July 6, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on how the municipal government can improve.

I have been waiting for this opportunity for over 60 years to talk about racism by the Toronto police.

As a young boy from Italy I grew up in the Toronto Brockton Neighborhood near the Little Italy Neighborhood on College Street near Grace Street in the early 1950s when the Toronto Police were actively involved in breaking up groups of more than 2 people walking on College Street enjoying what is known in Italy as "La Passeggiata"... a traditional stroll that new immigrants undertook back then, especially after Sunday morning mass, as a way of meeting relatives and getting current news of life back home in Italy's many villages.

This police targeting people enjoying a Sunday stroll with other Italian friends caused great anxiety and fear in many Italian families and resulted in many family arguments about not walking on College Street...for fear of being deported.

This is just another clear example of insensitive racist reaction because of a lack of knowledge of other immigrants' cultural habits. I wonder to this day, what kind of a person in the upper management section of the Toronto Police Force instructed the local police on their street walks to ask the new Italian immigrants to not walk and talk together. Also what did the police walking their beat think they were achieving? Was it just a way of being a bully towards people out on a stroll or a way of exerting “control”?

Maybe the police were afraid of what the immigrants could have been talking about? How could they think that by allowing only no more than two people to walk together was achieving anything but causing fear in the Italian community?

This is method of policing is still happening today although in a different form….yet never the less as in the Italian community in the 1950’s…..causing anxiety, fear and enjoyment of public freedom by everyday citizens…..these days.

You are to accept that people and communities who tell you so ….are under great stress.

In my observation I suggest that a major shift in attitude by an organization that has a billion dollar annual budget needs to consider changes as to how they deal with the public at all levels of operations from the individual police officer up to the Police Board itself.

You have a great deal of work to do.

I can suggest the following to help gain trust by the Toronto citizens and make what presently seem like “ a secret society “….accountable to the public:

1. The police Board covers too large of an area and it needs to be reconfigured and divided up into mini boards in different areas of the City

2. These mini police boards need to better represent the communities they serve and be selected by the community

3. The board meetings need to be more public

4. The police budget needs to be transparent and much more detailed….line by line

5. The annual audited police expenses need to be made public and more transparent to the same level as all government expenses are so that the ordinary citizen can see where the 1 billion dollar expenses was spent.

6. Many services that somehow were given to the police over the years need to be given to other service providers….just like handing out parking tickets were not that long ago.

Thank you Board members for allowing citizen input in this very difficult timeand for keeping democracy alive in between elections.

Stay well

Danny Bellissimo

1909 – 3 Summerland Terrace

Toronto

(647) 483 – 7548

danbellissimo@hotmail.com