

Comment

Anarchism is beautiful, even when it’s ugly

Breaking windows on Locke was just as much about love as about protest

TRISH MILLS

Anarchism is beautiful.

The most similar thing I’ve seen recently published in media along those lines came from a pastor. Unfortunately he also condemned the destruction on Locke Street while forgetting to include that Jesus whipped bankers and threw a mini riot of his own back in the day.

But yes; anarchism and the way it plays out in my life is beautiful. It’s not what media says it is; it’s not all black masks, smashing windows and “f” the police. Of course it is some “FTP” because we do hate hierarchical, dominant and abusive systems of control — but also it’s about supporting and building friendship and community. It’s about love — for each other and for what this world could be instead of what it is now, and fighting for that better thing.

Anarchism is beautiful.

I saw it the other night when someone’s dog got spooked and ran away. I saw it in the 20-plus people who immediately took the care and initiative to mobilize for that dog. We stayed out all night looking on foot, in car and by bicycle. Not because of a reward or because we all knew this dog or their person very well. Not even because we had the feeling that we’d succeed. We did it because we believe in care and collective action, having both the hope and a willingness to work and fight for the very best resolutions. We stand with each other in the hard times, trusting we too will be held when needed.

I saw how beautiful anarchism is when we organized legal support or our friend Cedar — arrested after police carrying

assault rifles broke down their front door and threw concussion grenades. I saw how beautiful it was as we spontaneously gathered after that spectacularly unnecessary use of force, unintimidated and ready to reassemble demolished rooms and feed each other, for each other.

I saw it when we picked feminist postcards out of the toilet that had been intentionally put there by police. Again as we filled the body of the court with 50 people to show our friend she’s loved and would be taken care of. And again when we collected 57 letters from academics, community leaders and professionals who couldn’t attend the hearing, encouraging justice of the peace Barbara Waugh to grant our friend bail.

Waugh denied Cedar bail regardless, stating in her decision that all anarchists belong in jail for even being anarchists. She then went on to talk about social media campaigns, dismissing the need for anything beyond them as a way to dismiss over a decade of Cedar’s work in the community.

It’s absurd that neutrality could be expected with her presiding, and ridiculous bail was denied to appease the public’s blood lust over the broken windows of a doughnut shop and some Audis.

Indeed, the response to the Locke Street “riot” has been downright ugly. Shops have socially and monetarily capitalized on the event but continue to paint themselves as victims while retaining the power and behaviour of a perpetrator. They continue to push agendas that support displacement of the poor instead of being accountable for creating at least some of the anger and frustration behind such

vandalism. They’ve even received the support of racist, misogynistic white nationalists during the “patriot walk” because the more support the better, right?

But if you’re not denouncing white nationalists, you’re supporting them.

If you haven’t gotten there yet, I’ll spell it out: I, in the fine words of The Tower, have no tears for Locke Street. I have no tears because I can understand, empathize and even support property destruction and violence used to escape or fight oppression and death.

What I don’t endorse is violence when it’s used from a position of power as the police, courts and jails use it — which unfortunately happens to be the type most people celebrate, including our fine city councillors.

Breaking windows on Locke was just as much an act of defence as it was an attack. Just as much a symbol of love for people as an act against capitalism and gentrification. Anarchism is beautiful in its kindness and gentleness and care — and in its visceral hurt and rage and intensity. I say these things to balance the narratives being presented by police and media — not to feed or form a divide between smashing and building or good anarchism vs. bad anarchism. I think that’s a false dichotomy we’re often presented with as a means of undercutting each other. We need the tearing down of harmful institutions just as much as we need the building up of ourselves and community.

Anarchism is beautiful even when it’s ugly because we’re not fighting for ourselves; we’re fighting for each other.

Trish Mills is a Hamilton resident

Don’t judge the journalist by his or her work



Opinion

LAURA FURSTER

Good journalism involves more than the ability to write an engaging and relevant story. As proponents of public conversation, members of the media should also prioritize peer inclusivity, regardless of differences in perspective.

I’d like to think that most of us are aiming to fight the good fight, to produce quality, thought-provoking material for a wide audience. We put our public identities on the line in service of our communities and of the intellectual pursuit of public discourse.

It’s expected that the public will frequently take issue with the work of journalists. Investigative journalism and commentary are strains of writing that are highly scrutinized by readers. This is not only OK — it’s constructive. Without public reaction sparking debate, public discourse would be a cold, dead fish.

Ideas don’t develop in stagnant waters — it’s only through a diverse and colourful ecosystem of perspectives that ideas flourish on a social level.

While those for whom the propelling of diverse opinions is not a part of their professional lives may be uncomfortable with or even downright hostile toward the publication of ideas that oppose their own, professional journalism should be held to a higher standard of inclusivity.

Silence and sabotage between media professionals is poor practice, and does a disservice to the industry. I’m fortunate enough to write for a newspaper that’s governed with journalistic integrity, but I have been contacted by writers and journalists who claim to have been ignored, shut down, and blacklisted by peers and publications that should be acting as their local support system. There’s not always a clear reason in each case, but there is an undercurrent of intolerance beneath what should be a vibrant pool of co-operative writers, editors, and publishers.

