# I Have a Dream —

# for Pouch Cove…

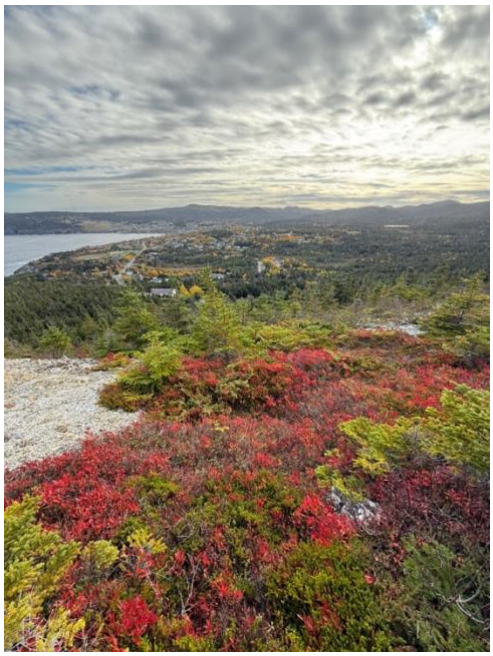
An open letter

to the

Pouch Cove Town and Community

Thomas Mengel,

November 17. 2026



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## Abstract

- **Purpose:** a restorative adaptation of King's "I have a dream," spoken to the whole town rather than to one faction, the day after a third public code-of-conduct ruling and a councillor's resignation.
- **The core image:** council holds a promissory note written in trust. It is coming back unpaid because every side has drawn down the same account, but the town's reserves of trust run deeper than any council term.
- **Why now:** don't wait for the next election. Turn the code of conduct from a weapon back into a shared promise, and open decision-making to residents.
- **To each side:** to those seeking change, transparency can't be won with contempt. To those valuing steadiness, caution is a virtue but a closed door is not. To all, a finding of fault can begin a story, guided by the restorative questions: who was hurt, what do they need, and who should put it right?
- **The dream:** opponents sitting in a circle, findings that open conversations, residents invited in before decisions are made, and a council that works like a kitchen table with room for one more chair.
- **The close:** let trust ring from Cape St. Francis down the Killick Coast, until everyone can say, "We are still neighbours. We are still Pouch Cove. We are home."


…that I would like to share with you today. But first, in the spirit of honesty: what follows borrows its shape and its refrain from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech of 1963.[i] Today I borrow it to try something harder than taking a side: to speak to all of us stakeholders at

once. Because the longer I live in this town, the more I believe that the opposite of division is not victory. It is repair.

So here it goes.

I am glad to be with you today in this shared space— neighbours and friends, councillors of every view, people who have filed complaints and people who have answered them — in what I hope we will one day remember not as the season our town came apart, but as the season we found our way back to one another.

And I know what today is. Yesterday, for the third time this year, a complaint was heard, judged and penalized in public. And yesterday a councillor resigned — someone who gave her time and her name to this town. Whatever each of us thinks of those decisions, there is now an empty chair at our council table, and every one of us is poorer for it.

# The promise we hold in common

When we elect a council, we hand them something like a promissory note. It is written not in dollars but in trust. It promises that decisions about our roads and our water, our taxes and our future, will be made in good faith, in the light of day, and for the good of all of us.

Today that note is coming back unpaid. And I want to say plainly: not because one side defaulted and the other kept faith. It is coming back unpaid because, one complaint at a time, one finding at a time, one sanction at a time, we have all been drawing down the same account — and the account is trust.

But I refuse to believe that the trust of this town is bankrupt. I refuse to believe there is nothing left in the reserves of a community that has buried its dead together, fought fires together, dug each other out of winter storms, and fed each other when the fishery failed. That account is deeper than any council term. So we are here today not to collect from each other, but to make a deposit.

# The urgency of now

We have also come to remind ourselves that this cannot wait. This is not the time to sit back and let the next election sort it out. This is not the time for the slow poison of grievance, nursed in private and spent in public.

Now is the time to step out of the cold fog of accusation into the clear air of honest conversation. Now is the time to return the code of conduct to what it was meant to be — not a weapon we turn on each other, but a promise we make to each other about how we will disagree. Now is the time to open the doors of our decision-making wide enough that every resident can see in, and to open our hearts wide enough that every councillor can be seen as a neighbour first.

