

LETTERS

Stolte should reconsider

Regarding "Burlington loss" (May 5): My thanks to Marsha Terry for expressing so well what I too felt on hearing that Coun. Shawna Stolte won't seek re-election. It's a profound loss as she has clearly demonstrated that she is interested in the best for her Ward 4 constituents and for all of Burlington. I so hope that she reconsiders.

Anu Stewart, Burlington

Power-hungry bullies

I really feel badly for the woman in Wednesday's Spectator being picked on by the city for a few things in the wrong place on her property. I also have dealt with these people who are power-hungry bullies with a quota to fill and I blame the city for that. I was so peeved that I got my ward councilor involved.

John Wood, Hamilton

Common sense in bylaw

Are you kidding me? What on earth is this city council doing? A small green bin on a front porch? A garbage bag on top of a muskoka chair? Thank goodness this has been rectified because I might never have slept at night worrying about it!

I wish there had been a ferocious chihuahua on the other side of Margie's backyard gate when that bylaw officer opened it. With so many huge problems going on in this city right now, these silly rules are unnecessary. Use common sense.

I'm so glad there is an election coming up so we can vote in people who will make good changes and not pick on hardworking taxpaying citizens.

Nancy Pegg, Hamilton

Follow the property rules

Bylaws are put in place for a reason and officers need to be allowed into yards to make sure infractions are not being hidden there. Those people who keep their properties nice should not have to suffer with those who don't. When the city allows absentee landlords and single-family homes to be used as duplexes, they should expect issues and send bylaw officers to such residences on a weekly or monthly basis, and charge the homeowner if there are any infractions. But as usual with this city, nothing gets done unless there is a complaint.

Bylaws are not an infringement. Your responsibility as a renter or homeowner is to follow the rules and keep your property up to the standards of the neighbourhood.

Diana MacKenzie, Hamilton

Backyard transgressions

I was amused by the piece on the woman who was fined for various minor transgressions in the way she kept her backyard. I have to wonder where these warriors for justice are when I risk life and limb to negotiate the numerous icy sidewalks in February. I suppose it's a lot safer to wander around and peep into a few backyards in April than it is to negotiate said sidewalks targeting real miscreants in February.

I have a few more observations from someone who moved from Edmonton to Hamilton in 2013: ■ In Edmonton, when you step onto the road at a junction, traffic stops. In Hamilton, they dare you to try. My wife and I have even been berated by a driver who wound down his window to inform me that there was a perfectly good traffic light a block away. I'm 71.

■ In Edmonton, garbage collectors place your can and recycling bins in an upright position where you left them and pick up fallen items. In Hamilton, where garbage can tossing appears to be a sport, you have to negotiate around the cans, bins and debris strewn over the sidewalk and road.

I live on a street where the parking restrictions flip from side to side every 15 days, except November to April. Kafka springs to mind. I'm sure I've paid the salary of one of the aforementioned warriors for justice in parking fines.

Derek Elliott, Hamilton

Fire Russians from NHL

Most nations in Europe and the Americas are sanctioning the Russian oligarchs and other high-ranking Russians for their atrocities against Ukrainians. Sports organizations, including but not limited to FIFA, UEFA, the IOC, IIHF, World Curling, World Rugby and International Ski Federation have collectively banned Russian participation.

Unfortunately, it's business as usual in the NHL. Russian players continue enjoying their multimillion-dollar contracts, in spite of some openly supporting Vladimir Putin. Come on NHL, do the right thing and cut all Russians from the league!

If contractual obligations prohibit such a move, at the very least restrict any Russian players from entering the NHL from now on.

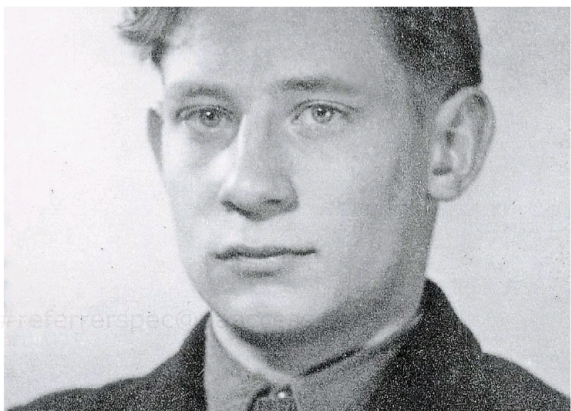
Arthur Meneian, Burlington

Where is health care?

I read platforms of those running. I read The Spec articles and I listen, but where is my topic of health care on the party's priorities? Our hospitals, nurses, doctors, counsellors for mental health are so backlogged.

Peoples' lives are in jeopardy and yet our politicians seemingly avoid the topic of health care. Please wake them up!

Joanne Battersby, Smithville



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Guenther Froese, father of Spectator contributor Thomas Froese. This photo, circa 1955, was taken shortly before he emigrated from Germany for a new life in Canada. His burial today in a Kitchener cemetery fittingly coincides with reflections on surrender and peace for the VE-Day weekend, writes Froese.

My father's final lasting peace



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Peace can be a strange thing.

When I turned 12, my father sat me on the cement ledge at the front of our house to tell me about it. When he was 12, he was taken prisoner by the Russians. Then his escape. And other stories. Hard stories. I needed to know, now that I was a man, so to speak.

My father, who grew up in Nazi Germany, easily shared these things, his scars. Even in recent years, before leaving his presence, you'd often be asked, "So what do you think about Trump?" Or, "What do you think about Putin?" Then you'd listen.

