforests, but I can do something about the area I choose to live in. I am involved in my own small way. I do my part by not littering up the country I love and by picking up after others. Next time you are out in the woods look around — the stuff is everywhere. Check out Lamont Lake and see literally bags of garbage. Have a close look at the ski hill and the bush behind your homes. You may be unpleasantly surprised. Check out any area accessible to snowmobiles and four wheelers. It's the same sad story. We all pay for this one way or another, but the solution is pretty simple: if you can carry it in, you can carry it out, and the load is lighter on the way back. Those cans are worth money and can be recycled.

The choice is ours

We live in a beautiful part of the world, and it's time we appreciated it and took some pride in the beauty in the wilderness around us. In many parts of this continent, areas like ours are just a memory — let's keep ours a thriving reality. The choice is ours to make, not only for ourselves, but for our kids as well.

So the next time you're out fishing, camping, snowmobiling, hunting or just walking, don't leave that can behind, take it with you. And if you see one, pick it up, don't leave it for someone else. If we all do a little, we can accomplish so much. It would be nice to let my son play in the water or on the beach without fear of broken glass. I don't think it's too much to ask for now is it?

Letter to the editor

Christmas tree on the hill like a sentinel

Dear editor,

If you were a motorist heading west during the Christmas season, and you looked Northwest on the horizon, you would have noticed a lovely lit up Christmas tree, standing like a sentinel, watching over our town of Schreiber.

Sudbury has its Big Nickel, Wawa has its Canada Goose, and White River has its Winnie the Pooh. Thanks to two local citizens, Aurel Major and Gerry Thrower, and their belief in spreading the Christmas spirit, we now have this beautifully decorated Christmas tree out in the wilderness.

Kind of reminds you of the Star of Bethlehem, spreading the Christmas spirit and reminding us that we are not alone.

George T. Lengyel
Schreiber