

Extremism

by BRIAN LOCKHART

'We've all seen a man at the liquor store beggin' for your change,

The hair on his face is dirty, dread-locked, and full of mange,

He asks a man for what he could spare, with shame in his eyes,

'Get a job you ***** slob,' is all he replies,

God forbid you ever had to walk a mile in his shoes,

'Cause then you really might know what it's like to sing the blues,?

That's the opening verse from the 1998 song, 'What it's Like?' by the artist known as Everlast.

The song tells three stories.

The first is of the man reduced to asking for money from passersby. There is a short tale of a young girl who finds herself pregnant and alone and receives scorn from strangers. And a story of a young man who hangs with the wrong crowd and ends up dead, leaving behind a grieving family.

The message is simple: don't judge other people. You don't know what they are going through or what troubles life has tossed their way.

Over the past few years, maybe longer, we have been hearing a lot about human behaviour and what is expected of people.

There are all sorts of buzzwords that float around. Tolerance, acceptance, inclusiveness, and discrimination are just a few of the words you hear a lot. You also hear freedom, rights, and accountability used quite a bit.

They are all good concepts ? when used within reason ? but no one truly follows the meaning, even those that claim they do.

Everyone discriminates, in fact you do it on a daily basis. You don't automatically take what is thrown at you. You make a decision based on what you want or need.

Teachers, employers, police, and basically anyone with any kind of authority discriminate as part of the job.

If they didn't, you would have received that job promotion rather than your boss's brother-in-law.

That ticket you just received for doing a Hollywood stop at the stop sign, was given at the discretion of the police officer who pulled you over. If you would have been polite instead of mouthing off and asking why he dared pulled you over, he might have given you a warning and told you to obey traffic signs.

You probably don't practise tolerance when you have a neighbour that enjoys activities that you find offensive. You most likely aren't tolerant of his tastes in music when he plays his bagpipes in the back yard at 3:00 a.m.

'I know you have to get up for work at 6:00 a.m., Mabel, but we must be tolerant of Fred's decision to further his career as a

bagpiper even though his alcohol-fuelled concerts interrupt your sleep.?

Trying to abide by certain ideologies is a noble concept. There's no doubt about that.

However, when those ideas take on a level of extremism you eliminate the very concept of what you are trying to achieve.

We have seen a lot of extremism in the media lately, mostly by small groups who are demanding everyone else adapt to their level of thought.

The thing with extremists, is they believe that they, and only they are right about the issues.

When you believe you're right about everything, that makes, in your mind anyway, everyone else to be wrong.

That is a dangerous mindset to have ? it creates enemies.

Extremists on any side of an issue create the intolerance they profess to practice.

Just because a person makes a statement that is contrary to what you believe, doesn't make them a bad person, nor does it make you right.

The old saying 'never judge a man until you walk a mile in his shoes' is pretty much self explanatory.

If we are indeed going to be a tolerant society, then you must consider the viewpoints of others, whether you like it or not.

?I've seen a rich man beg I've seen a good man sin

I've seen a tough man cry

I've seen a loser win and a sad man grin

I heard an honest man lie

I've seen the good side of bad and the downside of up

And everything between.?