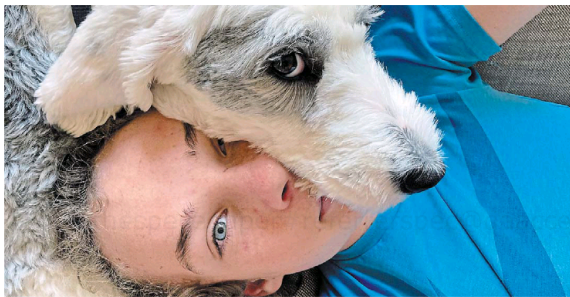


Dogs, in the dog days of summer



JONATHAN FROESE

Jonathan Froese relaxes at home with the family dog, Grace. Commenting on the often mysterious ways of canines, contributor Thomas Froese writes, "God knows why, but dogs always think the best of us."

People and dogs are, simply put, gaga for each other



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

From this corner, the only thing left to say about the dwindling dog days of summer is that the dog is somehow managing.

The kids have been gone for large swaths of time. If I was a dog, or if you were, this would take something out of you. How could it not?

You know the greeting a dog gives when you arrive home? You won't get that hello from a horse. Or a lion. Or a house cat. A cat — and God bless all the cats out there — doesn't really wear its heart on its sleeve. And God knows why, but dogs always think the best of us. "Be the person that your dog thinks you are," is what's written on a plaque on our Grace's doghouse. It's something to chew on.

People and dogs are, simply put, gaga for each other. Sometimes they enjoy just looking at each other. Dogs, if given the choice of extended time with another dog or a human, usually choose the human. It's been a long relationship. Archeologists have found remains of a dog and person buried together as long as 14,000 years ago.

Then the mysterious stories of dogs finding owners. One account — it's verified by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals — involves an Irish terrier, Prince. In 1914, Pte. James Brown left his home in Staffordshire, England, for war and France. His dog somehow journeyed even across the English Channel to find Brown on the front. Later, Prince stayed for the war's duration, often relaying messages for soldiers.

Our dog experiences are more modest. Can we get the dog to sit still for a family photo? Grace, our sociable, 35-pound Sheepadoodle, has done this enough. Living in Uganda, our annual family photo included Zak, a striking, long-haired, black-and-tan German Shepherd. Zak, funny enough, was born on my bride's and my wedding anniversary. Even early photos of my own mother and father, beautiful studio black-and-whites, include their sizeable German Shepherd, Comet. Nobody would ever tell Comet that he's not family.

Some people will try. They'll tell you that dogs, that animals, live with just instinct. That they aren't sentient. That they're incapable of understanding something like family. Or love. That it's more like a contract. You give food and exercise and toys, the dog returns affection. Tell that to my son who, recently returning home, fell onto the couch before he and you-know-who were all arms and paws and fur and faces crammed in mysterious confusion.

Speaking of sitting still for pictures, about 100 dogs are now trained to sit unrestrained inside an MRI scanner. It's to better understand the thinking and brainpower of your own Snoopy or Toto or Lassie. Research shows most dogs can understand like a typical two-year-old child. About 20 per cent are closer to a three-year-old.

Grace, admittedly, is not as smart as Lassie. Border Collies are the Rhodes Scholars of the dog world. Even so, recently, while Grace was off-leash, a boy walked by and asked, "Hey, is that one of those smart dogs?" Sure. She's smart enough to navigate family life. This is the mystery. Dogs see themselves as family.

The MRI studies are led by physician and bioengineer Gregory Berns. He wrote "What It's Like to Be a Dog." You could also consider the ancient book of Job. "Ask the animals and they will teach you," Job says to his finger-wagging friends, while making the point that the breath of every human being, and the life of every living thing, is in the Creator's hands.

It's a good weekend to ponder these things. World Dog Day, Aug. 26, is soon here. Maybe this upcoming week is even a good time to rescue a dog. During the pandemic, dogs were like houses. Gone. Unaffordable. Now with more people returning to work commutes, rescues are available, needing new owners.

Then again, who rescues who?
FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

LETTERS

Police procedure

Regarding "Hamilton police board reviewing use-of-force ..." (Aug. 13): It says a lot, but nothing good, when the Hamilton Police Services Board, following the release of a video showing a violent arrest, requested a review by an unnamed party of the Hamilton Police Service's policies and procedures on the use of force and prisoner handling. The chance that among those procedures is a clause to the effect "When a prisoner has been rendered unconscious, use the opportunity to kick him repeatedly in the head, especially if the prisoner appears to be an Indigenous person" is minuscule. The fact that the officer was charged with assault should be a clear indication to the board that the officer disregarded use-of-force policy.

Watch the video, which can be found at thespec.com, if you can stand it. See how one officer, not the officer charged, repeatedly kneed the back of the neck of the arrested man and see how the officer who was charged moved into a better position to kick the man in the head after he lost consciousness.

Apparently, no one involved in the arrest or their supervisors took issue with it. The HPS acted only when the video was provided to them. The board has taken the meaningless step of asking for a review of procedures. Policing in Hamilton is not going to get better.