By this day in 1945, May 7, the day Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally, my father was 13. About 200,000 people had just died in the Battle of Berlin. Hitler had put a bullet in his own head.

And my father, like millions across Germany, now despaired for a morsel of food as much as a morsel of peace.

Eventually, after refugee experiences and after training in postwar Germany as a therapeutic massage therapist, Dad Froese found his way to Canada. He became a citizen,

established himself in Niagara and went on to practice massage therapy — not the world's easiest vocation — for more than 50 years. Fifty. Years. He became a recognized therapeutic guru.

With hands that helped heal many, he also restored a run-down, 1870s estate home, which he then ran for more than 20 years: first as a nursing home, then a community home for people who were broken in one way or another, often with no family or home of their own.

This was the home, our home, where my father sat me on that front ledge when I was 12. By then he'd already been a widower for some years, finding whatever help he could to raise his children as a single dad.

This is my father: stubbornly strong and an enormous influence on me.

He could be a bear. If you were an official — maybe at his door for a routine health inspection on the home — you might be asked to leave. My father did things his way and sometimes suffered, even publicly, for this.

One evening, he sat me in his office. I'd left home and found journalism and my life direction. It deeply hurt and angered him for a long time. Family, especially Mennonite family, doesn't leave family. That night he talked while I listened. Until after sunrise.

But even in his most bearish times, I never doubted my father's love. And in an era when fathers weren't known to say much, or show affection, he did so naturally, even when my own children came along. Well into his 80s, he stayed lucid with an intelligence buoyed by a lifelong love of books and learning. With my wife and children, I'd often greet him with "How are you, young man?"

And Germany? He never returned.

It's just a sketch. An incomplete picture. But an important one. Because, at 90, my father has breathed his last. Near the end, at his bedside, loved ones held his hand.

My father's death is my personal loss. It's also another loss, a loss of one of those distinctive postwar immigrants, Canadians who've helped forge both families and communities across this nation. It's something to remember when you see an immigrant. Appreciate who they are. Their stories. Their unique contributions.

One day, war itself will die. Isn't this what the old, wide-eyed prophets say? Swords beaten into plowshares so peace can rule for all time. Somehow. But after a full life, my father is living his lasting peace now.

Today, in a Kitchener cemetery, Dad Froese's loved ones will have a small gathering to say some words and put his body in the ground. This is the day, May 7, Germany's surrender day, part of weekend reflections for VE-Day.

This is the day that marks my father's own final surrender.

It's all rather fitting. And mysterious. This peace.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

The too-high cost of private health care

NANCY OLIVIERI

I want to thank my grandfather for a wake-up call about Doug Ford.

He's been dead nearly 66 years. But this week, he reminded me what a Ford re-election will mean in its legacy of for-profit health care for generations to come.

Many may not have needed that wake-up call; it's hard to miss Ford's ongoing enthusiastic privatization of our health care. A few examples: he failed to protect thousands of vulnerable citizens from suffering and death in for-profit long-term-care homes.

He rewarded the owners of those homes, promising new, lucrative 30-year contracts. He privatized home care. In a pandemic, he privatized administration of vaccines and COVID testing, supplying the bulk of free testing to private schools.

Yet, many of us don't seem too worried, possibly because of the stealth under which Ford operates, including his quiet rush to pass Bill 37 (enabling the awarding of thousands of new long-term-care beds to for-profit chains) and Bill 218 (extending legal protection to those same chains). And Ford's double-speak hasn't helped: announcing

the intention to privatize hospitals, his health minister creatively spoke of "independent health facilities."

But families whose loved ones died in long-term care see through Ford's bafflegab. Others of us may have to go further back to remember.

Those with long memories may recall the summer of 1962. Saskatchewan doctors were striking against the introduction of Medicare. I was a kid; my father, a pediatrician in Hamilton's east end, talked of Tommy Douglas, hoping for Medicare for families under his care, but also remembering the precarity of the pre-Medicare era for his own family. This is where my grandfather comes in.

My grandfather immigrated to Hamilton in 1909. (When asked why he left Italy, aged 15, his answer never varied: "We were starving.") In the mid-1950s, he and my grandmother died in quick succession. I have a window into their world only because our family saved everything, and I mean everything.

Every photograph; every birth announcement; every wedding invitation. Every card of congratulations or sympathy. Over three generations — my grandfather, later my father, later my sister and I —

discarded almost nothing.

Included in our family "archive" is every payment to a doctor, medical service and admission to hospital. First, those for my grandmother's care — one visit: \$7; the next: \$20; the next: \$200 — accumulating steadily to her death. In March 1955, my grandfather himself was admitted to hospital, an admission which cost over \$1,400. In today's dollars: nearly \$15,000.

My grandfather, still working at his store at Imperial Street and Sherman Avenue, was able to pay that bill, and others, totalling tens of thousands. Many of his neighbours could not. What happened to them is not so carefully recorded.

Today in Ontario, no one has to worry about paying for admission to hospital — because a few years after my grandparents died, Tommy Douglas pledged health care "for every man, woman, and child, irrespective of colour, race or financial status." But years later, Douglas warned Medicare was being marked for destruction. We may reasonably fear that, if he is re-elected on June 2, Ford will be empowered to complete that destruction.

My grandfather gave me a precious gift. The records he so painstakingly saved illustrate the toll imposed on ordinary Canadians by a for-profit health-care system. If we wish to avoid returning to those grim times, we must express our concern at the ballot box.

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