I believe them. Why? I, too, have been put on someone’s naughty list for participating in a controversial topic. At least, that seems to have been the reason. I never got an explanation. In the midst of setting up a meeting to discuss the possibility of my contributing to this publication (which I will not name) the other end of the email exchange went quiet. This occurred at the same time that a column of mine sparked some hot debate. I dug for a reply, but received none.

The message conveyed was, “I have a personal issue with your professional existence, so much so that I will not give you the courtesy of clarifying my position.”

Offend my personal sensibilities and you have no journalistic friend in me.

In journalism, authors write in their own voices rather than those of constructed narrators. Yes, the Laura Furster you’re reading right now is real. The articles I write are based on my own observations and contemplations. However, who I am as a person outside of my work, what I think and feel throughout any given day, is far more nuanced than what is portrayed in print.

It’s easier to personalize the work of journalists than that of literary writers, but this is a mistake. Journalists may put their hearts and souls into their careers, but the work itself is ultimately a professional product, not a personal diary.

The methods and attitudes with which society reads and critiques literature may transform through time, but journalism should not be subject to the same vicissitudes. It should never be guided by individual, behind-the-scenes opinions.

Let’s imagine the media itself as a living creature. Evolution depends on genetic variation — without it, a species cannot adapt. Likewise, without a variety of ideas, public discourse ceases to breathe and thrive.

Another thing about evolution is that it’s not goal-oriented, and the media shouldn’t be, either.

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THOMAS FROESE

A coffin maker on a roadside in Kampala, Uganda, a part of the world where “hard times can be as common as sunshine,” writes columnist Thomas Froese.

What if pain and suffering are also nourishment?

Our most painful memories make up the richest parts of who we are



Opinion

THOMAS FROESE

A bus hits a semi on a highway. A van drives along a busy walkway. Death arrives as casually as one day following another. And all the pain with it. Humboldt. Toronto. And the next one?

Healing will come. But much of it will come later. First it’s been time to cry with those who cry. To be reminded that suffering, for all our fear of it, is our human birthright, our gift — a difficult and bewildering gift — to steward. It’s our covering. Our mantle.

I never imagined that the boy, my son, would run out the door on a recent spring day wearing his hockey jersey for this reason, to remember young, dead hockey players. My boy with thousands of schoolboys and schoolgirls wearing jerseys, this maybe the best way in Canada to cry with those who cry.

The jersey he wore — funny enough, with the same team name and number as what I wore at his age — was from my boy’s first team from his first-ever hockey season in Canada. Then Toronto.

On another day between the grief from Humboldt and Toronto, I wore my own jersey, a Team Canada jersey, when speaking to a group of doctors on the theme

“Physicians (and all the rest of us) as Wounded Healers.” Not that I’m some expert on any of this. I’m not. Not any more than you are. That’s what I said that evening.

But I did break my arm once. I wasn’t much older than my boy. And while I’m no doctor, I can tell you this: my arm is stronger at the exact point where it broke than it is anywhere else. Why is this?

Nobody welcomes suffering. We run from it. All the doctors and all the journalists and all the readers. All the energy we put into running. All the pills. Suffering? No, I’m fine, thanks. Contain it. Suffering, you’re just a distraction. I have places to go.

But what if suffering’s rightful place is in some core part of our being? What if pain nourishes us like nothing else can? I’ve seen this, too, in places like Africa, where hard times can be as common as sunshine.

Go on the morning school run in Uganda and pass the coffin makers on the roadside. Look, there, tiny coffins for the smallest children. Or, another day, there, look, there’s a body beside a crumpled bicycle. Now pray, like I did, that your children, half-asleep in back, won’t see.

We want to protect especially the children. How could anyone with even half an ounce of love want otherwise? Then the news arrives. And you realize that not only can you not protect your children from pain in this world, you’re not doing them any favours by trying.

No, it seems to me that the best anyone

can do is gather their symbols — a jersey, a hockey stick, two hockey sticks crossed — like you gather stones or seashells. You gather and keep them as markers from places you’ve travelled: this one to remember this dark event, this one to remember the time when you were comforted also. Yes, you were comforted, somehow, even in the worst of it.

“Pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” This is how it was once put by C.S. Lewis, whose own loss — his wife, Joy, died of cancer — is told in the story “Shadowlands.” The shadows, it seems, are what give our lives both grief and meaning.

One national hockey commentator said after Humboldt, “We can’t think about the “why” of it. This is where we get stuck.” Maybe. Or maybe we need to think of the “why” with a different spirit. This, realizing that life is to be lived forward but understood backward.

And it’s often in the looking back when we realize that our most painful memories make up the richest parts of who we are. As people. As communities. As nations. In this, suffering makes us more humble. More dependant. More gracious. More human. And more humane.

Suffering can also make you more bitter, more victimized and more lost. In a world of choice, we know enough of those stories too. But this is not our story. Look around and you’ll see why.

Thomas Froese writes about news, travel and life. Find him at www.thomasfroese.com