

Today we mourn the loss of our people. Today, we begin to bring them home.

## MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER NAJIB RAZAK.

The bodies and ashes of 20 victims from the Malaysia Airlines plane shot down over eastern Ukraine in July were returned home Friday. Forty-three Malaysians were among the 298 people who died when the plane was struck by an anti-aircraft missile.

## We're told to love our neighbours

Who speaks for people like Kenny who battle alone with their very dark fears?



THOMAS FROESE

He needs a home with others. Assisted living. There are options in Hamilton. He needs one before he's destroyed by his uncertainty and fear, his black-as-midnight darkness.

He's not a star, not a celebrity, not, say, Robin Williams, whose suicide just shook us so deeply. He's simply your neighbour. This is his story.

(No, it's more. It's the story of any Hamiltonian fallen through the cracks into depression and despondency, that abyss of disrepair while the world spins indifferently.)

It's a warm and sunny day when he asks you, "Could God ever forgive someone who kills himself? Mom always said you'd go to hell." This, driving home after meeting with his doctor and social worker. He's that fragile.

His mother just died. Collapsed in their little Ancaster condo of 18 years. Heart attack. On that day your neighbour, who's developmentally challenged, called 911. Couldn't talk straight, so ran door-to-door, "God, my mother's dying!" Lights. Sirens. Emergency vehicles.

The old woman had also cared for her husband, a stroke survivor. Days after her death, he went to a nursing home. The condo's now to be sold. Where will your neighbour go? Nobody knows.

It's why this middle-aged man, "Kenny" (not his real name), fell back into drink. Like the old days. Benders. Detox. AA. Those days. It's why he cut his head open on a dresser, why a crisis counsellor, with police, stayed over an hour to settle him down, why he's hyper-anxious in days and can't sleep nights.

He's sociable and kind. Can give deceptively fine appearances. Loves old rock music. Can talk hours on that. But he's more. Was labelled "special needs" during his school life. Can't hold a job. Lacks life skills. Now that dark loneliness. "I can't take it," he confides in you. To another neighbour, "I might as well do myself in." Another day, talks of harming his welfare agent.

Kenny asks you for a Bible. You also give a book on heaven. It helps, he says. But it's God with skin on that he really needs. Safety from, if nothing else, himself.

He's never collected disability. His mother always filled that gap. Now disability is critical to find assisted living.

Meetings are at McMaster's family health centre on Main Street. Kenny's asked you to come. His social worker and his doctor, a young resident, are both there. It's the four of you, Kenny's brother, a fifth, so very busy, on speakerphone. He's previously told you "It's a horse and pony show."

"What's the game plan when disability's denied?" This, from the young family doctor. "There's no money in the system," he later declares. The social worker suggests a cheap apartment alone in Hamilton's east end. "I don't think it's a good area for you," he tells Kenny. But it's expedient.

You find it breathtaking, this strange disconnect, this willing blindness. You'll soon be back in your other home in Africa. Finally you say, "You know, one day an ambulance will show up at Kenny's front door and people will shake their heads and say, 'How on earth was this allowed to happen?'"

This, apparently, is it, how this community's vulnerable and neediest souls slip through the gaps, how they're shafted, really, so professionally and softly. You poke and prod. You suggest an expert psychologist's assessment. "We can arrange that," you're told.

You drive your neighbour home. This is when he asks if God could ever forgive suicide.

Two weeks later, no expert psychologist. Not needed, you're told. Instead, the young resident with those breathtaking remarks assesses Kenny himself. Fills in the disability application. Prescribes new anti-anxieties. "At first, they'll likely make you want to harm yourself more," he explains. "But longer-term, they should help."

In the meantime, he says, disability will take months to process. If denied, then, at best, appeal. Who will appeal? And time. It's what your neighbour doesn't have.

It's on his front porch, where he drinks, where you say, "Hang on." Because we're told to love our neighbours, not leave them to their own dangerous devices or a wanting system.

Someone now needs to advocate for this man, my neighbour that is your neighbour. He needs a new home with others. He's waiting. With his dark fears.

