

Life lessons from Paul Henderson

Paul Henderson, 79, the hero of the celebrated 1972 Canada-Soviet Summit Series, has had a life filled with unexpected things. "Every day," he says, "I get up and give thanks."

THOMAS FROESE



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OPINION

I'm with Paul Henderson who's telling me about unexpected things and the rest of the story.

First, for my boy and hundreds of thousands of other young Canadians starting a new hockey season, Henderson offers some advice. He talks about pushing yourself, and teamwork, and the power of encouraging others. Then he says, "Because you're going to lose."

Interesting, since Henderson's story is about winning. You know "The Goal," the game-winner in Moscow in the dying seconds of the historic 1972 Canada-Soviet Summit series, very much celebrated recently. Hollywood couldn't have imagined it. The goal, immortalized with Frank Lennon's photo, minted on to Canada's soul, turned 50 this week.

Henderson, a Memorial Cup winner with the 1962 Hamilton Red Wings, was a fine player, but not a superstar. Nobody expected he'd, in fact, score game winners in the last three games against the Soviets. Back-to-back-to-back game winners in a weighty international series is something unaccomplished even by Bobby Orr or Wayne Gretzky or go through the list. But unexpected things fill Henderson's story. I get the sense while we're at a Hamilton-area golf club. He's golfing 18 holes to raise funds for Joy and Hope for Haiti, a Hamilton-based charity helping Haitian school kids. It's typical Henderson. He's pushing 80.

We're at a lunch table. A passerby gives him a fist-bump. "Happy 50th," the man says. Henderson smiles. His book, "The Goal of My Life," is nearby. But on this cool September day, for the photo I'll take, there's no hockey stick, or even hockey book, in his hands. For this photo, 50 years on, it's just Paul and his candid 79-year-old face. The moment feels so bare, it's discombobulating.

Remember, athletic heroics have a certain permanency in our culture's conscious. A strange value. Henderson's 1972 Canada jersey, for example, which he'd simply gifted to the team trainer, was auctioned in 2010 by another owner for \$1.2 million.

Which is to say that there are goals, and there are goals. And the wind blows wherever it may. Henderson, born somewhat miraculously on a horse-drawn sleigh in a snowstorm somewhere short of Kincardine Hospital, will tell you. His biggest goal in life isn't from a hockey game. It's to live the daily realization that he's holding nothing, not really, not even his life. Lose your life to find it. As a friend, that's what he'd tell you.

"Every day," he says, "I wake up and give thanks."

Henderson's discovery of life's spiritual side also came unexpectedly. After Moscow, he was a household name. Had a loving family. Money. A privileged life. Still, his heart yearned. "I wondered, what gives life meaning? Why am I here? What am I really supposed to do? I was among the most public people in the country, but I wasn't content. I was frustrated, even angry at times."

Mentors eventually befriended the hockey player, in Toronto, then Birmingham, where he'd later play. In time he gained new understanding. Now, for almost 40 years, he's mentored others the same way.

In 1984, he started in Toronto, inviting a few friends. Then Hamilton. "No question is too dumb," he'd say. With that friendship model, Henderson founded LeaderImpact, a volunteer-led organization with small groups that now meet in, remarkably, about 800 cities in dozens of countries. The goal? To nourish and grow your life personally, professionally and spiritually in a Christ-centred way. Are there cynics and tongue-waggers? Sure. Even a life that's light and free doesn't become, as Henderson puts it, "wrinkle free." Diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in 2009, he knows. He's doing well, but knows that one pain or another is a normal part of life.

Here's something else that Paul easily shares. His relationship with his father wasn't as close as some. But when scoring that goal in Moscow, what, to his own surprise, was his first thought? "Dad would've been proud of that one."

I imagine he's right. What father wouldn't be proud? A father proud, also for that larger goal.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

LETTERS

Ford hangover

The Ontario government has a \$2-billion surplus, while at the same time they are shipping the elderly out of the area for health care. The homelessness situation in Ontario has become a shameful epidemic. I hope the people that voted for Premier Doug Ford and all his presents are starting to wake up from their buck-a-beer hangover.

Jon Lisowski, Hamilton

Citizenship oath

Like previous letters writers, I absolutely agree with the position that the Canadian citizenship oath should be updated. I suggest that Canada follow Norway's lead pledging to the country, not to King Chuck, keeping it generic so that Canada is recognized forever.

