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Failing to vote is squandering your birthright

By MAYANN FRANCIS

THE NOVA SCOTIA Human Rights Commission and its supporters have been working to bring a special museum display – the "Anne Frank in the World" exhibit – to Nova Scotia later this year.

I have had time to reflect on what lessons we can learn from Anne Frank's story.



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For me, it is a story of hate, indifference, love and kindness. The indifference of the world person and his Nazi followers to murder millions of Jews. He also targeted persons with r physical disabilities, black people, Jehovah's Witnesses, gays and lesbians and anyone els not white and Aryan. Hitler subverted the political process and used it to promote Nazi tyr limit freedoms.

Voting is a fundamental right given to all Canadians. Veterans of the First and Second Wo fought and died for us so that we could have these kinds of freedoms that other people in can only dream about. Today, our Canadian troops are fighting in faraway places to guar freedoms like the right to vote. We can cast our ballots for whom we want without fear th may kill us or members of our families because we voted a certain way.

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I remember the dismantling of the evil apartheid system in South Africa and the impact it marginalized black majority. I recall an elderly black woman who walked for miles in the t then stood for hours to mark her "X" on a ballot for the first time. The look on her face sp volumes. She was finally free to cast her vote. She was living Nelson Mandela's words: "F is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the others."

Here at home, women were granted the right to vote in provincial elections in Nova Scoti and in federal elections in 1919. Not until 1963, were all Canadians, regardless of their ra religious belief, permitted to vote in federal elections. This is within the lifetime of some o reading this column.

I think about all of these things when I encounter people who refuse to vote. Several peo they had no intention of casting their vote in the recent election. They were from different and included both genders. I overheard a flight attendant say her shift changed and she v able to vote. One could argue that we have the freedom not to vote. Somehow, I do not k choice is one our past and present veterans would endorse.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

" In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our

Elections Nova Scotia reported that in the recent provincial election, turnout was low. I ca some people may have believed their vote would change nothing; or politicians are corrup promises they will never keep just to get elected. As my friend who is a political junkie re remarked, those people who do not vote should not complain about taxes, crime, educati food, transit, health care and housing and a long list of other issues.

friends. "

Martin Luther King
Jr.

When I lived in Ontario, a young woman from New Zealand, where not voting is illegal, became my secretary. She was on the last leg of her journey before returning home in plenty of time in an election. She said voting was something she always did because her parents instilled the importance of being a good citizen and voting was one way to practise civic responsibility.

When I think about Hitler and the Canadian veterans who died fighting for equality and freedom, it saddens me that people choose not to vote. There are plenty of opportunities prior to election day, if a polling station cannot find your name, instead of leaving in anger without voting, about the elderly South African woman who walked miles, then stood in line for hours to vote, what it would mean if suddenly, without warning, our right to vote was taken away.

Our province and country are not perfect and some politicians have disappointed us, but at the same time we look for solutions other than refusing to vote. We can start by reintroducing mandatory civics courses in our schools. Let our children learn early on about citizenship and civic responsibility. There are some lessons to learn from the experiences of other democracies such as New Zealand.

Regardless of what we do to encourage people to vote, the ultimate responsibility remains with us. Mid-20th century American author Jane Auer Bowles once said, "Voting is one of the few ways where boycotting in protest clearly makes the problem worse rather than better." Failing to vote is a form of indifference which can allow everything we might complain about in a democracy to thrive.

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