

>>COMMENT

How to mark Truth and Reconciliation day

Orange shirts are in short supply, but there are many other things we can do

Deirdre Pike
OPINION

I had barely packed up my red T-shirts from a month of door knocking for local candidates when the requests for orange shirts started showing up on various platforms in my phone.

This time last year I had made arrangements with the Woodland Cultural Centre's "Save the Evidence" team for a bulk order of "Every Child Matters" orange shirts, just in time for Sept. 30. It was possible to do this right up to the last minute. Not this year.

This year people will need to mark the day in a deeper way beyond wearing a particular-coloured shirt because the world is out of orange material. When I opened up Woodland's order page at the end of August, I was surprised to read the announcement.

"Due to a national shortage of orange shirts, Woodland Cultural Centre is no longer accepting orders on orange shirts and hoodies. We apologize for these unfortunate circumstances. Nyaweh for the overwhelming support!"

Marked since 2013, Orange Shirt Day began as a time to listen to residential school survivors and their families and to remember the children who never made it home. It was during a St. Joseph Mission Residential School reunion event in Williams Lake, B.C., that Phyllis (Jack) Webstad told of her first day at residential school and the taking away of her new orange shirt, a spe-

cial gift from her grandmother.

This year, when too many Canadians to count decided against donning the traditional red apparel to mark July 1, trading up to orange out of respect and horror at the unveiling of what would be the first (Kamloops, B.C.) and then second (Marieval, Sask.) of many stories (St. Eugene's, B.C.; Brandon, Man.; Muskowekwan, Sask.) of unmarked or mass graves on former residential school sites, the supply of orange shirts started to dry up.

Over the last four years, the wearing of the orange became a popular way of showing support, with proceeds from sales going toward local Indigenous projects advancing truth and reconciliation. Many Indigenous artists have created their own designs and offered them to various organizations to use on their merchandise.

However, not everyone is in for the right reason. You can still find orange shirts online through various for-profit companies, but you would be drifting far away from the origin story of this movement.

A 12-year-old artist in B.C., Haley Paeku, was shocked when she learned the design she made based on her grandmother's drawings had been stolen and attached to various clothing items at an American online shopping site. She had originally made the shirt to help raise funds for First Nations schools and had already donated \$6,000 to Qwam Qumran Stuxiwulh school on the Snuneymuxw First Nation for sports uniforms.

Paeku asks people to, "Just research where you get your orange

shirts from and that will help a lot of people," said Paeku. "Then you are donating to a good cause instead of a big company."

This year there is added significance to Sept. 30, with the House of Commons declaring it the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, acting on the 80th Call to Action from the 2015 TRC report. While federal employees will have a day off, and some provinces and territories have chosen to observe the holiday, Ontario's leadership has not. Whether you agree with that choice or not, we do not need a day off to reflect on the harmful and death-dealing legacy of the residential school system.

I think the shortage of orange shirts is actually a good thing. There are far superior ways to be an ally, advocate and accomplice to the work of Truth and Reconciliation. If you don't have an orange shirt, maybe you can find a piece of orange material to pin to whatever colour shirt you wear that day as you sit and listen to or read the words of a residential school survivor.

Take them in; immerse yourself in them; and wear the words in ways that will cover you, change you and move you to take action for truth and reconciliation, far beyond Sept. 30 this year.

Deirdre Pike is a freelance columnist for The Hamilton Spectator. She will be watching "Stolen Land, Stolen Hearts: The Doctrine of Discovery" and listening to Indigenous voices on Sept. 30. You can, too: vimeo.com/32909285. You can take in Phyllis' orange shirt story here: orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story.html.

READERS WRITE

LETTERS WELCOME, 250-word maximum, full name required. Send to letters@thespec.com

Thank you candidates!

Thank you to all of our local candidates that stepped up to run in the federal election. It is a brave decision and sacrifice to choose to be a public servant subject to scrutiny. Congratulations to the newly minted MPs and thank you for upholding our democracy.

