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Time for a giant leap forward

COVID may be attacking young and old, rich and poor, employed and unemployed at will, but the impact of the pandemic has not been the same for everyone.

Consider measures people are advised to take to avoid getting the virus – stay home as much as you can, work from home, and have your groceries and other necessities delivered.

Working from home is pretty much a white-collar, middle-management privilege, not an option for those who earn their living serving coffee at the drive-through, doing factory work, driving a truck, or doing dozens of other jobs in service, retail and health-care sectors.

Getting groceries delivered may be safe and convenient, but it comes with a hefty price tag. It is ironic that the people who need the service the most – the elderly and those in poor health – are the ones least able to afford it.

Then there are appointments, COVID-style. Phone when you arrive, and wait in your car until called to come inside. It works beautifully – for those who have phones and cars. Not everyone does.

Getting tested for COVID, whether through acquiring a rapid test kit or more conventional testing, has come to mean waiting in line for hours, often outdoors in brutal cold – not something the elderly, people with young children, or those with physical challenges can do.

Then there is remote learning, a euphemism for computer school. It depends on children having access to a decent computer and a good internet connection, not to mention a parent or caregiver who is part techno-wizard, part Mary Poppins, understands the new math, speaks both official languages, and can afford time off work.

The kids who generally do well in school will get through another couple of weeks of remote learning with no ill effects, whether they take to computer school like so many little fish to water, or whether they regard it as a form of torture. The kids for whom school is a struggle at the best of times will fall further behind or drop off the educational radar completely, increasing the probability of a lifetime of marginal employment.

People who live in urban apartment complexes and depend on public transit have a much higher chance of contracting COVID than rural or suburban residents who live in single family homes and own cars.

Those who live in congregate settings – government lingo for nursing homes, group homes, shelters, jails and rooming houses – are at even greater risk. COVID spreads like wildfire in such places, especially the Omicron variant.

Those hit hardest are people without a permanent residence. Being told to “isolate at home” is a cruel joke to someone who has no home in which to isolate. Some are faced with the choice of going to a shelter, where the chance of getting exposed to COVID is sky-high, or risk freezing to death on the street.

If COVID has accomplished nothing else, it has raised our awareness of numerous inequities that exist in our society. We see where the fault lines are and we have been taking action – often small steps when giant leaps are needed, but we comfort ourselves by knowing it is in the right direction.

The shortage of health care professionals, especially nurses, is not new. It has been with us for two decades. Now, with cases of COVID spiking at a terrifying rate, we have a situation where the need has outstripped the availability of health-care resources. It is not a future danger to fear; it is our present reality.

We do not need a crystal ball to predict how health-care resources will be allocated, or that an increasing number of people will die from treatable conditions.

Future generations will judge our society not by how we treated our wealthy and privileged, but by how we cared for our most vulnerable – the poor, the elderly, the fragile and those with physical and mental challenges.

Where the nursing shortage is concerned, we cannot waste time with tentative small steps. We need that giant leap forward, now.



The dirty business of coming clean

* Reader advisory: You may envision Dan McNee nude over the course of this opinion piece.

Now that I've scared off 96 (100?) per cent of my readers, I have to come clean on something. Pun heavily intended. The night of Friday, Jan. 14 marked my first shower of 2022. Not out of choice really, more a representation of present circumstances.

I should also point out that I've had a few baths leading up to my breaking of the 'new year shower seal.' I don't have an option in the matter these days; when construction of our addition began around Labour Day weekend, it meant that our primary main floor bathroom avec shower was going to be sheared off, and for the next few months we would be relegated to the upstairs tub.

Initially I didn't think it would be too bad. I don't mind a bath, especially during the winter months. It can be cozy and relaxing, 20 minutes of serenity after the tykes go down for the night. That said, I don't want to have a soak every single time I need to wash.

"Sitting in a tepid pool of your own filth," as Cosmo Kramer once elegantly described a bath on *Seinfeld*. He's not wrong.

My non-shower streak had actually extended back before the turn of the calendar into mid-December. Without getting too vivid, the mo-

Dan McNee
Banner Blitz



ment of realization that I was long overdue for one came when I was having a tub last week, and I noticed that the water had become particularly murky. *How did I allow myself to get this heinous?* my inner monologue pondered. It took a bit to register, but after a few minutes of watching that surrounding pool get blacker and blacker, it finally kicked in. The new black socks I received for Christmas were displaying themselves after detaching from my feet. That did it.

