

The joy and renewal at being outside



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

A youth at a campfire in Ontario's Muskoka region. Commenting on the need to connect with nature, Thomas Froese writes that summer camps in 2022 mark "the first real return to this quintessential Canadian activity in three years. We can applaud everyone involved, everywhere."

THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

LETTERS

For Margaret Houghton

A local history museum paired with a branch of the Hamilton Public Library is a great idea, and I would like to propose that it be called "The Margaret Houghton Local History Museum and Archives."

The passing of Margaret in 2018 was a sad loss for her family, and the Hamilton community. Archivist to the Hamilton Public Library for 38 years, she was a fount of local lore, a tireless researcher and generous always with her knowledge. A teller of tales, she wrote and edited many books on local history, and there is no doubt that many of those stories would have disappeared, like so many of the historical Hamilton structures now gone, but remembered in the photographs she preserved.

To Mayor Eisenberger, Dermot Nolan, spokesperson for the Hamilton Museum Citizens' Committee, Tony del Monaco, HPL director of facilities and finances: when you are considering a name for this museum please think about commemorating Margaret Houghton!

Jill Downie, Ancaster

Importance of fun

Thank you Greg MacDougall (a waterfront museum) and Anne Bokma (Buffalo's Canalside), for pointing out the importance of fun and entertainment in waterfront development. All I've seen in city plans is housing. No parks. No attractions. No commercial areas. I know how that kind of development has sadly closed

public access to waterfronts in Stoney Creek. It would be a big missed opportunity to not include all residents and tourists from enjoying Hamilton's natural gifts. This city is coming to life. I hope councillors aren't listening only to those who want to keep it quiet.

Stanley Klimowicz, Stoney Creek

ImpRACTICAL LRT

Since COVID-19, I've been walking the streets and trails of Hamilton. What I've come to realize is that the 17 stops servicing the 14-kilometre LRT is impractical walking distance for the elderly, parents with kids, disabled and shoppers with armloads, particularly in inclement weather. Question: Just who is benefiting?

Douglas L. Martin, Hamilton

Health-care mess

Health care has been a mess for many years, and it's the pandemic that finally broke its back. Having worked in health care for 30 years, a big part of the problem is what people expect from it in the way of services, accessibility and personalization to meet their needs. I doubt there is a system anywhere that can deliver that to our satisfaction. The big issues are the colossal waste of resources, especially dollars, and now it's the human factor. In this province its onus lies strictly in Doug Ford's lap. I read in the Spec that he's apparently sitting on billions that were earmarked for the pandemic and now he's screaming for more as are the other provinces. If I were Justin Trudeau I wouldn't give a thin dime until all stockpiles are accounted for. It would be refreshing to see these elected individuals come to the table with their

own suggestions and for once, try to work together.

Bob Panchyson, Burlington

Not for Canadians

The Bank of Canada is not for Canadians. It continues to raise interest rates to curb inflation. The net result is that all items begin to cost more, which fuels inflation and allows the BOC to raise rates again. We will be forever on a cycle of inflation/recession/depression.

The BOC should devise a system whereby the interest rate for the purchase of a primary residence is held consistently low and separate from the rates charged for credit purchases, speculative real estate and investment borrowing. This would allow young families to access the home market. There has to be more "Canadians looking after Canadians" in this country

Bob Heap, Binbrook

Stand up for us

When will municipalities stand up for the residents they are purportedly representing? When will municipalities stand up to oppose the Ontario Land Tribunal (a provincial agency) from deciding what and where developments get built in our city? Our city! We need to make our own decisions on developments, so I implore our representatives to stand up, have some backbone and stand up for our neighbourhoods. We were elected to make decisions, not have it passed on to people who, in some cases, don't live in the community. Gather support from other municipalities and press to get rid of the OLT, who constantly side with developers, before they pave over the entire province.

Aldo Castelli, Windsor

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Why I turned down a meeting with the Pope

DOUG GEORGE-KANENTIO
CONTRIBUTOR

On July 29, a select group of 22 residential school survivors were asked to attend a private meeting with Pope Francis at Quebec City, part of his national apology tour. I was, as a former student at the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ont., selected as one of those presenters, but although honoured by the request, had to turn it down.

I did so because I was given but 60 seconds to speak to the Pope followed by a photo with him. There was no way I could summarize our concerns and why we, as Mohawks, have rejected his apology.

We have done so because the Roman Catholic Church has not been co-operative in releasing the records of the children assigned to the institutions administered to by the Church. Without those documents there is no way we can answer the fundamental questions as to how many children were taken, where they were confined to, what happened to them and where they are now?

No Indigenous entity knows the answers and to truly heal we need our children returned to our homes.

We also refused the apology as it did not acknowledge criminal acts were committed, from food deprivation to murder.

