

COMMENT

What have I done right? I tried to keep on top of new things. I tried to grow myself.

ROSE KRIEDEMANN, WHO IS CLOSING HER WESTDALE STORE, BAYSHORE HOBBIES, AFTER 33 YEARS IN BUSINESS.

Hep C: This silent killer has a cure

Get tested — we have the power to stop it in its tracks



LAURIE EDMISTON

Close to a quarter of a million Canadians live with a disease that can endanger their lives, yet one in five — about 50,000 across the country — don't even know they have it. What they have is hepatitis C, a virus that can cause serious, and even lethal, damage.

World Hepatitis Day is July 28. While the global significance of the hepatitis epidemic may well be acknowledged, Canadians should give pause to consider how hepatitis affects us here within our own borders.

Hep C is one of those viruses that flies under people's radar. You can have it for years without having any symptoms whatever, until your liver, vital to your health, is in trouble. Which is why it is sometimes called the "silent killer."

A recent study conducted by the Canadian Cancer Society, Statistics Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Provincial/Territorial Cancer Registries showed that deaths from liver disease are on the rise in Canada and one of the main causes is Hep C.

While some people assume that a simple shot or pill can protect you against the virus, there is no such vaccine for Hep C. (Those TV ads that speak of a protection before you travel are for Hep A and B, not for C.)

The good news is that there is treatment for Hep C. Also, new treatments are being developed that are easier to take and promise to be more effective, with even higher numbers of people cured. These treatments will be a game-changer for people with Hep C.

The sad reality, however, is that with few or no symptoms, Canadians with Hep C aren't alerted to their condition and won't get the treatments they need. The only way to know you have the virus is to get tested.

It's never too late to learn about Hep C. It is passed from blood to blood — when blood with Hep C in it gets into your bloodstream. In Canada, some people became infected through blood transfusions before the blood supply began to be screened for the virus in 1992. New Canadians may have contracted the virus in their birth country during a period when transfusions and the use of medical equipment were not tightly controlled.

The most common way to get Hep C is through sharing needles or other drug-use equipment. Although it is unlikely in professional tattoo parlours, you can also get Hep C from tattooing or piercing equipment that is not properly sterilized. Getting Hep C through (some types of) sexual activity where blood is involved is also possible but the evidence shows it seems to be mainly an issue for HIV-positive gay and bisexual men.

The risk of contracting Hep C through sharing personal hygiene equipment such as razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes is low, but transmission is still possible so it's important to be careful. Hep C is not passed through kissing, hugging or eating meals together.

Canadians should think about their history of possible exposure to hepatitis C and take that next step to get tested. This way, they will be able to make the best choices for their health. Together, we have the power to stop hepatitis C in its tracks.

Laurie Edmiston is the executive director of CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange)

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ANDREW DRESCHER WILL RETURN

Love is love, in all its manifestations

It takes many forms, but its ambiguities keep us guessing



THOMAS FROESE

Love has always been one of those loaded words, one that means everything and nothing at the same time because we can love the latest Bond movie or country music or summer rain, but this has nothing to do with summer love at, say, a July wedding, or the love that shows on the faces of a couple who have sailed through thick and thin.

This is what it was the other day, an anniversary of 55 years. The man smiled and looked me in the eye and told me that he knew from the first time he saw her. "She stepped off the train and I heard a voice: 'This is the woman you'll marry.'"

It's really something when this sort of thing happens, but it's quaint too, and we know it, that we're further away from such voices of clarity, closer now to all sorts of ambiguities that keep us guessing.

I'm in a local mall looking for a hat and looking rather closely while talking to the clerk, unable to tell if this youth is male or female. Neither body nor voice really gives it away, and then this person calls over a colleague who also appears to be in some sort of gender flux.

Now it's before, and I'm driving our van with my son, Jonathan, and the radio reports a man has been targeted and shot because he's gay. Jonathan asks and we talk about it, first about paradise lost and then about being gay and men marrying men, as if I know what to say to a seven-year-old, except that it's wrong to go around shooting people for any reason and that nobody is unworthy of — here's that word again — love.

The hard truth of other places, like Africa, where we live most of the year, is that sexual minorities stand much less of a chance, and, if a gay man is shot, it may or may not make the news. On the other hand, in those difficult places, one doesn't ever con-

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sider exploring sexual territory just to make a fashion statement, just because styles and colours have changed and we can now wear whatever hat we please.

It comes to mind because it's summer, and not just summer but the season to wed — Hamilton region sees plenty of weddings June through August — and my own anniversary is here, and, maybe more so, because the very name Jonathan is associated with one of history's better known relationships.

Jonathan was a close friend of David, that ancient Israeli shepherd boy turned king whom we know somewhat through movies and Richard Gere prancing around in a skimpy loincloth, when he, David, feels especially full of freedom and worship and joy.

This drove one of David's wives to hot jealousy, but, presumably, earlier, these traits also made David sympathetic to his dear friend, Jonathan, when David ran for his life from Jonathan's murderous father.

This isn't to suggest that Jonathan and David were gay lovers, though some liberal scholars speculate this because the old texts say that the two young men wept and kissed each other (this is the Middle East) during one of their last goodbyes, and these texts say David loved Jonathan "as his own soul" with "a love passing the love of women."

It is to say, though, that it's sad when two men can't weep together, or show affection, or have emotional and spiritual intimacy, can't even rent an apartment or maybe barely walk down Main Street together without the assumption that they're also in bed. Neither can two women. Not much. Not anymore.

