

Solidarity Cycle/FLOG 2021

September 12 is a day of heroes.

For the past five years running – or walking, Zumba-ing, yoga-ing or pedaling - we have dedicated Solidarity Cycle and (For the Love of Grandmothers Fitness Challenge) “FLOG” to the grandmothers of Africa: those women of incredible valour who number in the millions. The women who every day rise up through worry, illness and the grief of inexpressible loss to selflessly take up challenges almost too overwhelming for us to imagine.

We are called to share their lives, lives that speak to us of resilience, determination, of unstinting sacrifice, lives that teach us over and over again the true meaning of nobility.

Many of us have also chosen this occasion to pay tribute to our own beloved mothers and grandmothers. We have directed our ride and other favourite physical fitness activities toward thanking to them for their gift of life, for nurturing us and shaping our characters, and for modeling for us exceptional levels of caring.

This year, marking the fifteenth anniversary of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, let's sound two more names in our roll call of heroes: co-founders Stephen Lewis, and Ilana Landsberg-Lewis. During a long and illustrious career Stephen served for five years as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa. Ilana, a human rights lawyer, served eight years at the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Together they looked at an Africa ravaged by AIDS, and through the turmoil and despair they saw a better way. Their unique vision of supportive community-level partnerships is grounded in the respectful acknowledgment that it is those living on the front lines who must lead the way.

For fifteen years we, as much as our counterparts in Africa, have been the beneficiaries of Stephen and Ilana's extraordinary gift. Today, true to their vision, grandmothers across the continents are joined at the heart. As grandmothers we are continuously reminded that being age-advanced in no way compromises our capacity to contribute in ways that are positively transformative. Those of us who are not grandmothers are inspired no less through our eager participation in this life-affirming enterprise.

In our comparatively small way we are heroes too. With our body-and-spirit devotion to the Grandmothers Campaign, with our willingness to virtually FLOG our way across Canada and back again, and to keep on pedaling through storm, wildfire smoke, heat dome and viral invasion, we become a source of inspiration to those wonderful, generous, loving people who back us with their dollars. We carry them all with us. Their messages of encouragement say it all: “You are amazing!” “Ride

on!" "Thank you for doing this!" And when our children post on Facebook "Look what my seventy-something Mom is up to! Check out her site!" their pride in us lets us know we are doing our part to pass along those vital lessons of caring.

Solidarity Cycle crowns a season of incredible generosity. So before we saddle up let's take some time to savour this once-a-year moment, to send a mental hug to all those we honour, and to let gratitude for the opportunity fuel us through this day of heroes.

