

## **Racism runs deep in psyche, takes work to overcome**

Goldwin Emerson, [gandjemerson@rogers.com](mailto:gandjemerson@rogers.com)

*London Free Press, August 1, 2020, pg. A13*

On May 31, 2020, the actions of a Minneapolis white policeman, Derek Chauvin, set off a series of world-wide protests, some looting and also some peaceful marches throughout much of the civilized world. Officer Chauvin and three white policemen arrested a black citizen, George Floyd, in what initially seemed to be a fairly minor misdemeanour when he paid a storekeeper with a counterfeit \$20 bill. During the arrest, along with the aid of Chauvin's three white fellow officers, Floyd was handcuffed and placed face down on the ground for nearly nine minutes. Using his knee, Chauvin put his weight on the neck of Floyd who kept calling out that he could not breathe. After about 4 or 5 minutes Floyd became motionless and died probably from asphyxiation.

Many citizens, both black and white, in many countries regarded this unfortunate event as yet another example of white police arresting and killing black citizens.

Racism runs deep. In our childhood we unconsciously or perhaps subconsciously accept the prejudices and opinions of parents, playmates, friends, teachers and other authorities. We become familiar with the set of values we see around us and we do not consider them as choices but rather we accept our community values as a real part of our world view. These values become our reality and our concept of truth. We become unconscious of the fact that our social values are the result of choices in our past. They become deeply embedded in our psyche. We simply accept our social values as part of our concept of the real world.

Later in our adolescence, we meet up with new acquaintances who hold slightly different opinions concerning which values are part of reality. But for the most part, we hang onto the ideas that confirm what we already believe.

When different values are introduced, we think of the new values as simple exceptions to our reality. But when we encounter information that is in agreement with our prejudices, we pay more attention to this information because we find it concurs and conforms with what we already accept as actual reality.

As we progress into young adults we may be able, through reading, education and discussions with those whose values are different from our own, to rethink our prejudices and opinions. However, this is not an easy task nor is it one that returns immediate benefits.

As we enter into middle adult life we often find that it is easier and reassuring to maintain the common opinions that we assume will be acceptable to our neighbours and our co-workers. It seems safer and more comfortable to avoid new political or new ethical concepts. We tend to keep our set of prejudices more deeply and quietly within us.

In the United States, racial prejudices between blacks and whites run deep in America's history. Society today is a long way from the days of slavery to the present time of blacks struggling for better education, improved health care and better housing and improved job opportunities. Canada too has its racial divides, so we should be careful in thinking we have solved such racial conflicts. Without being conscious of our own prejudices we quietly keep them to our inner selves.

A more thoughtful view would include the recognition that skin pigment, whether black or white or one of the many shades in between, does not serve humanity well in determining one's human values. A more enlightened view would include the recognition that all skin shades are part of the human family. We are all equally human. Regardless of skin colour, we all deserve the dignity and respect that should come from being part of humanity.

We are each born with the skin tones that our genetic make-up provides for

us. These are the given features which we do not choose and for which we ought to be neither praised nor condemned by our fellow human beings. Such features as skin colour do not in themselves serve us well in assessing our value in the greater picture of our human dignity or human worth. We should not judge our fellow members by the colour of their skin. Such unconscious judgments are but a short step towards racism and bigotry.