Michelle Chin, Dundas

Not your Dad's Conservative party

There seems to be a lot of second guessing Erin O'Toole's shifting the CPC party toward the political centre during the recent federal election. Two points here: First, under this shift, the CPC party won the popular vote during last week's election by the same amount they did in 2019. So if O'Toole's shift cost his party some votes from the far right, it also gained votes in some measure from the centre — a much larger group of Canadians. Second, O'Toole's shift may produce better results at the next federal election, after Canadians have had some time to be convinced.

Douglas Wyman, Dundas

Did the Liberals collaborate?

Your editorial, "We are in the era of minority governments" (Sept. 22) points fingers at the Conservatives for not collaborating with the previous minority government. Did the Liberals collaborate with all the other parties when they decided to call an election?

Chris Asimoudis, Ancaster

Tories wanted an election, too

Your editorial on minority government was good, but it overlooks the fact that the Conservatives wanted an election as much as the Liberals did. Otherwise, why did they vote against the government's budget, effectively trying to topple the government and bring on an election?

Helen O'Connor, Burlington

The low cost of our democratic freedoms

Enough already, with the foolish rant about the \$600-million election costs. It seems everybody is throwing that figure out in every op-ed piece, editorial or angry screed. I want you to visualize living in Russia, under Vladimir Putin, in Belarus, in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, in India under Modi, and on and on. I put it to you that these are not places you would find more appealing as places of residence. If spending \$600 million every few years is the cost to our society for keeping it I put it to you that this is a great bargain indeed. This works out to about \$18 per Canadian. How many Russians would be happy to pay substantially more to rid themselves of Vlad the Impaler? How many women in Afghanistan would be astounded at the low price for ridding themselves of their male Taliban tormenters?

The way I see it, my \$18 was the best money ever spent. I am delighted to have had the opportunity of doing so. How many people around the world would envy the ridiculously cheap cost of my freedom?

Frank Spadafora, Hamilton

Get ready for broken promises

Here we go again. The leader of the Liberals offers an election to please his ego at the cost of \$600 million. Canadians had the chance to send the scandal-ridden leader packing, but of course they voted him back in. For all those people who voted him in, get used to him breaking all his campaign promises like he did every other time.

Peter Colley, Hamilton

All I can say is 'OK, boomer'

To all the angry old white men writing letters because they don't like Justin Trudeau, because they wanted their guy Erin O'Toole instead, but too many Canadians disagreed with them. To all these ranting and raving sore losers, I simply say: OK, boomer.

Ali McDonald, Hamilton

Survey just has one answer?

Interesting to get this survey (Hamilton needs housing survey.ca) in my mail. I am disappointed that it has one box to check off — yes. How do you judge a survey to find out who is opposed to this expansion? This is a sneaky way to get things passed. City council is playing into the hands of developers, who sponsored this survey. We need housing for the homeless. Councillors need to impose affordable house fees attached to new builds if they want boundary expansion. The homeless need help now and this needs to be in the lower city along the LRT.

Wayne Battaglia, Hamilton

Spec's new 'economist' got it wrong

If the Spec's new economist Scott Radley is to be believed, going into debt is a bad thing. He would have all governments balance their books every year. I have the following questions:

Does Mr. Radley have a mortgage on his home or did he pay for it entirely out of his pocket within one year?

Does Mr. Radley have a vehicle? If so, did he pay off the entirety of the purchase within one year, or did he take out a car loan?

If he has a mortgage or vehicle loan, then his article was an exercise in cynicism. Space-filing to gin up letters to the editor, perhaps?

Mr. Radley is of the "omigod however we are going to pay for all this? Let's sell off the Chedoke golf courses quick!" school of economics. He probably believes we should run our economy like each of us manages our household budget, a sure marker of someone who has obtained his economic chops from the University of Google. He is an excellent writer, and not just on sports. His article on his father was one of the best things The Spec published. However, economics is not his forte.

