

**THE QUEST FOR THE TRUTH
AND THE IMPORTANCE OF JOURNALISM
SPEECH FOR THE ROATRY CLUB OF HAMILTON
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Good Afternoon. My name is Lyla Miklos.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. My family has had a long history with the Rotary Club. My Grandfather and Father, Dez Miklos Senior and Junior, were both Rotarians. My Grandfather created the Frobisher Inn, Frobisher Bay's very first hotel, on Baffin Island. My Father then helped birth Frobisher Bay's very first Rotary Club. The Frobisher Inn still exists but is no longer owned by the Miklos Family.

My Grandfather and Father have both now passed and Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island, North West Territories is now known as Iqaluit, Baffin Island, Nunavut. I have many fond memories of my Father taking me along as a young girl to many a Rotary Club event including Hamilton Rotary Club meetings that used to take place at the Royal Connaught Hotel.

What I want to talk to you about today is inspired by a conversation I had this summer at my friend's wedding in Vancouver, British Columbia. I ended up sitting next to someone during the reception I had only just met at my friend's wedding ceremony earlier that day. He was a very intense personality and he asked me to pick a word that would define my personal mission in life.

The word I chose was Truth.

This was even more ironic because prior to this we discussed my childhood growing up as a Jehovah's Witness. Jehovah's Witnesses describe their faith as the Truth. I wanted to make it clear to my new friend that when I said my mission was the Truth that it wasn't a messianic or fundamentalist mission.

As an annoyingly precocious child I would often get myself in trouble with the Elders at my Kingdom Hall because I would openly question the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witness faith and point out their many contradictions. A young woman who was doing Bible Study with me told me that all my questions demonstrated my lack of faith. She said if I had so much doubt in God's Word I should just go out and experience everything that the world had to offer before Armageddon came. She didn't realize just how much I would take her words to heart.

I grew up in a household where the telling of tall tales was a common occurrence. Navigating what was true and what was false was an ongoing struggle. This again gave me a very driven need to weed out the truth from lies at a very young age.

Perhaps this is why when I went into Post-Secondary studies at Mohawk College I enrolled in their Broadcast Journalism course. I had visions of uncovering government corruption or unsolved murders dancing in my head. And why wouldn't I?!?!? Pop culture had already given me many a journalist hero to look up to.

Whether it was

Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford portraying Washington Post reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward in All The President's Men as they uncovered Nixon's Watergate Scandal.

Margot Kidder as Lois Lane in Superman whose spelling was atrocious, but whose determination and bravery wouldn't keep her away from pursuing a good story.

The Boston Globe reporters in Spotlight who uncover revelations of child molestation and cover-up in the Catholic Church.

Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks as the publisher and editor in The Post who decide to share the secrets of The Pentagon Papers in their newspaper.

Then there were all the cautionary tales of what happens when journalistic ethics go out the window and people forget that journalism's purpose is to tell the truth.

Orson Welles as Charles Foster Kane in Citizen Kane who acquires a multimedia empire and has amassed enormous wealth and power, but it all amounts to him being an empty, bitter, lonely and friendless shell.

Brian Cox in the modern-day version of the same story as Logan Roy in the television series Succession.

The sci-fi series Babylon 5's version of CNN taken over by a fascist regime to only broadcast propaganda on behalf of their dictatorial Earth government.

The magical newspapers in the world of Harry Potter when Voldermort comes back to power being turned into a mechanism for his evil and lies and oppression to spread.

When I was a student at Mohawk College learning the basics of journalism one of the big rules that was banged into our heads over and over was to verify your sources. You never took any one person's word as gospel. If someone told you a big gossipy juicy story you went sniffing around and asking other people to verify and back up that story or you would do your own sleuthing and research.

A huge part of this was to make sure you as the reporter were not liable and have someone come after you for defamation.

Your objective as a journalist is to strive to be as accurate as possible. Truth is a defense for libel and defamation. If you can prove that what you wrote is true, it isn't only good journalistic practice, it also puts you on safer legal ground.

Mainstream Press is also known as the Fourth Estate. The term fourth estate comes from the traditional European concept of the three estates of the realm: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. The Fourth Estate has also led to its offshoot, The Fifth Estate. A term that dates back to 1960s counterculture. Nowadays we would classify bloggers, independent journalists and social media as The Fifth Estate.

During both Bush regimes in the USA my tolerance for sitting through American jingoism as journalists reported on both the Iran and Afghanistan Wars had reached its limit. The only American news I could stomach was via my personal fave Fifth Estate – The Daily Show With John Stewart.

Mainstream news media as we have known it has been dying a slow and painful death. Local newspapers, urban weeklies, radio stations and television newsrooms keep shutting down. Since 2008 nearly 500 news media outlets in Canada have closed. Digital media which was free and available without a subscription ate away at their audience.

But the bigger problem was despite having all these different mediums with which to spread the news, for them to be maintained they had to be funded via Capitalist principles. There may have been MORE media outlets, but this didn't necessarily translate into more advertisers. And an organization whose goal is to promote the Truth, will always be at odds with a funding formula based on a greed driven profit motive.