Thanks to an extremely generous gesture, we've been able to utilize our neighbour's shower largely whenever we like, but I still feel fairly uncomfortable imposing myself in this way. However, when they happen to leave town for the weekend, I'm all over it like black dye on Dan's feet.

Last Friday's shower cracked the top-five lifetime for me (I'll refrain from listing the others). It was long, it was hot, and by the end I actually felt completely clean. With a cus-

tom Spotify playlist ripping along on random, I was belting out tunes like it was 2007 again and I was on stage with the boys in my former band. Albeit a very different setlist. Paul Simon's "You Can Call Me Al" was the encore this time around. I hope you can never listen to that song again without picturing yours truly in the raw. I am truly sorry.

It goes without saying that the loss of our shower (also having no dryer with two young children in the house has also been taxing) over the past few months has been the most difficult aspect of our renovation. Looking at it that way, I suppose it hasn't been too bad. But rest assured, once our new facilities are up and fully operational it will be a very, very long time before I willingly opt for the tub.

Singing in the bath just doesn't have the same feel to it.

"If you'll be my bodyguard, I can be your long lost pal; I can call you Betty, And Betty when you call me you can call me Al..."

Once again, I am truly sorry about that visual.

Thanks for reading and I'll see you back here in a fortnight.

This is a bi-weekly opinion column; for question or comment, contact Dan McNee at dmcnee@midwesternnewspapers.com.

TURNBACKS

Ten Years Ago
 Jan. 18, 2012 – Representatives of Invenegy Canada hosted an information session to discuss the benefits of wind energy with local residents. Proposed wind turbine farms in the area continued to be met with strong resistance by many landowners. The Palmerston Snow Kings and Maitland Valley Snowmobile Club partnered to host a Ride for Cancer fundraiser on area trails.

A large crowd of residents attended the first public forum on a proposed new Listowel arena at Parkview Gardens.

Twenty Years Ago
 2002 – A large crowd of representatives from local restaurants, bars, charities, bingo halls and bowling lanes expressed their displeasure with North Perth's proposed no-smoking by-law. Dilly's Donuts in Listowel opened a billiards room, which included arcade games and a jukebox.

Thirty Years Ago
 1992 – The newly-established Listowel Horticultural Club registered 104 members at its inaugural meeting.

Krista Senek, 24, arrived from the Simcoe detachment to become Listowel's first female OPP constable. The Listowel Bantam 'A'

Cyclones' 30-game winning streak came to an end during the International Silver Stick final in Michigan.

Forty Years Ago
 1982 – The Atwood Fire Department used its new Jaws of Life apparatus to free a London man from his wrecked car.

Some rural residents were opposed to Ontario Hydro's plans to build a tower in the region, citing health concerns and a loss of agricultural land.

Fifty Years Ago
 1972 – Robert Farrish was elected chair of the Public Utilities Commission. A 1971 Mercury Meteor was \$2,786 at Harvey

Krotz Ford. Playing at the Capitol Theatre was *Black Beauty*, starring Mark Lester. Poultry farmers were urged to vaccinate their flocks for Newcastle disease.

Sixty Years Ago
 1962 – The Listowel Rotary Club launched a fundraising campaign to rebuild the arena, which collapsed nearly three years prior. Excessive snow and stormy weather made it impossible to maintain the replacement outdoor ice surface.

The Chamber of Commerce announced there would be a downtown party when the streets were repaved after several years of road and sewer work.

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**OPINION
PIECES OF THE PAST**

Fifty Archives Treasures: Signature card of Apollo 11 astronauts

JENNIFER GEORGIU
Stratford-Perth Archives

After 50 years of operation, Stratford-Perth Archives houses an ever-growing collection of material that is carefully preserved and made accessible for researchers from Perth County and around the world. One of the ways that we are celebrating the Archives' golden anniversary is by highlighting 50 "treasures" from our collection in our weekly local history articles throughout 2022. This is week No. 29 and this week's treasure is a card autographed by the Apollo 11 astronauts.

This year marks the 53rd anniversary of landing the first man on the moon. Apollo 11 launched from Cape Kennedy on July 16, 1969, carrying Commander Neil Armstrong, Command Module Pilot Michael Collins, and Lunar Module Pilot Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin. It is estimated that over 650 million people watched Armstrong's televised image and heard his voice describe the event as he took "...one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind" on July 20, 1969. The Apollo 11 safely splashed down southwest of Hawaii on July 24, 1969.

