

The benefits of lifting weights



By Nate Smelle

DRIVING TO BANCROFT early Monday evening, I had to pull over my car when I found myself being drawn in by the magnetic beauty of the setting sun. After soaking it in for a brief moment and taking a few photos, I felt a sense of relief as if a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. Appreciating the tangible benefits of the roadside attraction I had just witnessed, I restarted my car and continued on my journey. Before I left my home that night, I had been watching BBC News coverage of the carnage in Haiti, Gaza, and Ukraine. Although I hadn't realized it until the weight was gone, the images of starving infants and fly-covered corpses had gotten to me. It is hard to smile when accepting the awareness of so many innocent people dying for corrupt causes. I recall experiencing a similar feeling of dread and despair a few years back as I sat in my vehicle outside the North Hastings Public Library researching death tolls during the COVID-19 pandemic. Feeling a sense of duty to share the best, most accurate information regarding the unprecedented emergency I admitted in that moment that I had been steeped in the misery of the world too long for my own good. Since then I have been trying to absorb my news of the world in small doses. Of course it is our responsibility to stay informed regarding the good, the bad, and the ugliness of human nature, but I am starting to realize how important it is for one's mental health to take a break. While I am still monitoring the amount of death and destruction I observe in the news, all one needs to reach one's limit these days is watch a single report. Within less than a minute of seriously paying attention, as I am sure most of you reading this know, you will feel that weight on your shoulders grow heavier. A half hour or so into your period of worldwide observation, the weight will have become such a burden, that the only remedy was a long hike and a glass of bourbon. When there was no real point of going out for non-essential reasons during the pandemic, I found this, with or without the drink to be the best cure for the lockdown blues. I can't imagine what it would have been like to ride that nightmare out in some small apartment in the city where the only nature available for such therapy was on your TV, phone, or computer screen. For me, thinking of such awful, yet unavoidable circumstances faced by so many for so long ? as well as the fear generated by the uncertainty of those managing the crisis ? really opened my eyes to how truly lucky we are to live in such a peaceful and beautiful place. Now, as violence and war are again sadly and unnecessarily taking up more and more of our precious time and energy, we need to take time to understand the value nature has in regards to our personal health and well-being. This year as the temperatures warm and the tourists and cottagers arrive to enjoy the natural beauty we experience every day, take a moment to reflect on the trees, rocks, water, and wildlife outside your window. Better yet, set aside a few moments each day ? as many as possible, really ? to get outdoors and let your senses experience it. As soon as you do, I assure you that you will not regret it. Sitting quietly, writing in the sunshine on my front porch, listening to the birds, a flock of Canadian geese flying over the heads of the red-winged blackbirds I was watching. As I write this, I can smell that scent that arises each year around this time; it is the scent of life returning to the warming soil. It can be easy to overlook these relatively simple sources of calm, given the pace of our day-to-day routines. However, for our own peace of mind in these strange and dangerous times, it is critical that we do not take them for granted. When we invest our time and energy in fully appreciating all aspects of our natural environment, we begin to acknowledge our place within it. From our firsthand experience of this all

encompassing interconnectedness, we temporarily forget about the reasons why we fight, exploit, and kill each other and our home planet. It is in this forgetfulness, and the opportunity to remember who we are and what kind of world we value that we find an opportunity to start making peace with ourselves and each other. Recently The Bancroft Times launched its Stories of Peace column by Chris Houston, president of the Canadian Peace Museum. As part of his efforts to make Bancroft the Peace Capital of Canada by making it home to the Canadian Peace Museum, each week, Houston interviews peace advocates living in and connected with our community. If you haven't seen it yet, make sure to pick up the next edition and check it out. What I have learned from the Stories of Peace he has shared so far, is that those who have seen the horrors of war and violence up close, those who have feared for their lives in every moment for extended periods of time, are the ones who value peace the most. I suppose Joni Mitchell was right when she said, "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone."