

The extremes of too much and not enough

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We all know there's a vast inequity of wealth spread across the globe.

We see the TV commercials and images on the news about the poor, destitute, starving and displaced.

And, back home, we all know about the tycoons, entrepreneurs and CEOs pulling in comfy salaries while average Canadians struggle to make ends meet, pay their utility bills and ensure there's a roof over their heads.

There are homeless, right here in York Region. There are shelters and well used food banks.

Thankfully, there are many who work together to help and try to lessen the burdens of others.

Just to toss out some totally wild figures, let's look at Bill Gates, arguably one of the richest men in the world.

His estimated worth in the neighbourhood of \$72 billion. For sake of argument, if this was money in the bank with a 6% interest rate, he'd pull in about \$114 per second. If he dropped a \$100 bill on the sidewalk, it wouldn't be worth his time to stop and pick it up!

If he were a country, he'd be the 37th richest country on the planet!

Again, for sake of argument, if he lives another 33 years, he would have to spend \$6 million per day to use up all that wealth.

We're all too familiar with government waste and enormous civil servant salaries.

The Toronto 2015 Pan Am/Parapan Am Games Organizing Committee (TO2015) and its former chief executive officer, Ian Troop, reached a severance agreement last week.

The settlement, which follows the terms laid out in Troop's 2011 employment contract, will provide him with a cash payment of \$478,200. Other settlement costs include legal fees of \$3,500; outplacement payments of \$10,000; deferred retirement benefits including an [RRSP account](#) of \$27,300; and medical and health benefits through the severance period of \$15,800.

These amounts would make most of hard-working stiff sick to our stomachs.

To put things in perspective, let's get back down to earth and closer to reality.

More than 80 per cent of humans on earth live on less than \$10 per day. More than half the world's population (3 billion) lives on less than \$2.50 per day. That's a coffee and donut for most of us in the morning.

According to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty. Worldwide, 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of 5 (same as the child population in France, Germany, Greece and Italy).

Also, 1.4 million die each year from lack of access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

In our very own backyards, an estimated \$27 billion in Canadian food annually finds its way to the dump and composting, creating unnecessarily high levels of carbon and methane.

This equates to approximately 40% of all the food we produce and 2% of Canada's GDP (Statistics Canada, 2010; Macdonald, 2009).

To put things in perspective, \$27 billion is:

? More than Canadians spent on food purchased from restaurants in 2009.

? Slightly below the value of all Canadian agricultural and agri-food exports in 2007.

? Greater than the value of all Canada's agricultural and agri-food imports in 2007.

? Higher than the combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the 32 poorest countries (World Bank 2009).

The pricier TV?commercial spots in this weekend's Super Bowl, cost roughly \$4 million each.

The litany of money tossed around in what could be deemed trivial avenues, is mind-boggling.

My daughter Lexie just returned from a week in the Dominican Republic, helping Dominicans and Haitian sugar cane workers with life's necessities.

They made half a dozen trips to the working communities and dished out food, clothing and a few playthings for the children. They were overjoyed at the most meager of offerings ??a pair of shorts, new socks or t-shirt made them smile from ear to ear.

Lexie recalled some tales for us around the dinner table, with an almost angelic look on her face. She was overcome with a sense of peace, love and appreciation of life.

?Seeing the people's faces light up when we handed out donations in the Bateys was the greatest joy I had today. To put it simply, it is amazing how something that seems so little to one can be a huge treasure to another,? one of the students wrote.

All came home with a new-found sense of humility, faith, hope, charity and the importance of family. Hopefully lessons they learned during this year's mission will serve them well for their entire lives.

It's too bad each and every one of us can't enjoy the revelations that such perspective brings. Sure, we read about the plight of others in developing nations and witness tragedies on the nightly news. Some of us donate and support children in such places.

Many of us volunteer our time in our community or at our local church.

Many of us try to give back and ?pay it forward.?

I'm not sure how we are perceived by those who are struggling in the sugar cane fields. Do they see us as wealthy do-gooders?

My daughter said they were very welcoming and enjoyed their company as much as they relied on their donations. Kids are kids the world over, whether they have shoes or not. They love companionship and they enjoy simply having fun.

Perhaps just letting them know that total strangers care about their fellow human beings is enough.

As global disparity continues to grow, it won't be long before many ?developed??countries are reduced to rich and poor.

When that time comes, I hope my fellow citizens will show similar compassion.