Upon their return, the three moon men went on tour visiting various countries. Fans of the TV series *The Crown* may remember the fictional presentation of their stop in England that included a private visit with the Queen's late husband, Prince Phillip.

At 11:30 a.m. on Dec. 2, 1969, Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins, along with their wives, arrived in Ottawa where they were publicly welcomed on Parliament Hill. They then had lunch with Prime



Minister Pierre Trudeau before joining the front row in the House of Commons. As they entered the Commons, Mr. Trudeau rose to acknowledge their presence in the chamber and there was a thunderous one-minute ovation from both the floor and the packed galleries. Outbursts such as this are strictly forbidden in the galleries but there was no attempt to suppress the excitement.

After the crowd quieted, Trudeau continued and went on to say "The exploits of our visitors today proved that the age of exploration is not over, and we are glad. They proved too, that there is new meaning in the heavens and we are better for it." The afternoon continued at a busy pace as

the astronauts were rushed from the Commons to a screening of film of their moon landing, followed by a press conference, and finally a dinner given by the Government of Canada.

The dinner was held at the Chateau Laurier Hotel. While the meal was going on, a small crowd lined up outside in hopes of being able to obtain the astronauts' signatures. Inside the main dining room, a number of Canada's top scientists, leaders and businessmen also had the same idea.

The group outside eventually went home when it became apparent that the dinner would not be ending for some time. This did not stop the individuals inside, but

they did not fare any better. The astronauts' table was invaded as dessert was being served and one of the hosts, Treasury Board president C. M. Drury, had to assume the policeman role to get the enthusiastic fans back to their seats. He assured them that if they filled out cards they would not only receive an autograph, but a photograph would also be included.

One of these signature cards has made its way to Stratford-Perth Archives. The card came into the Stratford branch of the Archives in 2012 with the dinner menu from the event – both items are part of the Monteith Collection. The small signature card contains all three names of the Apollo 11 astronauts, and the background contains a circle with the image of an eagle on the surface of the moon with, presumably, the earth off to the left in the background.

According to a note from, Nancy B. Monteith, "I was able to get these – at Govt. dinner to honour the astronauts." It is unclear if she obtained them during the dinner or if she filled out a card and they were sent to her at a later date. One assumes the latter is most likely as the men did not seem to be signing autographs at the meal nor would they have had the little cards at the table with them. This signature card is a real treasure as it has a very clear provenance connected with Perth County residents and because it documents the "rock star" status of the Apollo 11 astronauts.

Stratford-Perth Archives is open for in-person research by appointment from Tuesday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For details, please contact us at 519-271-0531 ext. 259 or by emailing archives@perthcounty.ca.

Win with focus

Are you letting someone else's loaded bar prevent you from lifting what you're capable of? A friend of mine told me a story that I didn't fully appreciate in its entirety until right now...

She was in a competition and going head-to-head with a girl beside her; both were fighting for first place and both had the potential to win it. The lift was a five-rep max bear complex and the clock was running. If you're not familiar with the bear complex, to keep it simple, picture picking a heavy bar off the floor and doing a few squats and shoulder presses with it five times in a row. It matches the burpee for likes. It's probably one of the least favourite lifts because it's so taxing and if you ask me, very effective.

My friend did her five reps at 125 pounds. She knew this was as heavy as she would be able to go. The girl beside her had just finished 120 pounds but had more in her tank. There was still time remaining on the clock. They rested and my friend's husband, knowing she had maxed out, told her to load her bar to 135 and rest as if she was going to finish with that weight.

The girl next to her saw 135 on the bar and of course, in an effort to win, went heavier than she maybe would have. As a result,

Alison Brown
Column



she wasn't able to complete the lift. The weight was too heavy for her. The loaded bar that never got picked up by my friend won her first place.

Winning is winning. In this case it was a psychological win and it counts.

Had the other girl picked up 130 it could have won her first place but even 125 would have given her a tie for first. Instead, she let the appearance of what someone else was doing distract her from simply doing what she was capable of. Sometimes we think we should be doing what others are doing.

This thinking could prevent us from winning at what we are great at doing. Obviously, in a competitive setting, things are different but the story got me thinking about rosy Instagram pictures and the Facebook highlight reel. Our culture is thick with a focus on what others appear to be doing and from the outside, it usually looks picture-perfect, even if it's not.

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Wilson: Cobra Chicken

Continued from page 4

"Why are you laughing? Those things are scary!" he said.