## A word to every side

And there is something I must say to all of us who stand on the warm threshold of conviction.

To those of you who long for openness, for public input, for a new way of governing: you are not wrong to want the light let in. But the cause of transparency cannot be won with contempt, and a town will not trust a reform that arrives by treating half its people as nay-sayers. Let your passion for openness be matched by patience, and by an openness to being changed yourselves.

To those of you who value steadiness, process, and the way things have long been done: you are not wrong to ask that rules be kept and that the work of council not be thrown into turmoil. Caution is a virtue. But a closed door is not caution, and a rule used to silence is no longer a rule — it is a wall. Let your care for good order be matched by a willingness to let more voices into the room.

And to all of us: a finding of fault is not the end of a story. It can be the beginning of one. Restorative justice asks three simple questions, and they belong in our council chamber as much as in our public spaces and in any courtroom: *Who has been hurt? What do they need? And whose obligation is it to put things right?* When we ask only the first half of the first question — who did wrong? — we may win a ruling and lose a town, we may be right and wrong the community.

## When will we be satisfied?

There are those who will ask, "Whose side are you on? When will you be satisfied?"

We cannot be satisfied as long as residents learn about decisions only after they are made.

We cannot be satisfied as long as people who have served this town for years feel their good faith treated as suspect.

We cannot be satisfied as long as councillors speak to each other through formal complaints instead of across a table.

We cannot be satisfied as long as town staff are caught in the crossfire, doing their best work in the middle of a storm they did not make.

We cannot be satisfied as long as neighbours avoid each other at the post office, the store, and the slipway because of how they voted or what they posted.

No, we will not be satisfied until fairness flows through this town like the brooks run down to the sea in spring, and goodwill like the tide that comes back, every time, to every cove.

# I have a dream

So I say to you today, my neighbours: even though we face the hurts of today and the uncertainties of tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream rooted in what this town has always been at its best.

I have a dream that one day this town will rise up and live out the true meaning of the word *community*: that we are held in common, and that no one here is disposable.

I have a dream that one day, in our council chamber, the mayor and the councillors who have stood against him — those who brought complaints and those who were found in breach — will be able to sit together, not across a table but in a circle, and each tell the other what this year has cost them.

I have a dream that a finding of fault will one day become the start of a conversation rather than the end of one — that someone will be able to say, "I hurt you," and someone else will be able to answer, "I hurt you too," and both of them will be able to say, "Let us begin again."

I have a dream that every resident of this town will one day be invited in before decisions are made, not informed after — and that those who have carried the work of council for years will find that more voices lighten the load rather than add to it.

I have a dream that our children will one day look at their town council and see not a battlefield but a kitchen table: crowded, noisy, sometimes heated, and always with room for one more chair.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that every high place of power will be brought low enough for every voice to reach it, and every low place of distrust raised up until we can see each other again. The rough edges between us will be worn smooth, the tangled ways made straight, and we will find, all of us together, that we were never as far apart as the year made us feel.

This is our hope. It is not a hope placed in heaven, but in each other. With this hope we can take the hard rock of this bitter year and cut from it a step to stand on. With this hope we can turn the clashing noise of our town into something like a kitchen party — many instruments, many voices, not all in tune, but all in the same room and all playing the same song.

# Let it ring

And if Pouch Cove is to be the town we tell our grandchildren about, this must come true.

So let trust ring from the lighthouse at Cape St. Francis.

Let it ring from the cliffs above Shoe Cove.

Let it ring from the slipway and the harbour, from the fire hall and the council chamber.

Let it ring down the Killick Coast, through Flatrock and Bauline and Torbay, from every kitchen where people continue to believe that neighbours can disagree and still be neighbours.

And when we let it ring — when we let it ring from every road and every cove of this town — we will hasten the day when all of us, mayor and councillors, the ones who complained and the ones who were found in breach, families who have been here for generations and those who came from away, those who want change and those who want to keep what works, will be able to stand together in the same hall and say, not *"We won,"* but:

*"We are still neighbours. We are still Pouch Cove. We are home."*

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[i] *A restorative adaptation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream Speech" from 1963. This is also based on a similar text I created in 2014 during a confrontation between administration and faculty at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in 2014. The healing that happened at UNB makes me hopeful for the future of our town community also..*