Getting back to Africa, you can. Because people yearn for same-sex, non-sexual intimacy. There it's not uncommon to see two men hand-in-hand for no other reason than they have a friendship of value. The same is true in many other places around the world. Just not here.

In all this we're losing something, something of, ironically, our freedom, that ability to simply be ourselves. And in this, there's something to learn from the other side of the ocean.

It's what I wish for my son, my dear Jonathan.

Author and journalist Thomas Froese is a Hamiltonian in East Africa most of the year. Follow his blog on fatherhood at www.dailydad.net and on developing world issues at www.thomasfroese.com

The looming telco threat

Tory policies will let foreign multinationals move in ... and stay in



DAVE COLES

Should a future Canadian government have the power to regulate foreign ownership of this country's telecommunications sector? Stephen Harper's Tories don't seem to think so.

Through the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) currently under negotiation with the European Union, the Conservatives are set to make it extremely difficult to reverse their recent reforms allowing foreign multinationals to take over Canada's telecommunications industry.

A leaked German CETA negotiating document dated June 18 reveals that Canada has agreed to weaken its telecom reservations under the accord from an Annex II to Annex I category.

An Annex II reservation allows future policy changes and protectionist measures in a sector, while an Annex I reservation only allows Canada to maintain current limits on foreign ownership or to further liberalize the sector.

In practical terms, this change means that if a Liberal or NDP government wins office in 2015, they would have a hard time reversing the Conservatives' reform to the Telecommunications Act buried in last year's 450-page omnibus budget.

That move allowed foreign-controlled corporations to buy 100 per cent of telco companies holding up to 10 per cent of the Canadian market. The foreign company is then allowed, in the words of the leaked German CETA document, "unlimited expansion from 10 per cent market share."

If the Conservatives stay the path on CETA, a future government that tries to reverse telco policies could face a challenge from a European investor.

During the last formal exchange of CETA offers in October, Ottawa proposed the much stronger Annex II reservation for telco. But as part of a recent "top-up market access package," Canada gave in to EU pressure to downgrade this reservation.

This is "the first time in any trade agreement," notes the German memo, that Canada has included

Foreign ownership of the telco sector is bad for Canadian workers, security and culture.

telecommunications in such a way. In NAFTA and all previous trade and investment treaties, Ottawa reserved the right to "adopt or maintain any measure" with regard to restricting foreign ownership in telco.

They did so with good reason. Foreign ownership of this country's telco sector is bad for Canadian workers, security and culture.

The spectrum (airwaves) telco providers use is a limited and valuable public asset. It's particularly damaging to the Canadian economy when foreign companies transfer telco jobs, as well as research and development functions, outside of Canada.

Beyond jobs, the Telecommunications Act currently makes companies responsible for strengthening and safeguarding Canadian culture. But the separation between Internet, phone, music and the broadcasting industry has largely disappeared, so allowing foreign ownership in telecommunications also paves the way to foreign ownership in broadcasting. And this will almost certainly undermine current Canadian cultural content rules.

Finally, there are privacy and national security issues with foreign ownership in the telco sector. Many countries monitor individuals' communications and having foreign companies in charge makes Canadians' data more vulnerable to the whims of other governments.

After the Conservatives announced they were looking to open the sector up to foreign telecom providers, Public Safety Canada warned Industry Canada that the plan poses a "considerable risk" to national security. According to a Feb. 25, 2011, letter marked "secret" that Daniel Lavoie, a senior official with Public Safety, sent to Industry Canada, "The security and intelligence community is of the view that lessening or removing restrictions from the Telecommunications Act, without implementing mitigation measures, would pose a considerable risk to public safety and national security."

Locking telco ownership rules into CETA creates concerns for jobs as well as Canadian culture and security.

But even more fundamentally, there is the question of the sovereignty of the people. Canadians must be able to elect officials who can reverse the current government's telco policies. Locking us in to a current government's policies goes against the very core of democracy.

Dave Coles is the president of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada



BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

Bell needs to solve sinkhole problem

The King Street sinkhole has been causing traffic problems for more than a month now, thanks to a Bell conduit. It comes as no surprise that a company renowned for its reprehensible customer service practices has failed to rectify the problem in a timely manner. Even those of us, like myself, who long ago left 'Ma Bell' for greener pastures, continue to be adversely affected by her grasp. The City of Hamilton needs to assign an off-duty police officer to direct traffic around the sinkhole from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. everyday, and send the bill to Bell on a weekly basis. Perhaps then Hamiltonians will finally see some resolution to a problem that should have been resolved weeks ago.

RON COLLIER, HAMILTON

Our Detroit may be sooner than later

The city of Detroit has filed for bankruptcy based on per capita debt of more than \$25,000. The province of Ontario will reach that level of per capita debt before the end of 2017 based on current debt, interest rates and annual deficits. Since interest rates are expected to rise and our current provincial government gives no indication of a plan to reduce spending, we can realistically expect to reach this critical debt level before 2017. We should watch what happens in Detroit with interest. It may provide a look into our future.

RON AGNEW, HAMILTON

What'll it be — glass or concrete block?

Hamilton is such an enigma as a city. They are demanding that business have 80 per cent glass in their storefronts downtown yet allow the redevelopment of two malls, Upper James and Centre Mall, where all we see from the street is the solid backs of buildings save for a couple of banks. How does that view enhance the streetscape, especially Barton Street? Oh how I love Hamilton.

MARK MILLIGAN, HAMILTON