I heard a joke some time ago that explained why Canadians are generally so polite. At birth, a ritual is performed that extracts our hatred and places it in Cana-

dian geese. I'll leave you with one more joke, this time from Daryl on *Letterkenny*.

"Well, Mike Tyson had a pretty good run of things. Do you wanna know why? No Canada geese in his weight class." Sounds legit to me.

Mike Wilson is the editor of the Listowel Banner. In addition to being wary around the Canadian Cobra Chicken, he also has a mortal enemy in swans. Share your Canada goose encounters and other feedback with him at mwilson@midwesternnewspapers.com.

Streaming, flaxen, waxen

*Gimme a head with hair
Long beautiful hair
Shining, gleaming
Streaming, flaxen, waxen...*

The Cowsills' 1968 single "Hair" based on the musical of the same name always makes me laugh every time I hear it.

It's just a jaunty, catchy tune, and certainly appropriate to the era of its original release. Youth in the 1960s were growing their hair long in what became known as the hippie style, and after the Summer of Love in '67 the Cowsills' track was very well received indeed. I digress...

I have been fortunate in my life when it comes to hair. Certainly on my head – there's not much history of baldness on either side of my family. It's tough to pinpoint an actual shade to label my 'salad' as the kids like to call it these days. I've been told it appears to be everything from brown, blonde, red or auburn – whatever that last one means. A good old classic dirty blonde it is. With gingery highlights, perhaps.

Over the generations, the McNee men have also been known to produce a fine moustache; my old man had a legendary duster for most of the 1980s and through the '90s. Big Doug's could be best described as a combination of Tom Selleck and Sam Elliott in his younger years before the western style began pulling it south into the elaborate horseshoe shape for which he is now best known.

Dad never really grew a beard, but his son can produce one in relatively short order the colour of a setting summer sun.

Dan McNee
Banner Blitz



That's red, for the layperson. I'm not a fan of regular facial grooming; typically I'll shave my face clean then let it grow back for a couple months before repeating the process. My daughter is always amused by the first sight of my beardless mug, and is fond of pointing out, "Daddy's beard gone, in the garbage."

And while I've been fairly blessed in not having to contend with an influx of unwanted back hair, as I get older it has been showing up more in unwanted places. As your mind trends towards the gutter, I'll stop you right there by clarifying it's more of a shoulders, eyebrow and ear situation. My wife can't wait to get at me with the tweezers on a regular basis to eliminate the old unibrow. Women have more experience in such areas, but I couldn't care less. I suppose it's because I don't have to look at myself.

For an added unwanted visual, I can say that from top to tail I pretty much have every colour of hair going. And despite a fairly extensive historical resume of 'recreational distractions' with the added daily stress of parenting combined with work deadlines, for some reason grey hasn't made much of an appearance yet. Aside from a couple stray greys in my moustache and beard, the hair gods continue to smile

down upon yours truly. Not that I fear the grey dawn. Salt n' ginger has a nice ring to it.

Sometimes I think I should honour aforementioned hair gods more by ceasing to deny the world of my locks when I almost constantly wear a hat. But with great hair comes great responsibility, and I simply don't have the desire or motivation to be bothered with styling (sometimes even combing) my mane on a regular basis. It's a lot of work, and I could do without. Besides, how else am I supposed to advertise my horrible NHL team of choice without wearing a hat?

While I know that a great many of my bi-weekly columns are fairly random in nature, this week's probably seems even more so. I suppose it stems from Nicole and I helping one of our neighbours with her trash receptacles last week, and she suddenly made a near-astonished comment on how nice my beard was looking that night, and that she hadn't really noticed me with one before. Maybe it was that setting summer sun catching the ginger coloration just right...

*Give me down to there (hair!)
Shoulder length or longer (hair!)
Here baby, there mama
Everywhere daddy, daddy
Hairrrrrr...*

Thanks for reading and I'll see you back here in a fortnight.

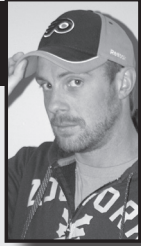
This is a bi-weekly opinion piece; for question or comment contact Dan McNee and his hair at dmcnee@midwesternnewspapers.com.

OPINION

Running out of time? No way, still in her prime

The still morning spring air is interrupted abruptly by an obnoxious, deafening roar.

Dan McNee
Banner Blitz



Elementary students

lined up for class all turn their heads together to see what is headed their way. Is it a random thunderstorm? The apocalypse, perhaps?

