

## Street games unite communities

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### Document Text

The recent road hockey controversy in Ontario has revived many personal memories of meaningful times in an inclusive community. My story starts in the 1950s, but it is a story that many generations of Canadians will have experienced.

Road hockey for my brother and our friends was not just a game -- it was the game, in a neighbourhood where none of us had television, and computer games were only in the wildest science fiction.

The games started in late August and went on daily until the local outdoor rink got ice for three months. Anyone who wanted to could join us on the road. In what was one continuous match, we only stopped for super time or bed-time.

My parents were supportive of this childhood indulgence, and one year gave us lightweight goals that could easily be removed from the road when a car was fast approaching.

One year, my father even convinced city hall to put up a sign at one end of our street that stated, "Drive slowly, children at play."

When I became a father, the road hockey tradition in our family continued.

Whenever our family with four children visited my parents, road hockey was part of the festivities. Three generations of boys and girls, men and women, cousins and friends, found joy in the friendly competition. The passing was crisp, the teamwork sensational and the goaltending brilliant.

On more than one occasion, the youngest family member at age seven was stymied by the oldest member, an 81-year-old grandfather who was playing goal like a youngster.

On many occasions, goodwill and co-operation would shine in this quasi-competitive atmosphere.

Neophytes were shown how to hold the stick and my daughter, who had a disability, scored many a goal when her unselfish line-mates would feed her a pass across the goal line.

Injuries were dealt with very sympathetically and this created a vital role for grandma to bring healing and hugs to the sidelines.

My road hockey memories are obviously filled with nostalgia and warmth. Road hockey memories are also a metaphor for inclusion. Our road hockey games were a tapestry of an inclusive community -- neither gender, age, ethnicity, class, nor race were a barrier to participation. What held us together was friendship and a common interest.

The street was, in fact, "the commons" -- the place to hang out, to be with friends, to include everyone.

We often forget the importance of the "commons." Diverse and inclusive neighbourhoods and communities have many "common" spaces - - parks, shopping spaces, libraries, arenas, benches on main street and many others.

Studies show that community participation and civic engagement declined significantly in the final third of the 20th century. There are many reasons: television, the Internet and computer games, suburban sprawl, time pressures on families, less "common" community space, and generational changes.

If road hockey has been on the decline, so have bridge clubs, neighbourhood parties and inter-generational activities.

Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The Age Of Access*, has argued that many of our relationships have become commercialized. Sometimes genuine community is hard to find.

Amidst this pessimism, the road hockey metaphor speaks to a strong human desire for relationships and human connectedness.

The good news is that more and more groups are building community and encouraging participation in local neighbourhoods and communities.

Nationally and provincially, the Healthy Community Movement has stimulated new thinking about the role of community and participation in health and well being.

It is ironic that vulnerable groups that have traditionally been excluded from community are teaching us the value of citizenship and participation. Locally, the Working Centre and the Welcome Home Initiative are just two examples among many, of places and projects that are nurturing community.

Like these projects, we can all heed the call from the road hockey metaphor and work toward more inclusive settings that welcome all members of our community.

"Three generations of boys and girls, men and women, cousins and friends, found joy in the friendly competition."

John Lord is a consultant and chairman of the Welcome Home Initiative. He was a founder of the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services in Kitchener.

[Illustration]

Caption: Photo: CANADIAN PRESS; Kids play road hockey from one end of Canada to the other. In this case, Mason Burke stops the ball during a game with some friends in a park in Halifax. Road hockey can be described as a metaphor for inclusion: young and old, either gender, ethnicity, class or race can take part.; Photo: John Lord

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