I have thought long and hard about what I should discuss in the editorial. I have been researching health issues, political issues, geo-political issues, historical events, but most of all I have been reflecting on friends and family.

During the course of last year and again this year, I have lost family members and friends. It makes you realize that some of things that we take for granted on a daily basis can never be replaced. Friends and family are a treasure. Having a true friend, especially a lifelong friend is rare. We should all be cultivating our friendships whether they are family members, or friends that we met throughout our lives.

In the course of our everyday lives we meet people from various backgrounds, who may have a different religion, a different upbringing, different morals, and may have different ethics that they live by. Regardless of these differences we should be able to live together and be able to discuss issues that affect our respective lives without physical or mental abuse during such interactions. You would think that this would be case with family members and our friends. You take it for granted that the people closest to us will always accept us for what we are, as they have known us for most of our lives. This is not always the case.

When our personal beliefs and our understanding of the world dictate how we treat the people around us, then I would suggest we need to reevaluate our own moral and ethic compass. We are all adults. We should be able to discuss our beliefs and our positions with those around us with humility, and empathy, without resorting to aggressive behavior, and without terminating our relationship over perceived differences.

In the world we live in today, it is very easy to swipe left, ghost, un-follow, and just ignore those that disagree with us on what usually is just a minor issue. If we can't accept a different opinion, a different position, or even a radical idea without resorting to total withdrawal, then again we need to reevaluate how we interact with others.

It is normal to surround ourselves with people who agree with us on most matters. It confirms our beliefs, cements our understanding and our position, and provides us with that good feeling that we are right. It doesn't mean we are right, it just means that others agree with us. We tend to filter out inconvenient truths and arguments that are presented to us. The result is that our opinions and beliefs become harder to disrupt and or change. We establish a way of thinking that protects our beliefs. When we become unsure, we tend to use alternative facts to support our position and our pre-existing beliefs. This unfortunately is quite normal for all of us. It is however an unhealthy position to take.

I was raised in a rural Christian environment. I was taught the beliefs that were taught for generations in our area, and were directly linked to our religious beliefs, which provided us with the basis for our morality, and our local society provided us with our ethics. We lived in a virtual cocoon. Not many people travelled very far when I was growing up. News and opinions were provided to us by radio and newspaper, but in most cases it was provided by the elders in our community and our churches. When I was growing up everyone was virtually the same. We were separated only by our religion, which was a minor difference as we were all Christians.

What I just described is a far cry from where we are today. We are constantly pummeled with information from a variety of sources. We just can't seem to get away from information overload. Everyone is an expert, has an opinion, and attempts to force others to believe in what they are saying. With social media today you can force your opinion on others without caring whether you are right or wrong, you just want to make your mark. Whatever happened to just having a discussion on a topic and not worrying about being right?

I do believe that because we have so much information being available to us that it makes it very easy to find the information that supports our understanding, without having to actually discuss/research a topic that might disagree with our position. In effect it makes it easier for us to protect our beliefs without having to consider an alternate position.

Since the beginning of time those in power have dictated to us what we are to believe, how we can act, and more importantly they write the history books. This was very easy in the past, but became more difficult with the advent of the printing press, and when the general population became better educated and could read. But it was still possible then and more so even today. Propaganda and untruths swirl around us like the tides. They are propagated through social media, the mainstream media, our leaders, our perceived enemies, and our elders. In fact, it is easier today that it ever was to control our thinking through narratives propagated endlessly throughout the day.

The only way to protect ourselves and our loved ones is to become informed, and you do that by listening to views that you may disagree with. We are not always right. We are sometimes so entrenched in our beliefs that even listening to another opinion becomes unbearable. Why is that? Has our thirst for knowledge and understanding dried up? Or is there just too much information surrounding us on so many different issues that we just throw our hands in the air and give up?

"To learn who rules over you, simply find out who you are not allowed to criticize." Kevin Strom.

I strive to bring alternative ideas, thoughts, and positions to discussions, in the hope that others will question what is happening around them, and why. I don't attempt to change others opinions and or beliefs, all I want to do is get people to think outside the box. I want to see critical thinking become the new normal. It used to be normal, but in today's world it appears that it is easier to follow than to question.