They're probably more than a little disappointed when they see that the source of the noise is only a small grey station wagon – albeit a classic – pulling into the school lot for a drop-off. I hop out, unbuckle Finn from his car seat, and barely have time for a goodbye hug as he hurriedly makes his way to the kindergarten line, anxious to put as much distance between him and the Vibe as possible.

Can't say I blame him, but it's still pretty funny. I didn't think it was possible to embarrass a borderline five-year-old, but it seems as though I've been able to succeed slightly ahead of schedule.

Last week my car was on the fritz again, suffering a fractured exhaust pipe that quickly altered the Vibe's sound from the likes of a modified sewing machine to somewhere in the realm of a modified tractor making its way to the starting line for a pull heat at the fair. It got even louder after the pipe fell off completely while I was backing out of my driveway – ironically enough on my way to a friend's to wire the dragging apparatus in place long enough so I could get my vessel in to see the surgeon a couple days later. With a final clunk and clatter the pipe dropped off into the street, with me sheepishly chuckling as I pulled back into the driveway, the Vibe roaring even more triumphantly. Another task complete with zero labour involved.

Finn takes on a funny tone of voice when he's not sure about something or perhaps slightly nervous about something coming up. The night before I dropped him at school as I described above, he told me in that slightly elevated tone, 'I'm not sure what my friends are going to think about your noisy car, Dad...' Point taken, Finn. But in fairness getting dropped off in a 'noisy car' will only be the first in a long list of embarrassing things I will no doubt subject him and his sister to in the coming years. My old man was one of the all-time greats in this field, and I look forward to carrying on the tradition. (Insert evil, slightly maniacal laughter here.)

I've of course written about my 'seasoned vessel' previously and the inner struggle I have every time I'm forced to take it in for some semi-significant maintenance, which is typically once every year or two. The Vibe is nearly 17 now, but the body still looks surprisingly decent and the engine runs like a top. She's only about 8,000 km away from the promised land of 300,000; I feel like I owe her at least that much before even considering changing vehicles. We've been driving partners for over a decade, and it's going to be very hard to let go.

It's also hard to say what will be the final catalyst for me moving on from the Vibe, but I reckon it would have to be fairly major to make that final decision that would truly mark the end of an era. An exhaust replacement still seems relatively minor in the interim opposed to the alternative of attempting to wrangle a newer vehicle that seem to be in short supply these days, let alone obtaining one as fuel-efficient as the Vibe in a time when you have to consider taking out a small loan just to fill up at the pump.

My car isn't overly fast, isn't overly pretty, and at the time I write this, certainly isn't overly quiet. It has been to the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico and everywhere in between, and she has some stories to tell. If I have it my way, the Vibe will add a few more chapters before her time is done.

Just don't follow me too closely. There's no telling what may fly off her next with minimal notice. Thanks for reading and I'll see you back here in a fortnight.

This is a bi-weekly opinion column; for question or comment contact Dan McNee at dmcnee@mid-westernnewspapers.com.

PIECES OF THE PAST

Fifty Archives Treasures: Mitchell Fire Brigade stages 'Happy Valley' fundraiser

ELLEN THOMAS
Stratford-Perth Archives

This week's 21st treasure from the collection of the Stratford-Perth Archives' continuing series "Treasures from the Archives" is a poster advertising a charity event at the Mitchell Opera House. This event, a play titled "Happy Valley," was staged by the Mitchell Fire Brigade in order to raise funds to provide Christmas gifts and essentials to those finding themselves in "unfortunate situations."

The story of the Mitchell Opera House has a tragic beginning and end. In 1886, Mr. Henry James purchased the "corner lot on Main Street" from Mr. J. S. Coppin for the sum of \$1,700. The article in the *Mitchell Advocate* in November 1886, stated that "his intention [was] to erect a brick building upon the site with a large opera house." The first tragedy occurred when the opera house was almost complete. In the obituary of Mr. James, it says: "It (the Opera House) was nearly completed when in the middle of the night, a wind of cyclonic proportion blew the east end of the three-story building over and it came down on the top of the frame building, which was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. John Green and Miss Snow... Mr. Green and Miss Snow were killed, but on clearing away the wreckage Mrs. Green was found standing alive under a door frame."

Mrs. Noel Green went on to file a lawsuit against Mr. James, suing for the amount of \$7,000. In April 1888, the *Advocate* reported the following: "It will be the remembered that the great storm last fall blew down the walls of the James' block, destroying the building of plaintiff and killing her husband and servant. The defense will be that the accident was purely accidental and impossible



to guard against, that the deceased was cautioned in time, but refused to leave the building, and that defendant should therefore not be held responsible." Mr. James won the lawsuit and Mrs. Green received no compensation for her loss.