Contact Thomas Froese at [thomasfroese@thomasfroese.com](mailto:thomasfroese@thomasfroese.com). Read him at [www.thomasfroese.com](http://www.thomasfroese.com) and [www.dailydad.net](http://www.dailydad.net)

## Tom Hanks' app takes me back

To the days before 'screen time' was the same as 'play time'



DEIRDRE PIKE

After almost a month offline, I'm back at it, albeit it with some modifications to my routine responses. I put my iPhone down when I come home from work and, unless it's for fun and frivolity, I leave it alone until the next day. Even the use for fun and frivolity is limited as I try to turn more to my cookbooks than to one of the many online recipe sites, and I take my news in through the paper versions.

However, I'm glad I was back online in time to learn of an exciting development last week in the land of apps. Tom Hanks has come up with a very cool gift for iPad users in the form of the Hanx Writer, simulating the experience of typewriting on an old-fashioned typewriter. The Oscar-winning actor has a love of the clack-clack sound and feel of the good old days. The app allows you a choice of three versions, each complete with a bell that chimes when you reach the end of the line. It's become one of the most popular apps since its launch Aug. 14.

I'm a fan of the typewriter. I still have one, and the neighbour kids love playing on it. They have no idea that in 1981, I trotted off to UWO in London, Ont., with a typewriter under my arm so I could complete the myriad of writing assignments I would receive. When I carried on to broadcast journalism at Fanshawe, my love of typewriters was cemented in a culture built on the clackety-clack and bell ringing of the newsroom.

School is almost back in session and I was thinking about what kids must have to carry with them to their destinations, particularly after I saw some wee neighbour kids with backpacks larger than their backs. I hope their parents will follow ParticipACTION guidelines calling for the contents of the bags to be no more than 10 to 15 per cent of the weight of the one doing the carrying.

The cool thing about this latest ParticipACTION infographic of "backpack must-haves," is that it encourages active and spontaneous play. A rubber ball, skipping rope and chalk is included in the list to try and undo some of the time kids spend staring at a screen of some sort. There's a pedometer to encourage walking and sunscreen, so they're not de-



PARTICIPACTION

terred by the great ball of fire when it shines, is also identified.

I think it's a brilliant idea to continue trying to lessen the amount of screen time in which our kids are engaged. Studies continue to come out linking an increase in anxiety and depression among young people who play video games.

One study in Australia found that young gamers who played for more than 33 hours a week faced a 15 per cent higher chance of having anxiety and 25 per cent more depression than those who play for 21 hours or less.

Although the numbers may vary slightly from study to study, the results are the same — and it's something I've been saying for years. If you look at a kid who sits in front of a computer screen chasing and killing things in order to get the highest score, you're going to find there is an impact and it's not all positive, as in increased hand-eye coordination. There are better ways to improve that, in my humble opinion.

So while kids are returning to school with brand new equipment to help them achieve their goals, I hope parents will provide them with the right tools. Not only is it important to lessen their physical load, it's essential to lessen their emotional load. I know parenting is complicated and there are many reasons that our young folks are hanging out in front of screens, but as the evidence becomes clearer about the impact of this kind of activity, both physically and emotionally, I'd say it's time to bring on a little restraint and more restrictions.

Deirdre Pike is a freelance columnist for the Hamilton Spectator who was a big fan of Donkey Kong and Ms. Pac-Man back in the day and understands the desire to play. She can be reached at [dpikethespec@gmail.com](mailto:dpikethespec@gmail.com) or @deirdrepik.

## My roots are deep in Wards 3 and 4

Maintaining a Christ-centred approach to education is paramount



ANTHONY PERRI

"The best investment we can make for tomorrow is to properly educate our children and grandchildren today." And that is why, after two past terms on the HWCDSB serving on and also chairing the special ed, finance and property committees, I am once again offering my experience and commitment to the residents of Wards 3 and 4.

My history in Wards 3 and 4 is deep and long. I attended St. Brigid, St. Anne and St. Patrick elementary schools as well as Cathedral High School. My own child attended St. John school.