Andrew Bell, Stoney Creek

Bill 124 example

Here's a suggestion: To show good faith in Bill 124, all persons within government including all employees, board members,



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committee members, security staff, legislative staff, in fact any and all persons who receive salaries and/or pay from the province of Ontario and especially MPPs, associated staff as well as all civil servants, show good faith by not accepting any pay increase above one per cent any time soon.

MPs would exemplify the qualities of good leadership by passing similar legislation to Bill 124 to curb in salary costs, including theirs, to show affiliation and support of nurses and clearly illustrate their avowed belief that Bill 124 is a good piece of legislation. Don't hold your breath.

Cady Ellen Ryder, Hamilton

Repeal Bill 124

In 2019 the Ford government passed Bill 124, which is essentially a wage suppression measure targeting registered nurses, nurse practitioners and health-care workers. For three years their wages are capped at a one per cent increase. On top of the health-care burnout due to the pandemic, health-care workers are leaving and going state side or to private services to move away from the cap.

I recently had day surgery for a total hip replacement and the nursing staff at Juravinski was caring and responsive. They deserve more. Possibly if Mr. Ford requires a hospital stay he will see first hand the health care professionals patient first, me second attitude. Repeal this bill ASAP and pay our health-care professionals according to the service they provide.

Steve Warrick, Ancaster

Jones skills lacking

Would you hire a doctor or a nurse to renovate a broken-down house? Doctors and nurses have many skills, but not the ones needed to do renovations.

For the same reasons, why would the premier of Ontario appoint someone with a community college diploma in radio broadcasting to solve the problems of a fractured health-care system?

Respectfully, Sylvia Jones lacks the background and the skills to solve the complex problems. She is being set up for failure. The citizens of Ontario will pay the price. We are already paying the price of faulty policies.

Hinda Levine, Hamilton

No sense, no feeling

Some 70 years ago my grandmother would say to me, after a minor bump or graze, where there's no sense there's no feeling. These days, I think Ford has brought this saying to a whole new level regarding health care.

Irene Hough, Hamilton

Life education

So we read that McMaster University students are having trouble finding affordable accommodation. In addition, it's bothersome having to take the bus to school or work, or not being able to afford an Uber. And then the expense of eating and drinking in bars and restaurants is forcing them to eat at home, and also cut down on food costs. Well, welcome to the real world. Many people who work hard in full-time jobs are having the same problems. Why not just treat it as part of your education? You may just have to exist with the same conditions once you graduate.

Terry Butlin, Hamilton

Recycled leaders

Andrea Horwath is another recycled politician, like Bob Bratina. Only Keanin Loomis brings fresh eyes and intellect to the mayor's role.

Brenda Hardy, Hamilton

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Rent controls won't solve apartment crisis

ANNA KUSMIDER

With the exception of the last few years, we have seen almost no apartment buildings built over the span 30 to 40 years.

This means that either it has not been financially feasible to build or developers have not wanted to make money. It is likely the case that developers want to make money, but it is not feasible. The environment for the majority of the past few decades has not encouraged the development of apartment buildings and the repercussions have been the lack of rental supply.

To help solve this, we need to find ways to encourage developers to build more purpose-built rental housing.

What has been a large determinant of new construction is rent control and related exemptions. During the boom of new apartment construction in the 1970s, any new construction was exempt from rent control. We see this again with the exemption for any new construction built after November of 2018, which has resulted in some new apartment construction, although it is still insufficient.

There has unfortunately been a lot of talk recently, specifically in Toronto, about vacancy decontrol as

well as the 2018 exemption and whether these should be removed. To remove these would be a terrible idea. It would put new construction in jeopardy and exacerbate the supply issues even further.

As properties age the cost of repairs and maintenance increases. Insurance, heating, interest rates, taxes and utilities among many other things go up and have been going up much faster than the rent increase guideline.

Property owners have mainly been able to recover these rising costs with rent increases on unit turnover. The proposal to stop rent increases on turnover will be disastrous on apartment buildings and the tenants who live in them. Rents will not be able to keep up with cost increases and property managers will not have the funds needed to keep up with building maintenance. Strict rent control was in existence in the 1980s and in part of the 1990s and the condition of the rental housing stock deteriorated quickly.

There was a shortage of apartments to rent with dozens of applicants for any unit that came available. Renters were so eager to find a unit, they did not expect units to be upgraded and would offer to take a unit as is and do their own repairs. Some tenants were desperate

enough to offer key money to superintendents to have their application approved.

The system was a mess, buildings were deteriorating quickly and getting worse every year.

It is a difficult situation to navigate as there are many low-income individuals who have difficulty paying their rent or finding units they can afford. However, introducing strict rent control is not the solution and will ultimately result in a further loss of supply and more unaffordability.

An option to consider instead is a portable housing or universal shelter subsidy program. In such a program everyone would be entitled to apply for a subsidy based on their income.

Everyone can pay their rent and that rent would be sufficient to maintain and improve our rental housing stock. Providers would be able to build the new rental housing we need, increasing supply and hopefully keeping rents reasonable.

For further information about these and other rental housing issues, you may visit our website at hiltonapartmentassociation.ca or reach out to us directly. ANNA KUSMIDER IS ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE HAMILTON AND DISTRICT APARTMENT ASSOCIATION.

