

Pushing for change

 torontosun.com/2017/04/07/pushing-for-change

Joe
Warmington Yes, that was a man pushing a shopping cart along the highway in North Ontario.

And no he is not homeless or destitute. At least not anymore.

If you were up around Sioux Lookout this week, his name is Joe Roberts and he and his shopping cart started travelling across the country from St. John's Newfoundland in May 2016.

To help raise awareness for those struggling with hard-core life issues, Joe is pushing the idea of second chances. He knows the importance.

At first blush this story seemed to be about a guy and his shopping cart, but a closer look reveals it's also about a great cop who didn't give up on this once troubled man.

His name is Scott MacLeod, a recently retired OPP officer who also believes in the mantra of not walking away from someone's life.

He didn't with Joe. And Lord knows he easily could have.

Kathryn Lawler of Enterprise Canada tells me Joe as a teenager in Barrie in 1991 had "barricaded" himself in "his mother's basement with a 9mm pistol aimed at his own temple."

But then "Joe met a man who would change his life forever."

Enter MacLeod — the Barrie OPP Constable who answered the call.

"My life was a real mess," says Joe. "I was facing major legal issues. Drugs had taken their toll and I was not likely to live much longer if something didn't change. Scott treated me like a normal person. He spoke to me with dignity and respect and encouraged me to do something better for myself and the world."

He first tackled his addictions, then it was back to school.

When he received his ten-year sobriety chip it was MacLeod who presented it.

"Scott saved Joe when he was a young homeless youth and has now turned himself into a successful businessman who is giving back to homeless youth in Canada," said Lawler.

Out of this came Push for Change, the cross-Canada journey for youth homelessness.

Joe is in Kenora Saturday and soon will push on to Manitoba. In a few weeks Scott will visit Joe on the road.

Thanks to Kathryn and former Sun News producer Robert Gibson for pointing this story out to me. It will make a terrific movie as well as act as an inspiration to people down on their luck and an example for police officers to follow too. You just never know who you are arresting and what their lives could turn out to be.

The lesson for everybody is you can't always judge a person alone by what they are carrying around with them. Or by what they are pushing.

One of the things that has stood out with this year's Maple Leafs is how decent they are as people.

Even after Thursday's disappointing loss I saw all the players still signing autographs and doing pictures. One of the best with the kids is Mitch Marner — a total class act. He's a kid himself and always has that smile and kindness to him.

Morgan Rielly is like that too. Good people. Having said that I give the whole team permission to put their ugly on — even if its just for one day. They need to win their game against the Pittsburgh Penguins and nice may not be what will do it. So if the Leafs are grumpy on game night, we will all understand.

This weekend's last two games are special since they are the final two regular season tilts for official team photographer Graig Abel, who retires at the end the season. He has not missed shooting a game in 40 years and goes back to the days of Darryl Sittler, Lanny McDonald, Mike Palmateer and Borje Salming. Nobody got closer to game action ice level for so long without actually being on the ice than this mega talented shooter. Great guy too. Hopefully he can close it out with some playoff games.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, his pot czar Bill Blair and some of their friends doing well on marijuana stock scored a victory this week with the closing of the Cannabis Culture shop on Lake Shore Blvd. W. at 30th St. in Etobicoke.

“Unfortunately our great success caused us to be unfairly targeted,” said a note in the window from management. “We cannot in good conscience put our staff at risk of getting arrested over and over again for selling flowers.”

The note also said “raid after raid with no recourse to regain our lost equipment and products has been a serious financial strain.”

It is true some people will soon be getting rich. Just not them.

Speaking of rich, the people who now own Hwy. 407 are rolling in our dough. But I must give credit where it is due. I went to 407 ETR Vice President Kevin Sack with concerns of Mike Rose's crazy \$4,600 bill — mostly compounding interest thanks to charges he didn't pay after his mothballed stolen car was driven on the toll highway. I found 407 ETR reasonable. They took into consideration the escalation of costs over eight years and agreed to settle it with the almost 74-year-old Mike for three instalments of \$333.

“They were very friendly and came up with a solution,” said Mike.

How about that — a good 407 story.

That was quite a busy week. Mostly good news. Sad on the passing of night time Toronto legend Tommy Garavellos of George's BBQ fame at Sherbourne and Dundas. Not a copper in town or criminal who didn't know Tommy. Everybody loved his chicken and fries. Everybody loved gregarious Tommy. Lots of talk about condo development downtown but scratch off the list the Church of Scientology at Yonge and St. Mary's, from being demolished. “We are going to re-open,” said long time Yonge Streeter Mario, who is the smiling guy always offering stress tests.

Yonge St. may have lost time stamp locales like Sam the Record Man, HMV and the Gas Works, but the Scientology building is staying.

Have a super spring weekend. Go Leafs. Scrawler out!

