

Whuppity Scoorie, everyone!

By Tony Pearson

We are again entering a significant time of year, as spring increasingly makes its presence felt. For Christians of course, it is Easter season, the holiest time of the year, when Jesus died and rose again to new life. For Jews, it is the time of Passover (or Pesach), when Moses delivered his people out of slavery. Hindus celebrate ?Holi,? or the Festival of Colours, when good triumphs over evil. Buddhists in South East Asia observe ?Wesak,? to mark the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama. For those who follow ?earth religions,? it is Ostara, the time of fresh growth. In all these traditions, there is a celebration of renewed life after a dark period. Many countries have their unique spring festivals. In Switzerland, the end of winter is celebrated by the burning of a snow man. In Poland, dolls symbolizing winter are paraded through towns to the nearest river or lake, where they are thrown in. In a gentler mood, people in Japan celebrate the blooming of the cherry blossoms; when this occurs, families hold picnics and parties under the trees. My favourite festival name is the Scottish ?Whuppity Scoorie,? where Scottish children race madly about town swinging paper balls around their heads. Why? No one is sure. Who cares? Winter's over, and spring is in the air ? that's the main thing.

But as with all festivals, not everyone is in a position or mood to celebrate.

We're all familiar with the ?winter blahs,? where each succeeding snowstorm or bout of freezing rain feels like it's fraying our very last nerve. The malaise is general. But in spring, people are expected to be happy. Those who aren't, can feel quite out of step. Did you know that in North America, suicides peak in the spring months?

Nobel Prize winning poet T. S. Eliot opened his masterpiece, *The Waste Land*, with the lines:

?April is the cruellest month breeding lilacs out of the dead land
mixing memory and desire stirring dull roots with spring rain.?

While many PhD theses have been written on the meaning of this epic poem, most people can recognize how spring reminds us of happy times in our past ? poignant memories if those times are now gone. Memory triggers desires which were not and cannot be fulfilled. Eliot's spring rain brings old times to life, and renews the aches and pains of the past. Memories can hurt.

Consider those who have lost loved ones during the year. When all around them are joyful, their pain may sharpen. Those without family, or those estranged from family, may feel their isolation more keenly.

In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, Barack Obama offered a suggestion: ?The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you not only fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.?

In this spirit, someone once said that the best exercise for an aching heart is to reach out and lift other people up. Sometimes, the helping hand we need most is at the end of our own arm.

In this newspaper, we regularly cover programs where people are helping people. In this issue, you'll find volunteers helping low income people with their taxes. You'll find lawyers helping people recover their rights as tenants and workers. You'll find a dentist giving area children an Easter treat. You'll find library volunteers helping kids enjoy the spring break.

They have a common denominator: they enjoy what they do, because of what they get out of it. There's a sense of personal satisfaction in working with others and helping out.

Take the reverse situation, and imagine a town where no one volunteered. First of all, just think of what services and events would disappear. Then consider the spirit, the morale, the atmosphere of such a community. It would resemble the Bedford Falls of the classic Christmas movie, *It's A Wonderful Life* ? the Bedford Falls that would have existed if the Jimmy Stewart character had never lived, and the town was run by the miserable banker Henry Potter.

We need to regularly salute our volunteers. But more than that, we need to lend a hand ourselves ? especially at times when we're feeling down, when the spring rains bring back sad memories.

Then we'll get a chance to proclaim ?Whuppity Scoorie,? and really mean each word of it.