

The answers within

Former military officer sees poetic signs of Hope in a troubled world

BY ANDREA PERRY

I get it – the world doesn't look so great these days. I see the images on the news. And I have seen a fair few of these terrible things with my own eyes as well.

I've watched bombs drop live from Unmanned Aerial Vehicles onto Afghans digging in the streets of southern Kandahar. I've stood in an old brick schoolhouse in Butare, Rwanda, and looked over the rows of human skeletons laid out on dusty pallets.

I hear the political rhetoric. I see the tension surfacing in so many arenas of separation – race, gender, class, nationality, religion. I can feel the gasping frustration of the Earth, under and around us, as we collectively continue to ignore the impact of environmental degradation.

But beyond, and through all of this damage, anxiety, fear and desperation, what I see most clearly when I look at the world is Hope. A tremendous amount of Hope.

I capitalized the word Hope because I often imagine hope as a being unto herself – thickly silent, yet ever-present in all things. Sometimes she goes by the name of Love. Sometimes Compassion.

Whatever you want to call her, I see her everywhere. She's on the news, sitting among the rubble. She's trending on social media, streaming alongside the latest shooting in America. She's not hiding – she's just in such plain sight that you probably look right past her. In fact, she's so good at being everywhere that she's even in the very last place you might expect to find her: in you.

Of all her manifestations, Hope appears most often to me as this fiercely glowing golden nugget, right at the centre of each human heart. In every person, I witness a brilliant orb of ultra-compact, pure-hope energy; and I know, if triggered, this type of concentration could set off a global love bomb.

One of Andrea Perry's favourite places for contemplation is Preservation Park in Guelph.
PHOTOGRAPHY • DEAN PALMER

Though that description of hope feels as real to me as a good-sized rock wedged in the bottom of my sneaker, pulsing with every step, I get that it may seem no more to some than a fantastic metaphor.

Forgive me. I spent nine years as an intelligence officer in the Canadian Army, but now I'm a poet. What I mean to say about hope in practical terms is that, although the problems of the world may appear utterly gross and insurmountable, the solution is simple and the solution is everywhere.

The solution is me. It's you. It's individual. It's not them. It's us.

I have a red magnet on my fridge that reads: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." I see it every time I go for a glass of water, and I know those words to be true. So important, and so true.

When you look at the world right now, do you see a lack of love? Do you see a lack of patience? A lack of willingness to allow others to express themselves and to be who they are at this stage of their journey, regardless of how that clashes with your own present opinions and experiences? Do you see a lack of time? Of health? Of joy?

If only there was more. More love, more patience, more understanding. More time, more health, more joy. But how can we create more when the world feels so chaotic and out of control? Who has such power to stop the momentum of fear and separation and send it, en masse, in another direction?

Great leaders have tried and have had some success, but unless such leaders have already done the internal work and are leading from a place of truth, and not primarily ego, they are likely to be doing no more than playing out their broken, individual dramas on a larger scale. If we are lucky enough to find a genuine, truth-led champion, chances are (and history shows) they will face enormous opposition from those who aren't ready to accept them, and from the established system, which continues to derive its power from greed, manipulation and division.

Given this, if you're waiting for a saviour to create real change and harmony, the best



Andrea Perry says some military rules translate well into civilian life. One of her favourites is "lead by example."

place to look, I believe, is in the mirror. In a fixed system fed largely by the fear, drama and discord of others, the one true and lasting solution, as I see it, is to focus foremost on the single resource that is entirely within your power to transform: you.

Magnificently, as you re-form yourself into a more harmonious, love-driven entity, you make it possible for others to do the same for themselves in their own lives.

Covert Brilliance

*People are less like apes
more like fireflies
carrying a secret pocket of light
in our bellies*

*One must only know it is there
to ignite
the fields of density*

Hope. A pocket of light in the belly. A golden nugget at the centre of each human heart. An orb of cosmic energy vibrating at a set point within each individual, ready and waiting to expand. The trigger is tiny, but the blast radius is huge. You are the global solution.