Over the next 55 years, the Opera House was home to countless events, from fundraisers, productions by both local and travelling groups, graduations, lectures, political gatherings, movies, and more. It all ended on Dec. 27, 1943, at 3:15 a.m., when a fire broke out in one of the ground-floor businesses. According to the *Advocate*: "The flames laid waste the Opera Block which embraces the

Plaza Theatre, O. E. Webb's Bakery, The Cozy Grill and Dominion store. Loss was placed at between \$35,000 and \$40,000." This was its tragic end.

The featured treasure, a poster now 91 years old, gives us a glimpse into the past and the names of young Mitchell residents who performed for charity. On June 4, 1931, an article appeared in the *Advocate* promoting the advertised play: "'Happy Valley' for Firemen

Last Christmas, it will be remembered the Mitchell brigade, assisted by many appreciative citizens of our town, distributed Christmas gifts and other useful articles to children and older

people who through no fault of their own, were placed in unfortunate situations through inability to secure work. It was a creditable and commendable effort on the part of the firemen. They purpose, if possible, to do the same thing again this year and in order to start a fund for this undertaking, well known Mitchell young people will present the play "Happy Valley" in the Opera House here on the evening of Friday June 5th. It is hoped that a nice sum will be realized and that the people of Mitchell will rally to the cause. The play "Happy Valley" is a live one, with lots of comedy mingled with dramatic episodes and no tiresome moments. It is a four-act creation and centres around city and country life."

The review in the next week's paper stated: "The play 'Happy Valley' was one of the best ever staged by the cast of Mitchell young people, and we doubt very much as to whether those taking a part in the play ever entered into the work with a more sincere or full-hearted manner than they did in 'Happy Valley' on Friday evening."

Yet, despite the glowing review, much fewer than hoped for turned out for the production. The firemen were excused for "wearing sober faces." It did not generate the funds they had hoped for, but their good intentions, their thoughtfulness, and the names of those who gave their time, have fortuitously survived almost a century, in the form of ephemera – meant to be disposed of after the event – but in this case, preserved for future researchers at Stratford-Perth Archives.

Stratford-Perth Archives is open for in-person research by appointment from Tuesday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For details, please contact us at 519-271-0531 ext. 259 or email archives@perthcounty.ca.

Jesus wept

SEAN EAST
From the Minister's Desk

As I write this, I am preparing for a visitation and memorial for my brother-in-law who died unexpectedly in a recent car accident.

Times of unexpected tragedy often become times of intense reflection – on life, on the world, on faith, on any number of other topics – and this tragedy has been no different for me. One thing I have been noting is how much differently death is processed by those who believe in a God (any god, really) and those who do not. Both experience the pain and anguish of grief and loss, but it seems people who do not believe in any kind of god demonstrate a finality to their grief – a despondency – that is not quite the same for those who believe in God, and by extension, some form of life after death. For Christians in particular, death is not just an end but also a new beginning.

Walking through this experience caused me to ask the question – what is the point? Why do we believe, and why do we try to put into practice what we believe? Especially in circumstances like this – where no trite theological explanation about freewill or sin in the world can really answer the most asked question at a time such as this – why? What do I say to someone who is deeply mourning, and for whom this kind of loss is often proof of the concept of God is false or the God who exists certainly is not worth knowing?

Two scriptures came to my attention in this time that I think speak to this very situation.

First, in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Paul writes: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

The comfort God gives is fundamental to our faith as Christians. However, Paul reminds us – as wonderful as it

is to receive God's comfort ourselves, the purpose of this comfort is it gives us the strength to comfort others – especially in circumstances like a tragic and unexpected death – in the same way. Our comfort for hoarding, but for sharing and passing on.

Second – in one of the most profound verses in the Bible, John 11:35 – "Jesus wept."

Contextually, he wept in response to the death of a friend, Lazarus. However, Jesus knew he would call Lazarus out of his tomb shortly – and so the real catalyst for his tears was not death itself, but his compassionate response to the real grief experienced by real people because of his death – and perhaps even their sense that Jesus could have prevented it but didn't. Jesus' response was not to explain, but to feel their pain and walk with them through it.

May we be similar sources of comfort and empathy as we seek to imitate Jesus.

Sean East serves as pastor at the Listowel Mennonite Church.