Owen Mahoney, Dundas



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

Jonathan Froese, aged 9 when this photo was taken, plays on his bike on a summer day in 2015.

It's the sort of manoeuvre that relates to research showing how children need free play, that is play with some risk, to help them fully develop, writes Thomas Froese.

Kids need play like they need oxygen

'Don't prepare the road for the child. Prepare the child for the road.'

Thomas Froese
OPINION

Once again parents are celebrating September and their kids' return to school, and I, for one, am enjoying the new freedom to reflect more on how to be the world's worst dad.

First, this. The exasperated school principal. I recently watched the poor guy — it's a thankless job — with his tie and blazer and jowls and arms all flailing and flapping in the wind. He was reprimanding some schoolyard boys, not a blade of grass in sight, as if they were about to bring red ants into the entire operation.

Whatever child's play they were up to, the boys couldn't have done worse than if they were running from the kissing girls, the girls who, when I was in grade school, never invited me to their parties. Yes, I'm a child of the '70s, when there was more danger but less fear. Remember, my entire generation should have been killed off by lawn darts.

And free play? Goodness, even God must enjoy free play, or why make all the warm-blooded mammals who like it so much?

In either case, for all the mothers out there, sorry, but the title of World's Worst Mom is already taken. This honour went years ago to Lenore Skenazy, the New York Sun columnist who wrote about her nine-year-old boy, Izzy, riding the New York City subway. By himself. Some folks were horrified.

The boy had begged repeatedly, so mom eventually gave him a Metro

card, subway map, \$20, coins if needed for a pay phone, and advice to ask strangers for help if necessary. Then, about 45 minutes later, right on time, the boy arrived home. Naturally, he was excited and encouraged by the trust he'd been given. Skenazy's Free-Range Kids movement was birthed.

Like Izzy, my boy, who's also nine in this old photo above, appreciates rides where the thrill outweighs any danger. But lest you think this is just about the boys, our eldest girl once jumped off a cliff in the Bavarian Alps.

"Have you totally lost your mind?" her wide-eyed mother asked when I suggested the jump. Even so, while tethered to her guide-instructor, our then-11-year-old ran and jumped and hang-glidered down some thousand feet in a rather lovely series of arcs, before landing safely.

For her part, our third child, 15, fell off a horse this summer. Yours truly followed the ambulance while her mother sat inside, beside our injured daughter. She recovered fine. So what's the girl doing Friday evenings this back-to-school month? Riding horses.

To elaborate, much research validates that risk and play need to go hand-in-hand for the brains of children to fully develop. They need play — especially free play — like they need oxygen. They need to climb trees. Tall ones. Leading play researcher Peter Gray notes that children need to "dose themselves in risk." Without enough risk, play is boring. Too much and, granted, it's terror.

But new societal norms, especially a death of free play, are contributing to today's galloping rates of anxiety especially for I-Gen, according to researchers like Greg. Hovering helicopter parents don't help. Nor does all that screen time. Nor does a rise in academic competitiveness and homework. Skenazy once asked her child's kindergarten teacher why kids so young already had homework. Answer? "So they're ready for homework in Grade 1."

Even without the pandemic factor, it's all something to think about. By the way, playing on a ball team or taking piano lessons is great, but it's not free play. Free play is fooling around on that piano, imaginatively. Or joining a pickup ball game without adult supervision. And don't let anyone tell you that your kids will be abducted. Statistically, you're about 90 times more likely to choke to death.

Not that there aren't always dangerously-boneheaded manoeuvres to try. In an obviously-distracted state of mind from my ongoing interior happy-dance about the kids returning to school, I recently jumped straight into a busy street intersection. I was also escaping the pouring rain. My boy yelled, "Dad! No!" It wasn't my brightest day moment.

But there are roads and then there are roads. Consider this adage: "Don't prepare the road for the child. Prepare the child for the road." Ignoring it just invites disaster of another kind.

Find Thomas Froese at www.thomasfroese.com.



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