

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME: 750-word maximum, full name required. Send to hellott@thespec.com

I am so thankful to be a Hamiltonian

We care, we get involved, we talk back, we ask tough questions and we go digging for information

NOELLE ALLEN

I came to Hamilton over 15 years ago, when saying you were moving to Hamilton still caused people to raise their eyebrows. My husband I had wandered around a lot, lived in Calgary, Guelph, Toronto and in the States for a short time, but by the time we came to Hamilton we had a one-year-old and pretty soon, a second child. We were looking for a place to put down roots. We were drawn to the escarpment, which was the closest thing to a mountain we'd seen in a while. We liked the size of the city, its depth of history and the fact that it felt like a city, not a suburb. But most of all, we loved the people.

Hamilton is the most community-minded place I've ever lived. People here see a need and step in to fill it. They organize at the drop of a hat, petitions for change are always circulating and I can guarantee there's a food drive, or a call to support a refugee family, or some other call to action going on in some part of the city any time of year. We're also a hard people to govern. We talk back, we ask difficult questions and we go digging for information. And I am so thankful we do all these things.

People might think this prickliness is a new phenomenon, caused by an influx of Torontonians and others who are stirring things up, but questioning authority is a Hamilton trait. I was lucky enough to know and work with Vince Agro, a longtime city councillor and deputy mayor for the city who was born and raised in Hamilton. People may think his first book was his award-winning novel, "The Good Doctor," which tells the experience of the Italian community in Hamilton in the lead up to the Second World War, but that was his second

book. His first one was "You Can Fight City Hall" where he shared all he knew about fighting the system in our city. It came out in 1975. He sold a lot of copies of that book.

And of course, we have the unions, who've been advocating for change for the longest time here, starting with the Nine Hours Movement in 1872. Filled with everyday people who came together under great adversity to fight for safe working conditions and fair pay, the unions have shaped our city deeply and continue to do so.

But regardless of where Hamilton's skill at organizing comes from, I am constantly amazed by how many grassroots groups are running in this city and by just how much they get done. Whether you look at the arts, the environment or working with our most vulnerable there are Hamiltonians coming together to do important work. Here are just a few of the organizations I know of:

The Lit Live Reading Series has been running as a volunteer collective for 27 years now, celebrating local and visiting writers and giving them a place to be heard though thick and thin. For the last while they've been online, but they still keep going litlive.blogspot.com

The Something Else Festival is something else! It's been bringing an amazing variety of music to Hamiltonians all summer in Bayfront park. While they're finishing off the season with a collaboration with Supercrawl shortly, they'll be back next year: somethingelsefestival.com

Trees for Hamilton is simply brilliant at getting trees planted in our city. That's all they do and they do it well. I'm particularly fond of their efforts to plant trees around nursing homes, schools and hos-

pitals: treesforhamilton.ca

Of course, I have to mention Stop Sprawl HamOnt, a true citizens group who has done so much to raise awareness of the risk to the farmland around us, and to our city, from unchecked sprawl. No Urban Boundary Expansion: sbsba.ca

Keeping Six is an incredible organization facing the opioid epidemic in Hamilton head on. They put Naloxone directly in the hands of residents so that anyone can save a life and they work to support those experiencing addiction, along with their families, with respect and understanding: keepingsix.org

We've supported the Welcome Inn as a family for more than 10 years now, donating to their food bank regularly and running food drives for them a couple of times a year. The food bank is only one part of what the Welcome Inn does, and they do it really well. They are constantly scrambling to fill what seems like an ever-growing need in Hamilton's North End: welcomeinn.ca

These are just a few of the many dedicated groups on the ground in our communities working to make change, to celebrate who we are, to keep people safe, healthy and well fed. As Thanksgivings approaches, I think it's good to be thankful for organizations like these and to support them.

But don't stop here. Look around your neighbourhood. I guarantee there is something going on that you can take part in. Because the heart of this city is truly in the people who call it home and who work tirelessly to make it a better place.

Noelle Allen is the publisher of Wolsak and Wynn, a small press located on James Street North, and she lives in the lower city.

Don't mess with Grandparents' Day and other important days



Deirdre Pike
OPINION

I have given pause a few times during the pandemic to offer gratitude for my dad and my grandma, whose lives ended long before they had to endure this experience, so much of it marked by isolation, division, and death.

More recently, I found myself thinking again, "it's a good thing my grandma isn't still alive."

This time, however, it was over the Pope, not the pandemic.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis kicked off the first ever World Day of Grandparents and the Elderly, a holy and wholesome idea to be sure. However, instead of using the decades-established Grandparents' Day, ordinarily celebrated the first Sunday after Labour Day, he chose the fourth Sunday of July, a day the Catholic Church reserves for the legendary grandparents of Jesus, named Anna and Joachim.

Now I don't normally go for "Hallmark Holidays" days often established south of the border and clearly connected to supporting capitalistic pleasures like purchases of greeting cards and flowers, but my grandma and I liked the original date.

Marian McQuade, known as a senior citizens' advocate in the U.S. of A., worked hard to raise awareness about seniors and pushed for an official day to help the cause. Jimmy Carter made it so in 1978, and shortly thereafter I began to fête my Grandma Margaret each year on the declared day until her death at 94 in 2010.

I realize now, the day was not just about celebrating but also about making change. Maybe we need two days for such priority people in our families and communities, one to honour our grandparents and wisdom figures, and the other to advocate for the necessary changes to equip them to age in place, in age-friendly and inclusive communities, with adequate income and supports.

While I was busy pondering Grandparents' Day, I almost missed World Teachers' Day, on Oct. 5.

This is not a day for celebrating teachers with another apple-themed mug or sticky note pad, but instead, advocating for worldwide educational standards concerning recruitment, training, continuing education, and working conditions, as first recommended by UNESCO in 1966.

