



Halton Peel Humanist Community

Freethinking atheists inspired to Humanism

In May 2017, I attended my first event at HPHC, that year's Annual General Meeting, as it was called then. When I looked around the room at the Franklin House, I saw a bright and interesting group of Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers and even a few who identified as Humanists, like me. When the call came out for volunteers to join the Board of Directors, I couldn't resist the urge to join them as a Member-at-Large. In the ensuing 7 years, I added responsibilities to my portfolio going from being "At-Large" to being very much confined as Treasurer starting in 2019 and as President & Treasurer starting in 2021. Today, after a few years hiatus, I am back at The Franklin House, virtually if not physically. I hope someone is having the chicken quesadillas for me. They were always my favourite!

7 years and many things have changed; the addition of virtual events and meetings, the use of technology to provide new opportunities to interact and the continually changing face of Halton Peel. What has not changed is the desire for non-religious people to find community and exchange ideas in a country that, though continually secularizing, still finds itself fundamentally rooted in religiosity with religions given an inside track. Case in point, the \$5.5B in direct and indirect subsidies given to religious groups by Canadian governments at all levels identified in the Centre for Inquiry's Cost of Religion in Canada report presented to us by one of its authors, Leslie Rosenblood, at our June member meeting.

Another aspect of HPHC hasn't changed – the quality of extraordinary and dedicated individuals who have volunteered to lead HPHC as Directors. This time last year, 9 Directors were acclaimed by the members at the Annual Meeting to later organize themselves to cover the necessary roles at the first Board meeting of the year on June 27, 2023. I agreed to continue on as Treasurer and President, George Cordahi moved back to Events, Cameron Soltys maintained his Secretary role, Kelly Bogart moved into Membership, Kostas Tsembelis stayed at Webmaster and Jerry Bakker, Mohammed Al-Naib, Blaine Adams and Edwin de Leon rounded out the Board as Directors-at-Large. By the way, congrats to Edwin on his new book! In the spring, Blaine resigned but Jamileh Sadeghi (Sadery) came on board to take his place.

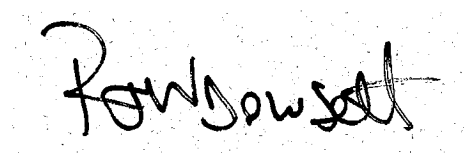
At this time, I must thank my fellow Directors for their service over the past year. Through the vicissitudes of modern life, the Directors managed to meet six times, mostly on Zoom but twice, with great gustatory pleasure, at the home of Kelly Bogart, where tapenade and prosecco are the order of the day. In between meetings we coordinated our efforts on Signal. Last year I called them "a very affable, flexible and diligent group". My judgement on this score has not changed a bit. Our meetings were always productive and professional. I have worked with many Boards and Committees and these people are tops! On behalf of the HPHC members and myself, thank you to this wonderful group for their efforts in 2023/24.

Over the past year, the Directors have sought to maintain the balance of social interaction and intellectual stimulation that we previously identified as vital to our members. Of our 12 events this year, 3 (including the Late Summer Backyard Social at my place and the Winter Solstice Potluck) were purely social, 7 were stimulating speaker presentations or moderated discussions in social settings. The Ancestor's Walk and a Zoom talk from Dr. Christopher Labos provided us with two alternate modes of interaction. Thanks to the input of the members and directors for their suggestions and Cameron's polls for eliciting and gathering useful feedback.

One of our organizational goals is always to increase paid members to replenish our resources, both human and financial. At year end March 31, HPHC had 23 paid members, 4 more than at the end of FY2022/23. A positive trend. In addition to the paid members, we had many, many guests attending HPHC events. Even though most have not chosen to become paid members, our guests have added greatly to the quality and diversity of our events and donated generously when we gave them this option. Though our financial position remains solid the new Board will have to wrestle with the perennial question: what does HPHC need to do to stay relevant and attract the further interest necessary to sustain our Community for the longer term?

At the April Directors' meeting I announced my impending move to where I now sit in Brighton, Ontario in the Bay of Quinte region. With 186 kms of highway between you and me, my in-person appearances at our events will be sadly limited. However, I will continue to contribute in every way I can. While it has been my honour to serve as President of HPHC over the past year, I encourage you all to ask, paraphrasing the words of JFK, not what HPHC can do for you but what you can do for HPHC. With your ideas and direction, we can further our mission of promoting Humanism and building a Community in which we can all thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Dowsett", with a stylized, cursive script.

Richard Dowsett
President HPHC 2023-24

(Delivered at 2024 Annual Meeting, June 25, 2024)