

Hateful graffiti is 'disturbing, terrible, and intolerable' says Bancroft Mayor



By Bill Kilpatrick

It is believed that sometime during the night of July 6 or July 5 an unknown person or persons went down to L'Amable Dam and spray painted on the walkway in black spray paint the hateful phrase 'f**k the gay's.' On July 7, the building and bylaw manager Pat Hoover received a complaint about the graffiti through the Town of Bancroft's complaint portal and an employee was immediately dispatched to the dam to cover up the offensive graffiti. However, the vandals returned during the night of July 7 and wrote three more hateful phrases on the top and sides of the dam wall. When reached for a comment Bancroft Mayor Paul Jenkins called the graffiti 'Very disturbing, terrible and intolerable,' adding that, 'there is no place for this in Bancroft and shows a real lack of education and understanding.' Dennis Purcell, the Mayor of Faraday Township echoed Jenkins comments stating that 'it's so disappointing that people feel that way' and he encouraged everyone to 'accept our neighbours as they are.'

Hateful graffiti against the 2SLGBTQ+ community is only one example of the underlying homophobia that has reared its ugly head in North Hastings over the years. While it appears that most residents of North Hastings accept members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community it should be remembered that there were many vehicles that did burn-outs on top of the rainbow crosswalk that was installed by the Bancroft Post Office in 2019. In 2013 there was the 'Big Gay Picnic' that was organized in response to a homophobic cartoon that was posted in a local restaurant, and in 2019 Hastings Highlands voted down a motion to amend their flag policy which meant that no pride flag would be flown in front of the municipality.

Roy Mitchell, a queer artist, community organizer, and resident of North Hastings viewed the decision by Hastings Highlands council to not raise the rainbow flag as 'dangerous,' because in his view it 'sent a message to queer or trans people that they weren't welcome in Maynooth.' Mitchell sees decisions like the one in Hastings Highlands as playing a role 'in creating a climate that makes the kind of graffiti at L'Amable dam happen.' Marcus Wade and Charity MacDonald, two Grade 12 students who frequent L'Amable dam throughout the summer saw the graffiti and were appalled. MacDonald called it 'disgusting' and Wade, who knows a lot of people in the 2SLGBTQ+ community called it 'offensive' and 'upsetting,' adding that 'I've been called that [a fag] a lot throughout my entire life so I know personally how it can make someone feel.'

This act of hate comes on the heels of ongoing anti-2SLGBTQ+ protests and hate crimes that have been escalating across Canada and the United States in recent years. A Globe and Mail article from March of this year points out that hate crimes in general, after dropping for the previous three years, jumped a staggering 27 per cent from 2020 to 2021 according to police records cited by the authors. The article goes on to point out that 'in 2021 there was a 64 per cent rise in crimes against members of the 2SLGBTQ+

community? along with a 67 per cent increase in hate crimes against members of the Muslim, Jewish, and Catholic communities according to the Statistics Canada hate crimes report. Mohammed Hashim, executive director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and Tyler Boyce, executive director of the Enchante network, which represents 300 2SLGBTQ+ organizations, both agree that these numbers are an underestimation of the actual number of crimes that are occurring. Hashim adds that one of the reasons people do not report hate crimes is that they have a lack of faith in the justice system stating, "Most people do not report hate crimes to the police mainly because they don't have faith that anything will come of it." Boyce adds that many in the 2SLGBTQ+ community distrust authority and for that reason they will often seek assistance from a community group only after an incident has occurred.

Where is the hate coming from?

While it is next to impossible to exactly identify what motivates someone to carry out acts of hate there are many factors that specialists have identified as influencing their decisions. Boyce puts the blame for the increase in hate crimes related to 2SLGBTQ+ people squarely on the far right. A July 9 article in The Guardian by Tom Perkins, also puts the blame on the religious right in the United States, pointing out that between 2008 and 2019 the Christian right in the United States spent over a quarter of a billion dollars abroad, helping people like Evangelical Preacher Scott Lively spread his anti-2SLGBTQ+ message in other countries. For example, according to the article, Lively told Uganda's law makers to "emphasize the issues of homosexual recruitment of children," in order to stoke rage and disgust against the 2SLGBTQ+ community there, and it worked. As a result of the misinformation that Lively was spreading against the 2SLGBTQ+ community, in 2014 Uganda signed a law making same-sex relationships a capital offence. According to the article, the Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni justified this law stating that, "western groups and gay people were coming into our schools and recruiting young children into homosexuality."

According to Perkins, the religious right in the United States has used countries in Africa, eastern Europe and in Latin America as testing grounds for their messaging to see which anti-2SLGBTQ+ messages have the most impact, and after 15 years of testing they have brought those messages home to North America. The messages, as Perkins points out, "have been re-imported to the U.S. as the religious right warns again that the left and gay people are grooming seven-year-olds and promoting pedophilia." The messaging, although false, has been effective, as Perkins argues pointing to the number of books and pride flags that have been banned recently in the U.S. and the "record 491 state level bills targeting 2SLGBTQ+ rights."

This hate filled rhetoric is spilling over to Canada as well and it is making it more unsafe for 2SLGBTQ+ people, but it subsequently is also stoking resistance. A Global News article from January cites a comment by Fae Johnstone, the executive director of Wisdom2action, a social action and consulting firm that works with 2SLGBTQ+ people, who points out that despite some positive changes in Canada in terms of acceptance of 2SLGBTQ+ people over the last couple decades, "most queer and trans people I know are still worried about their safety," stated Johnstone, adding that, "I've been doing this work as a queer and trans advocate for a decade. It's never been as scary out there as it is right now." But despite the current climate of fear that has been created Mitchell has a message for those who would choose to hate: "We're not giving up. We've always been here; we live, work, play and shop here and add to the vitality of this area. We're organizing and continuing to build communities. We're not going away."