



North Shore News Column.

Older & Wiser

By Tom Carney

Age warfare debate only starting to heat up

By Tom Carney, Special to North Shore News September 23, 2012

I'VE been writing this column for five years.

Not a long time really but long enough, I think, to give me some perspective on the issues facing seniors.

What worries me the most right now? At the top of the list is something I call age warfare. The war is all about the transfer of wealth. The pitch is aimed at those aged 20-40. Out of work, underpaid, crippled by student debt, can't afford to buy a house? It's not your fault. Your parents are to blame. They've taken all the good jobs, they've left you a massive debt and they're about to bankrupt the health care and social security systems.

The only thing left for you, if you're lucky, is a room in the basement. And here's the kicker: The older generation expects you to maintain a system that benefits them at your expense, regardless of their needs or yours.

The point is that the world has changed and old age entitlements need to reflect that reality. Or, to put it more bluntly, it's time to cut the social benefits for seniors. I think that's wrong but I suspect the game of pitting the struggling young against the smug and comfortably old is just getting started.

Recent actions by government and a quasi government organization have left many people disappointed. Recently we learned that executives at Community Living B.C. were receiving bonuses at the same time that services to clients were being cut. The public was outraged and the government promised to fix the problem. What did they do? The money that the managers previously received as a bonus was simply rolled into their base salary. Cute, but I doubt many people will be fooled.

TransLink's decision to restore the Taxi Saver Program is certainly good news. Management's explanation: They didn't fully understand the consequences of their decision. My take: They are more clueless than malicious.

Two years after the Alzheimer's Society released their groundbreaking Rising Tide report, we still don't have a national strategy to deal with this horrible disease. If someone can tell me why not, I'm all ears. Come to think of it we don't have a national strategy for housing, mental health or Pharmacare either.

I could fill this space many times over with things I wish I hadn't said. Two examples: More than once I've written that poverty among seniors in Canada was no longer a problem. I got fooled by the data. I was looking at percentages rather than actual numbers and I got it wrong. And the, "aging is a disease," quote that appeared in a 2010 column certainly didn't win me any friends, even though the quote wasn't mine.

Two or three books cross my desk every week. I'd be hard pressed to pick a favourite, but when it comes to the scariest book I've ever read on aging, it's no contest. Lillian Rubin's *60 on Up* is billed as *The Truth About Aging in America*. If you think the Golden Years is a bunch of baloney, this is the book for you.

It's difficult not to get drawn into the debate around public versus private health care. Frankly, I think we're missing the point. It's who should be on the receiving end of the care, not who should deliver the care that's important. And the answer to that question, in my opinion, is the poor and the marginalized in our society.

I'm not ready to throw in the towel about the benefits of the flu shot just yet, but lately those opposed to vaccinations have been much more effective in getting their message out than the health authority.

Finally sometimes the research that comes to us does not jive with our own experience. The reports I've seen on the use of technology by seniors suggests that as a group they love their computerized gadgets. Really? I'm not saying the research is wrong, but that is certainly not what we're seeing in our own work with seniors here on the North Shore.

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