I wonder what UNESCO would think about the working conditions of teachers in Ontario today. The provincial government recently presented a smaller than forecast deficit by storing up legislation to the tune of at least \$5.6 billion which could have been spent on prudent pandemic purchases like smaller classroom sizes and other much-needed safety measures. I think Premier Ford missed the memo on World Teachers' Day.

As a popular tweet from Colin D'Mello, CTV's Queen's Park Bureau Chief stated after last week's provincial throne speech, "Some of the keywords mentioned in the Ontario throne speech today: Hospitals, long term care, vaccines, masking, lockdowns, economic recovery. Not mentioned in the speech: Education."

Another word I see missing is "workers."

With the World Day for Decent Work on Oct. 7, the provincial government chose to mark it early by legislating a whopping \$2 a week raise to Ontario's poorest paid workers.

Answering the question in the iconic depression day tune, "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," Ford answered with a resounding, "Yes, Brother. But That's All I Got," bringing in a 10-cent-an-hour raise for the almost one million minimum wage workers in this province.

Of the "one slim dime," economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, Armine Yalnizyan, said, "That's bad for workers, bad for businesses and bad for the economy."

As we give pause to offer gratitude during the harvest for the multitude of good grains and gifts, we advocate for policies from our governments that are good for grandparents and seniors, good for teachers, good for workers, and ultimately good for a just recovery for all. Deirdre Pike is a freelance columnist for The Hamilton Spectator. She is grateful for the many days she had with her grandma, for the caring and compassionate teachers who helped form her, and for the many years she has had very decent work. You can reach her with your list of gratitude at deirdrepik@gmail.com.



THOMAS FROESE

Hockey enthusiasts play on a frozen Lake Jojo, also known as Sleepy Hollow, in Dundas, last year. "It's good to recognize that there's an indubitable spirit in Canada's national pastime," writes Thomas Froese. "And, at its best, this spirit helps us see the broader tapestry of our lives as much as it marks any winners or losers."

Sometimes hockey is more than just the game

It's the gatherings of sticks and pucks in more obscure rinks that are more striking to me



Thomas Froese
OPINION

I would be a Leafs fan, I suppose, but when I was seven years old someone put a woolly Montreal Canadiens sweater on me, with the rest of my hockey gear, skates and all, before snapping a Polaroid of me standing in the living room. My allegiance was somehow set.

Paul, my best friend, was a Leafs fan. His mother made sandwiches and cookies and gave them to me with love, an act of forgiveness as much as anything. In those years, the Habs couldn't lose, and when they'd march off every spring like Norse gods to capture what we simply called "The Cup," the result was often a foregone conclusion.

Playing in front of Paul's house, I'd be Lafleur and Robinson and, of course, goalie Ken Dryden, along with every other Leaf in Toronto's odious Harold Ballard era. Later, the games continued across the street at Maple Crest, our school, on a rink flooded by a loving teacher.

Later, the game changed more. The NHL grew. I moved away and fell into newspapers. Paul became a police officer. I'd get my stories. He'd get his. In time I'd befriend other Leafs fans. And while over the years I'd sometimes visit his mother, Paul and I reunited only rarely. A wedding. A funeral.

Now a new generation, and our kids

have friends who are, naturally, Leafs fans. Several filled our house with their hopes that evening last spring during the deciding game of that stirring Leafs-Habs series, decades in the waiting. Then you-know-what happened. So I sent Paul a rare text.

"Sorry, man," I said. "Some things haven't changed," he responded. "It's not easy being a Leaf fan." Regardless, whatever the loss, you keep going. Dryden said as much in "The Game," an insightful book about life as much as hockey. Still regarded as one of the best sports books ever, "The Game" sits, again, on my bedside table, a gift from my bride, her loving words inside.

I've always thought it's fitting that Dryden later became Leafs' president, a sort of bridge over troubled Leafs-Habs waters. Just as fitting is this. Long after retirement, Dryden expressed permission to take the Stanley Cup briefly to his old Etobicoke home where he grew up playing hockey in his backyard. And permission to bring it to nowhere, Manitoba.

Nowhere, of course, is somewhere, a tiny dot of a place called Domain, just south of Winnipeg. Domain's population? Seventy depending on who might have died or visited for dinner on any given day. The place seems so inconsequential in the hockey world that instead of a Zamboni, locals have used a crudely made manual push "Manboni" for their rink.

Dryden wanted to bring Lord Stanley's fabled trophy to such a place, represen-

tative of all the forgotten places too small to produce an NHL player. Dryden's father was also born in Domain. Funny enough, in one of those serendipitous happenings, organizers unwittingly gave Dryden's cup visit there on the day his father would have turned 100.

That particular visit unfolded 10 years ago this coming week. Which is to say that it's good to recognize that there's an indubitable spirit in Canada's national pastime. And, at its best, this spirit helps us see the broader tapestry of our lives as much as it marks any winners or losers.

In five decades since I put on that woolly Canadiens jersey, I'd never seen a Leafs-Habs game. Not live. Not until being offered free box-seat tickets, in Toronto, two years ago this past week. I brought my boy and youngest daughter, who, sure, are also Canadians fans. It was something: a 6-5 overtime shootout. The kids, their faces, it was really something. I have a telling photo.

But it's the gatherings of sticks and pucks in more obscure rinks, on other patches of ice, in impromptu games played on frozen lakes or rivers or ponds, that are more striking to me. I'm thankful that my kids, who'd missed many Canadian winters while living in warmer climes overseas, have now experienced some of this also.

It's good to remember, now that another season is upon us.

In Canada hockey is "the game," but sometimes it's more. No matter what jersey you wear.

Find Thomas Froese at thomasfroese.com.