The remains of the lost children will tell us more, but those who were the abusers were employed by the Church; it was not simply wayward individuals, but institutional.

We said no to the apology because it did not offer equitable restitution, nor provide a formula as to how we can work with the Church to realize actual truth and reconciliation based upon the wishes of the survivors. There was no acknowledgment that in every instance the survivors must be consulted and have the authority to oversee any and all programs directed toward this issue.

I could not present, within my allotted minute, our ideas concrete and applicable, about how we may truly heal on our terms.

I could not summarize the broad, tragic and permanent effects the taking of the children has had on my home community of Akwesasne: loss of language, cultural disruption, fractures within families and loss of connection with our ancestral lands.

It was impossible for me to say how I was taken with

According to my phone GPS, two of the three children are gone. I asked their mother about this. "Yes, Number Two and Number Three," she said.

"Oh," I said. "When did they leave?"

"Early summer."

"Yes, of course. To where?"

"Camp."

Only Child Number One, the Mac nursing student who's working in a nearby seniors home, sleeps here now. The younger two look at the stars from wherever. I'm also happy to report that now, from a quiet house, I'm beginning to hear the wind in the trees again.

Such wonder. Ask Calvin and Hobbes. You know? The cartoon strip characters. Calvin: "Look at all the stars! The universe just goes out forever and ever!" Hobbes: "It kind of makes you wonder why man considers himself such a big, screaming deal!"

Then the lakes. And forests. And that wind on your face. It all makes you happier and healthier. A phone app (good grief, a phone app) confirms this, the importance of place.

It's called Mappiness. This is not to be confused with nappiness, the feeling I get when wandering in the quiet house. Mappiness surveys you on how you're feeling throughout your day when in different places. Apparently, we're least happy at work, or home while sick in bed. We're most happy when with people we enjoy, and when we're outside in nature. No surprise.

Yes, nature has much to teach us about our physiology. As Richard Louv, author of "The Last Child in the Woods," points out, serious academic research that's now taking off in this field should have done so decades ago. Humanity's disconnect from the planet only deepens.

Enter summer camps. Gain self-confidence. Bond with others. (Especially after social malnourishment.) And connect, sometimes deeply, with creation. You know, nature. If you've forgotten what it is, consider Oscar Wilde's definition of nature: it's where the birds fly around unlooked.

Speaking of birds, in my own camp experience I learned about the birds and the bees. Yes, it was at summer camp where I first learned from a certain brown-eyed girl about this part of creation. Not through personal experience, of course. I was in grade school. And I was fully stunned by the remarkable truth of it, how our planet gets repopulated. You mean? Really?

But I digress. In relation to global population trends, it was 2008 when, for the first time in world history, more people began living in cities than outside them. Which doesn't help us become less anxious or distracted or narcissistic or plain kooky. In our time, more people live with, literally, less oxygen to the brain. This may explain certain things.

So am I overjoyed? Eternally grateful for my kids' Summer of 22 experience? Sure I am. They've been in leadership training at InterVarsity Pioneer Camp in Muskoka.

It's where their mother, an Order of Canada recipient, once developed her own leadership skills. In fact, Canada has a myriad of overnight camps involving tens of thousands of youth, the first real return to this quintessential Canadian activity in three years. We can applaud everyone involved, everywhere.

And when I asked my two kids what's struck them most about their summer experience so far, what did they, in separate conversations, say? The stars.

It helps us rethink everything. Look at, say, the Finns, often surveyed as among the world's happiest people. Until not long ago, they were known as a nation of forest people.

Finland still has laws allowing you to wander through natural spaces to camp, or pick flowers, or mushrooms, or your nose, or anything, really, without worry. That's good, barfed-out thinking.

Of course, I'm talking to myself about all this as much as anyone. Rather than wander around a house that's now quieter — an activity I'll always enjoy — I still need to get outside. Maybe I'll climb in the woods. Because place does matter. And the smell of trees is better than Eau de Nothing.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL, AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM

the co-operation of the local band council, the Indian agent, social worker and RCMP officer. Within that minute, I would have failed to address the feelings of abandonment and despair, of emotional and spiritual desperation all of us endured at the institute.

I did learn later the Pope called what happened to us as genocide, a word with powerful legal implications. But he did not say the Church committed genocide, nor did he reject the Doctrine of Discovery, which was the basis upon which we were kidnapped and continued to be the rock upon which all "Indian" law is based — from the first encounters to the present.

I did not want to take part in what I perceived as a public relations event in which the Mohawks were perceived as compliant.

We will never be that.

In June of 1968, all of the Mohawk boys at the institute were formally expelled — the first time for a single group in residential school history. I am proud of that, just as I am proud that our people reject any apology, and action, without justice.

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