I recall fondly playing at Woodland Park, being mentored by the wonderful Soupies, playing baseball at Mahoney Park and learning how to box at the attached community centre. Cheering for the Red Wings at the venerable old Forum was always a highlight of my youth. Being able to attend CYO dances at the Knights of Columbus on Queenston Road, near the original Bishop Ryan High School, was a reward for good behaviour. Even working at the KFC on Main and Sherman taught me lifelong lessons, especially the one about waiting for the chicken to cool before biting into it. I still have the blisters to prove it.

My community involvement is also extensive. As a teacher for 25 years, now retired, and as someone involved in helping out and contributing to local charitable groups (Member of Children's Charity of Hope, Hamilton Conservation Authority, school football coach, member of the Knights of Columbus, McMaster U Services Commissioner), as someone who has been a trustee, I am ready, willing

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and able to serve as a full-time trustee.

As interesting as the history is, the future, of course, is much more important to the work of a trustee. As we steer our Catholic system in its mission of service to our students and their families, a number of important principles will guide my involvement. They are to ensure a Christ-centred approach to education is maintained; to value each child as an individual deserving the opportunity to achieve his or her maximum potential; to ensure that our inner-city schools are renewed and provided with the latest technology needed for contemporary learning; to ensure that every member of the educational team, our principals, teachers, educational assistants and parents, have the needed resources to perform their duties and succeed in their quest for student enhancement.

On Oct. 27, I hope the Catholic voters in Wards 3 and 4 will allow me to again represent their wishes on the board and achieve success for students in all our schools. The school system belongs to us, the taxpayers. Please feel free to contact me with any concerns, questions, observations or suggestions.

Anthony Perri is a Wards 3 and 4 candidate the Hamilton-Wentworth District Catholic School Board. [Anthonyperri04@gmail.com](mailto:Anthonyperri04@gmail.com) or [www.anthonyperry.org](http://www.anthonyperry.org)

Note to all registered municipal election candidates: The Spectator's editorial board invites all registered candidates in this fall's election to submit one piece of commentary, which we will publish on the Comment page and online. There are some conditions attached to this offer. Submissions must be no more than 750 words in length and will be subject to editing for length, clarity and taste. Submissions that are personal attacks on incumbent politicians or anyone else will not be published. This offer is intended to give candidates the opportunity to express why they're seeking office and what they will do if elected.

Submissions must be accompanied by a photo of the author, in the form of a high-resolution jpeg image attached to the same email as the submission. The Spectator reserves the right to reject submissions if deemed inappropriate. Publication timing will depend on the volume of submissions and is the decision of The Spectator's editorial board. Please send submissions to [letters@thespec.com](mailto:letters@thespec.com).



## BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to [letters@thespec.com](mailto:letters@thespec.com)

### Homes and families, not big business

Andrew Dreschel's Aug. 15 column was interesting, but not necessarily representative of our experience. That said, there are a few items we definitely do not agree with.

First, Tom Jackson does communicate with the residents of this ward, and if we require assistance or have a question/problem, we have always found Jackson quick to respond.

He may be a "conservative and cautious politician," but we'd rather have that than a Rob Ford style blundering along, speaking without first thinking. Candidate Dan Rodrigues may see business development as the big ward issue, but we wholeheartedly agree with Jackson that "it's about roads, sidewalks, sewer upgrades, surplus school board sites, traffic safety and seniors' issues."

This ward is more about homes and families, not big business development. Change is not necessarily the way to go.

JACQUIE REID, HAMILTON

### Don't forget the right to housing

Regarding Tom Cooper's op-ed of Aug. 18; in his listing of the progress Scotland has made, one main achievement was not included — the right to housing. Our governments at both levels are fighting against that right at the United Nations even after we signed the UN charter with that guarantee in it. It seems to me that the "old country" has some lessons for us, still.

CONNIE BELLAMY, HAMILTON

### Shame on you, Councillor Powers

While the headlines show emergency personnel providing world-class services at the most violent, inhumane and dangerous scenes that our challenged city has to offer, Councillor Russ Powers criticizes. From his ivory tower, Powers seems to show contempt for the value of first responders, and as president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, forges ever onward with his onslaught on their compensation. Shame on you, councillor.

SCOTT CULVER, HAMILTON