Sorry, I digressed to poetry again. It has become a habit for me lately. If you prefer, I'm also into quantum physics. I'm into quantum physics insofar as it explains to me how the actions of one can and do impact the whole. My belief that each of

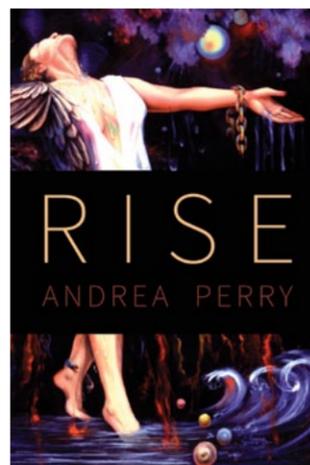
you is an extraordinary potential catalyst for change isn't just philosophical or poetic, it's scientific. Yes, the flame of a single candle can be used to light another thousand – but also, as Einstein related, space and time are energetically intertwined, and all matter is inseparable from an ever-present quantum field. So, the centre of your being is directly connected to the centre of the Universe, which is directly connected to the centre of every other person on the planet.

Who you are and what you do reverberates everywhere. What will you choose to add to the quantum soup? Despair, or hope? Pain, or peace? Hate, or love?

In the Canadian Armed Forces, there are 10 Principles of Leadership that every member must memorize and apply. I carried a laminated list of the principles in my breast pocket for years, protected from dirt and sweat, albeit bent somewhat at the edges.

I still remember most of them today, though if I ever think of them it's most often No. 4 that comes to mind: Lead by example. This is my favourite. You must be an example of that which you wish to see.

It works well in a military context; for instance, during the conflict in Afghanistan, officers who patrolled regularly with their troops into dangerous areas achieved much better cohesion and success than those who ordered others out but were unwilling to go



The poems included in this article are all from Andrea Perry's collection, *Rise*, published by Vocamus Press.

themselves. It's obvious, really. And it's just as applicable to creating a peaceful world as it is to winning a war. If you want to positively impact the whole, get yourself in order.

In case you're curious, principle No. 1 is "Achieve professional competence." That means, know your job. If you're going to ask somebody to do something, you better understand how to do it yourself, first.

If you desire less fighting worldwide, be competent at choosing to love in your own life. If you wish there were more real political dialogue and less insult-loaded defensiveness, be competent at listening to and having patience with those around you. If you want to see those who are oppressed have more freedom and opportunity, be competent at standing in your own power and claiming your own freedom and opportunity. If you'd like a transparent government, be honest with yourself.