During the Pandemic print media revenues dropped by over 50%. 1/3 of the journalism jobs in this country have disappeared with journalists leaving the industry in droves. Mohawk College just announced earlier this year that they are dropping their Journalism program this Fall because of the lack of jobs in the industry. As a Mohawk College Broadcast Journalism grad this isn't just heartbreaking news this is soul crushing news. Journalism isn't just an industry; it provides the public with an essential service.

Now we are seeing phase two of the death of Journalism. Many of the digital news media that came out in the past two decades have also taken a hit and are also closing.

Lack of revenue from advertising is making their businesses models unsustainable. Many of them never actually making much of a profit since their initial inceptions.

Canada's Bill C-18, The Online News Act, has given Canadian journalism yet another blow. The Canadian Government told social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that they can no longer steal Canadian media's advertising dollars. If they want to share Canadian news stories from Canadian journalism outlets, they will have to pay for it. Facebook's reaction was to shut down the sharing of all Canadian news links on all their platforms.

I remember when I first signed up for Twitter before it imploded under Elon Musk's leadership. My main reason for being on it was to connect with news outlets from around the world. I remember when my Godmother and Namesake was in Egypt in

2011 during the Egyptian Revolution or Twitter Revolution. Egyptians unseated Hosni Mubarak after a 30-year reign. Social media proved that it could be a powerful tool for positive change.

Now we are seeing messages from all the news outlets that we used to follow on social media telling us to download their individual news apps. Google is also looking into putting the same tactics into effect on their platform too.

In the middle of all of this came a very quiet announcement last summer that Torstar which publishes The Hamilton Spectator and Post Media which publishes The National Post were in talks to go forward with a merger. Soon Canadians would just all read one big corporate print media conglomerate called The Newspaper™.

The proposed merger fell apart. As a result Torstar laid off over 600 people who worked for community newspapers under their Metroland and Nordstar banners earlier this month, thus shuttering 70 community newspapers across Ontario. The layoffs included 68 journalists.

The death knell of Canadian print journalism has been coming for a while. Even over two decades ago when I was first working in Canada's television broadcasting industry after graduating from Mohawk College.

First as a traffic coordinator (the person who schedules all the commercials) and later as a programming coordinator (the person who schedules all the shows). Each place I worked at was eventually bought out by a bigger fish. CHUM by CTV and Alliance Atlantis by Global. The argument from my many soon to be unemployed managers and supervisors at the time was that we couldn't be competitive in a global marketplace unless we became bigger.

Problem was that Canadian producers of content for television had less options to try and pitch their work to Canadian broadcasters, which meant less opportunities to make a profit to fund their next creative endeavour.

Another group of Truth tellers were having less options to share their stories. All the more ironic in a broadcast environment controlled by the CRTC which mandated a certain percentage of Canadian Content be funded and produced by each Canadian broadcaster. This was again to ensure that Canadian stories were given a platform.

I never did get to live out my dream of becoming a reporter despite being around the newsrooms at the various media outlets I worked for. But my journalism skills did not go to waste as I honed them into doing Public Relations and Publicity for various organizations in the Hamilton area for well over two decades. Knowing what I needed to put into my messaging for it to be noticed by news outlets was half the battle. But even as a publicist the vehicles I use to get my message out have been hacked away at. With one news outlet after another shuttering there are less and less opportunities for me to get my message out to the public. Whether it is to let people know about a new theatrical production being mounted in the city or a Vigil to remember the

victims of violence in our communities. Just yesterday Entertainment Tonight Canada announced they have stopped production because the cost of producing the show can not be supported by the current advertising model.

I even have to take a pause as I look at my radio show Centre Stage which I have been hosting on Mohawk College's radio station 101.5 FM for nearly 25 years now. I play new Broadway cast albums, give reviews of local theatre productions and interview theatre artists from Hamilton to Broadway and beyond.

If the journalism program at Mohawk College is shut down what media studies program at the College will go with it next? Will it eventually mean the closing down of their campus radio station? Will we lose yet another Canadian Broadcaster?

What is the ultimate impact of the decimation of Canadian journalism and media?

During the first Donald Trump Presidential campaign he referred to any news that was critical of him as "fake news". Trump's rhetoric has been adopted and further amplified by the far right to dismiss and discredit mainstream media outlets such as the CBC, CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera.

Far too many of my friends and family during the COVID-19 pandemic would fall down a rabbit hole of disinformation and conspiracies theories being pumped out by people and organizations who were hell bent on convincing every one of their version of the "truth".

When I would try and redirect people away from these sites to far more credible news sources, they were all convinced that I was under the influence of BIG GOVERNMENT who was trying to control us all by making us wear masks and get vaccinated. The entire pandemic was a giant hoax constructed to keep humanity under control. Their conviction in their belief that they knew the truth and that I was just drinking the Kool Aid veered on the side of self-righteousness. Long deep dark sigh.

One of the things we didn't get taught in school during these past few decades filled with a glut of digital information is how to be media literate and consume the news we digest with a critical eye.

