

...e si radunarono, lì, in quella casa nel prato, antica, semplice, storica, bianca, stretti ed intimi, troppo piccola per tutti, per le idee, per le storie, tutti braccio a braccio intorno ad un tavolino pieno di carte con cibo semplice – un litro di vino en pezzo di pane, e raccontarono, ascoltavano, e incominciarono, a capirsi - di nuovo, a scoprirsi – di nuovo, a definirsi di nuovo

Last summer, around this time, my mom went on a cleaning frenzy – Danie’ come and clean out all these old books you have in your smelly soccer bag in the storage under the stairs. So I sat on the cool ceramic floor, in my parents basement, with my kids wondering “are The Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew are they like the Jonas Brothers and Hanna Montana? ...Aaaah no.

And I came to these lines, the smell of dampness on each page, in an old manuscript from Nicola Moscardelli – a little known Italian poet, and I folded the page and I put it in ‘do not throw out Ma’ pile

These are our 2008 lines.

...and they met, there, in that little house in the field, quaint, historic, white, all tight and intimate, far too small for all of them, far smaller than what they were use too, far too small for their stories and ideas, shoulder to shoulder around a cluttered table with paper and a litre of wine and a loaf of bread, and they told tales, shared realities, listened...and agreed to hear each other again...to understand each other again and find themselves and define themselves again

Because in 2007, at this same meeting in a much different venue, 4 months into my tenure, I posited for United Way York Region to be remarkable – for us to truly mobilize the capacity of community, seize the opportunities afforded and avoid a future lexicon of “inner city or at risk neighbourhoods”, we must return - to a bold old home.

And I pled (ok I didn’t really plead) ...I said....

Our bold old home must roar for the sorrow and strength of the people we serve.

Our bold old home must live in, listen to and host neighbourhood solutions...in family rooms, basement apartments and community centres.

Our bold old home must have the courage to set seemingly unachievable outcomes and measure our ability to address not only present needs but root causes.

A three year plan, I delineated: roar for the people, listen and live in the neighbourhoods, set and measure the impact.

Because this is the value add of United Way of York Region – no epiphany or brilliance here - our ability to tell the story of the people we serve, to be a change agent in neighbourhoods and to be able to clearly articulate our measured impact.

My friends, in 2007, we came home – in so many ways.

We roared – measured, reasonable, deliberate – but loud and unrelenting on behalf of the people we serve and the underlying root causes they face – daily.

We aligned and strengthened our organization, building on a great staff team and positioning us for future growth.

We committed to a 9 million goal and, I would posit, more importantly, under Mr. Hortie's leadership, our corporate and community leaders committed to the Community Fund – United Way's most important tool to strengthen lives and keep our region remarkable – funding the services people need close to home.

And today, we celebrate an unprecedented \$5 million dollar United Way investment in local programs addressing local priorities in the region's nine municipalities:

- Ladies and gentlemen, an infusion of \$625,000 in new funding, to be exact
- Over \$471,000 will support new and expansion programs, delivered by our member agencies – counseling for homeless youth and their families, outreach and support to isolated Tamil and Chinese seniors, a youth mentoring program for newcomers, additional counseling supports for children who have been sexually abused, youth wellness program in high schools, outreach to at risk families and their children
- \$115,000 in program funding for two new member agencies - Vita Community Living Services for the delivery of a Day Program for individuals grappling with mental health challenges and The Aids Committee of York Region with an innovative and preventative children and youth program,
- \$38,000 in IMPACT funds to support one time infrastructure and capacity building costs of our member agencies

2007 - quite simple: roar and more dollars invested on the ground.

2008 – quite simply must be our Moscardelli year.

This is why we meet, here, in this historic house in the field, white, all tight and intimate, shoulder to shoulder around cluttered tables with paper and a litre of wine and a loaf of bread – ok, muffin, yogurt and a glass of juice, and we share the realities of a growing, increasingly urban and beautifully diverse region.

Because here, in this house, we commit to listen and hear each other again...and begin to understand each other again and define ourselves again.

We commit to leave the comfort of our home, to stop listening to the sound of our own voice – something my wife tells me I should try to do more often and I answer, "Sorry hon', I didn't hear you I was talking. What did you say?" - and listen to others

We commit, over 2008, to a United Way that lives in, listens to and hosts neighbourhood solutions...in family rooms, basement apartments and community centres.

....from Mount Albert and Maple, Almira and Beverley Acres, Pefferlaw and Snowball, Holland Landing and Bloomingdale.

Because this is where, we know, our bold old home must be - where people connect best, where change is visible and experienced – in your neighbourhood, in my neighbourhood.

And this is exactly where UWYR plans to be in 2008 - on the streets, in a neighbourhood near you

- with the launch of a Community Campaign, under Ian Proudfoot's leadership, to raise awareness and involve residents across the region
 - with a declared United Way Week in late September in municipalities across York Region.
 - With new youth engagement activities in participating high schools
 - With a simultaneous media campaign, thanks to YRMG and Rogers
- the fall release of United Way York Region's most provocative report to date, tabling the stats and trends, the public perception and the lived reality of the regions social pressure points...followed by discussions in chambers of commerce, town halls, community centres, council chambers
- our "live in and listen to neighbourhood tour" – meetings in family rooms, mosques, office buildings, malls, second suites and condo towers, listening to local perceptions and solutions on three identified issues:
 - youth
 - because the population of children (0-14) increased by 14% and youth (15-24) increased by 24% in YR between 2001 and 2006 - among highest in Canada
 - newcomers and immigrants
 - because the immigrant population accounted for 60% of growth in YR between 01 and 06
 - between 2001 and 2006, the # of immigrants living in yr grew by 34% - highest growth rate in gta
 - because Alan Broadbent said so
 - families
 - because 83% of families in york region are married with children – highest proportion in Canada.

A 2008 of engaging community - again, of starting dialogue on the region's social pressure points - again of listening to how this is all playing out, on the ground, in subdivisions across the region.

A 2008 of understanding who we are, today, and how and where we can collaborate - in this urban, diverse region of nine unique municipalities.

A 2008 of listening for new priorities and solutions and opportunities

So that when we can come together, in 2009, at this same meeting, likely in a different location, likely with a quote from some other obscure Italian – because every UWYR event we go to, the CEO guy always finds a way to add in some Italian story about his zio frank or nonna amedeo - after having lived in and listened to communities across the region, we will, define ourselves a new – with the stories and realities we gather.

We will set in motion, together, the shaping of new funding priorities, the identification of shared and seemingly unachievable outcomes, and how we will measure our community impact.

And as I sat on the basement floor, that cold ceramic tile floor, with my mother hovering over with ‘the look’ – you know the bulging eye, eyebrows up like a cats arched back tight clenched lips “I do not have to say a word look”, I flipped through Moscardelli lines again,

....e capirono, dopo un po, nonostante tutti i cambiamenti, insieme, allo stesso tavolo, ascoltandosi, tutto era possibile.

...and they understood, after a while, though all had changed around them....if they listened and understood and worked together, all at the same table, all was possible.

Thanks to you, each and every one – donors, volunteers, agencies and their Boards, community partners, and our staff, - all is possible.

Remarkable together.