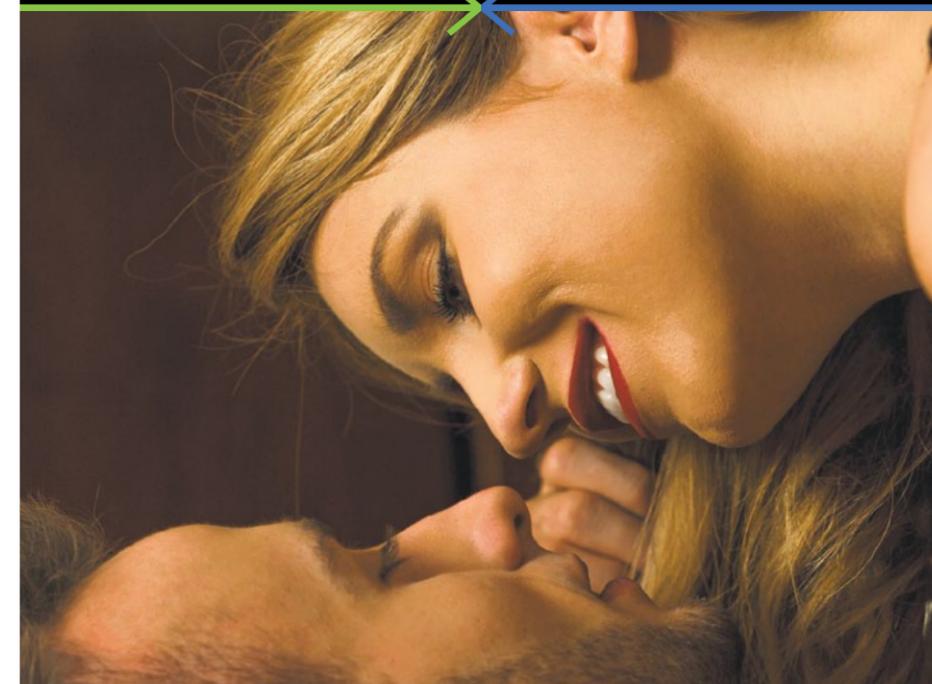
The Other

*Cattle stood uddered in the pasture
bleating into the shrill
darkness.
Something was barrelling down
from the hills,
coming for us all.*

*So I strode through the damp night
to touch its shining forehead.*

Might we, collectively, be better able to address the world's problems if we were less fear-driven? If we weren't so terrified of "Others," of those who appeared to be different from us? If we had space to breathe and to choose right action, rather than a knee-jerk response? Then, I'd say, begin at the places in your own life that scare you. Approach that of which you are afraid, and discover that a light shines there in the shadows, just as it does within you. Allow others to release their fear by stepping into and dissolving your own. You are setting the example. What you put out into the quantum field is picked up by others and reflected back.

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Particular Impact

*Atoms sling off my head
in your direction*

*Vibrations paddle the air
between us*

*My fingertips strafe you
with tidings*

*The space among us disintegrates
under a microscope*

*Though we've never met, we're all standing
in the wretched heat, waiting for the same bus*

This submolecular communion is deft

So I'm careful to hit you, strangers, with love

This poem speaks of one's presence – the actual vibration you send out into the world. To me, presence is paramount, although action is important, too, and both are intricately linked. I would like to see more people following their deepest passion, and I know I've assisted that possibility for others by choosing to leave the security and salary of my military career in order to pursue creative writing.

I would also like to see more healthy romantic relationships, rather than so many poorly matched couples clinging to each other because they aren't sure how to love themselves fully, or don't know how to be alone.

And I know I've assisted that possibility for others by calling off my own wedding three months out – the hall was booked, the dress was bought – because my fiancé and I weren't right for each other, even though we loved each other deeply, and still do. At the time, it was the hardest thing I'd ever done.

Lead by example. In some ways, I have done well at it, and in others I know there is much room to improve. Be vulnerable, I tell myself. I wish others would stop wearing masks that hide who they truly are. So, I urge myself, be vulnerable.

I'm not sure who was the first to say, "We're the ones we've been waiting for." Barack Obama used it in a speech, but who knows where it came from first. (Google doesn't know, I checked.) I used it, unattributed, in my collection of poetry. Maybe

I said it in a past life, and here I am now, repeating my own words. I'm sure this is something humanity has always known, and we've simply been reminding ourselves of it, era after era. Now, though, looking at the state of the world, it is clear to me that we must actually listen to what we've been saying all along. It's time to put into practice what we've always known to be true.

The Rise (an excerpt)

So we waited, begging

the saints

the stars

the books

for divine assistance

un-aware

they were already helping

they were already here

they were us

all along

When we see things we don't like in our world, we don't need to expend all of our energy trying to knock them, or anyone, down (unless we're talking about the Berlin Wall). We needn't worry ceaselessly, feeding fear with fear or drama with drama. We can instead raise ourselves from within. When we do that, all that is discordant around will begin to fall away. It's the difference between squashing the ugly caterpillar and consciously growing the butterfly. Please do express yourself and allow your feelings to be felt, but remember, at the same time, to be accountable for your own presence and actions. Lead by example toward the world you wish to see.

The Light in the Sky at the centre of the Universe, she surges with the power of our own love, our own compassion; and we surge in turn as she breathes into us.

This is an individual movement with worldwide repercussions. It's already happening. It's happening on a singular and an exponential scale, if you know where to look. I, for one, can't turn in any direction without seeing her: Hope – she strides so gracefully out of each heart and into the blooming world. ☺

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