Weeding out the truth from all the noise was something that we once depended on our journalistic institutions to help sort out for us, but more and more it is something we as world citizens have to be ever vigilant of.

The rise of fascism has become a worldwide phenomenon that we can no longer ignore. I got to see it come to the very front door of my workplace last week as hate groups organized themselves to be at various protests across the country. Now our public-school board is being harassed daily with bomb threats from transphobes.

Technology has evolved at lightning speed during the course of our own lifetimes. Those who created these tools often had noble intentions, but those with far more nefarious purposes have turned them into tools to promote hate and white supremacy.

Democratically elected governments were not paying attention to the rapidly changing world around them and now have fallen victim to digital tools run by corporations whose motives are suspect. The enshrinement of press freedom into our fundamental rights has become a battle.

Recently at a Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ social I said my Father and Grandparents would be rolling over in their graves right now. They escaped Hungary during the 1956 Revolution and came to Canada to make a better life. They survived Nazi and Communist regimes and saw the Berlin Wall fall, only to see the freedom they sought out, be so casually thrown away not just in Canada but in their former homeland of Hungary too.

It is painful to see history repeating itself once again. Many of the same things that have triggered the events my Grandparents lived through have come right back. A class divide that grows ever wider between the haves and have nots. Imminent economic collapse. And finally turning our most marginalized groups into a scapegoat for everyone's frustrations – whether they be Drag Queens or trans kids. It's a familiar playbook. None of this is new. We have all seen this before and some of us within our own lifetimes.

There is a scene in the 1962 film *The Manchurian Candidate* where a Joseph McCarthy-esque Senator keeps spewing out whenever a camera or microphone is in front of him that the US government is overrun with Communists. He laments to his wife played by Angela Lansbury over breakfast that he feels silly because every time he shouts out this falsehood, he randomly just makes up a number of Communists in the government. He asks her to pick one number so he can stick to it and at least repeat the same lie over and over again. Director John Frankenheimer wittily cuts to a shot of a bottle of Heinz 57 Ketchup and in the next scene the Senator shouts out "There are exactly 57 card-carrying members of the Communist Party in the Department of Defense at this time!"

I think of that scene when I think back to the first Trump Election campaign. Too much of our news media had devolved into infotainment rather than journalism. And Trump knew it. They reported on him like they would report on the release of Beyonce's newest album, the opening of another Superhero blockbuster film or the latest celebrity breakup. Instead of being that critical instrument to help the public navigate through all the garbage, they just became an amplifier for Trump to keep repeating his lies over and over again. The voting public then went to the ballot box filled with the belief that this narcissistic billionaire would stick it to the man and "Make America Great Again". Somehow, they all forget he is THE MAN.

Far right media outlets will often use the same kind of tactics as Trump, rapidly repeating their rhetoric, while aggressively talking over and harassing politicians or public figures at media briefings and press conferences.

Journalism is supposed to be a noble calling.

I think of the many brave journalists who put their lives at risk at exposing the truth some of them even losing their own lives in that pursuit. From 2016 to the end of 2020, UNESCO recorded 400 killings of journalists. Nine times out of ten, their murder cases remain unresolved. The impunity for these killings continues, breeding a cycle of violence with no justice in sight. Journalist imprisonment is at record highs. Online violence and harassment spurs self-censorship and, sometimes, physical attacks. Journalists have also increasingly been attacked while covering protests, by various actors, whether they be security forces or protest participants.

During the Ottawa Trucker Convoy Protest many of my friends who worked in mainstream media shared horror stories of being physically attacked or violently harassed by protestors. Journalists removed network logos from their vehicles and microphones. With the violence against women journalists being even more severe.

Finding an objective Truth that all of us can have a consensus on is becoming an almost impossible task in this day and age. This isn't just about a diversity of views or backgrounds or experiences this is about people arguing about whether the sky is blue.

Journalism is crucial to a healthy democracy.

The nightmare scenario that played out in the 1976 film Network and was only meant to be a satire. It has now become a daily reality.

There are more Howard Beale's shouting out "I'm Mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore" these days than I can count. Even more sobering and far too real is the scene between Howard and corporate mogul Arthur Jensen played by Ned Beatty who says "You have meddled with the primal forces of nature, Mr. Beale, and I won't have it! Is that clear? There is only one holistic system of systems, one vast and immane, interwoven, interacting, multivariate, multinational dominion of dollars. There is no America. There is no democracy. There is only IBM, and ITT, and AT&T, and DuPont, Dow, Union Carbide, and Exxon. Those are the nations of the world today."

Not a satire now, but an Orwellian prognostication.

We need journalism to not only let us know that the world is going to hell. We need it to also provide us with answers and solutions on how to get out of the hell hole humanity has created towards a better future.

In all the doom and gloom I shared in my talk I also want to give you some hope.

But it needs to also be the truth.

We may have to live through a revolution before we get through to the other side but is a thought from one of our great revolutionaries about how to make it through times of tremendous change.

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but, in the end, they always fall – think of it – always.” - Mahatma Gandhi

I promise to continue to make my life's mission Truth.

For as George Orwell said, “In times of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”