Paul Castellani, Hammon

Local heroes

I just wanted to express our appreciation to The Spectator for featuring two local heroes on the front page. This began with the feature article Sept. 21 about Dr. Tim O'Shea and his team who are piloting the SASS (Support and Safer Supply) program, which prescribes opioids to replace deadly street fentanyl for patients with addiction disorders. Then the Spec of Sept. 24 featured a front-page article about the housing crisis in Hamilton forefronting Graham Cubitt, director of projects and development for Indwell. This affordable housing charity focuses on buildings such as The Oaks, a recently opened building with 108 "deeply affordable" and supportive housing units at the former

site of the Royal Oak Dairy. It's heartwarming to open the morning paper to stories of leaders in our community who are working to support Hamilton's most oppressed populations. Kudos to The Spectator for featuring their efforts. Please keep them coming!

Pat Dickinson, Watford

Games vote

There seems to be a recurring theme of trust and transparency resonating as candidates conduct door-to-door canvassing. Most would agree the mounting frustration is well-deserved considering events during this past term, including the Red Hill Valley investigation and Cootes Water contamination. But there may be a movement of change in the air as recently highlighted during a Ward 9 debate. All three candidates pledged to host a public vote as part of the decision-making process toward Hamilton hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games. What better way of making an "informed decision?" But "what about the cost" as echoed by one councillor? Perhaps it should be assumed by the business consortium behind the bid? As incumbent Brad Clark suggested, it could be a process similar to the citywide, mail-in survey completed as part of the urban boundary debate.

Kevin Gonci, Hamilton

More enforcement

Traffic calming measures will not do a thing to those who are irresponsible drivers. Scott Duval had the right idea: police enforcement. My question to Esther Pauls' reply that police can't be on every corner — that's true, when is the last time you even saw a police car patrolling on our streets? They are fairly scarce.

Diana MacKenzie, Hamilton

Seniors pay

Your editorial "No simple fixes for health care" states some valid truths. Yes, there are no simple fixes, but why is it always seniors paying the most hefty price? It offends me to call them bed blockers. Had our government built the promised number of new long-term-care beds years ago, this would be a better situation — not perfect, but better. If charging fees will help, then I suggest that any patient in a hospital bed with COVID-19 who did not get vaccinated be charged fees as well. After all, they are taking up a bed that is needed by a surgical or cancer patient whose operations have been postponed. Let's not kid ourselves, once a long-term-care person is moved from hospital to a facility, that is where they will stay. They will no longer be a priority at their facility of their choice.

Maureen Ellis, Hamilton

The scenic route

Regarding "LRT scenic route" (Sept. 27): Excellent idea to extend LRT to Dundas along the beautiful Cootes Drive. If Kitchener can run theirs to St. Jacobs farmers market, why can't we run ours to the town of Dundas? I think this is a great idea.

Len Wilson, Hamilton

No recycling

I am imploring my fellow citizens to step away from the political blue box in the coming election. Pulling out recycled, failed politicians like Andrea Horwath, Bob Bratina or any of the scandal-plagued incumbent councillors will only guarantee us four more years of ineptitude and tired ideas. It's time for change like never before.

Calvin Ellens, Hamon



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Reclaiming culture of ambition in Hamilton

PAUL SHAKER

We refer to it all the time — "The Ambitious City," Hamilton's nickname. It's been the title of books, put on T-shirts and generally used as a rally cry for those who seek great things for our city. Of late, it might even elicit an eye-roll given the uneven state of affairs confronting the community.

In fact, the phrase had conflicting origins itself. It was first uttered by a reporter in the Toronto Globe newspaper in 1847. He referred to Hamilton as "the Ambitious City" in a derisive way. It suggested that Hamilton had ambitions far exceeding its talents. In response, Spectator editor Robert Sniley reclaimed the nickname, describing that the Ambitious City was a proud and perfect descriptor of a community with great potential.

Whatever you think of the moniker, the meaning behind it, the aspirational tone, is something worth striving for. In fact, the idea of civic potential is what has driven many achievements in Hamilton over the years. This type of aspiration led to the creation of the Royal Botanical Gardens in the 1920s and '30s. It's what led Hamilton to being known as "The Electric City" for being the first city to have AC electricity or,

more recently, the establishment of Bayfront Park in 1995 that began the process of reclaiming the waterfront that we see today. Supercrawl is another testament to ambitious thinking that has transformed a local street festival in to a major annual event recognized nationally.

This brings us to the current municipal election which will see significant change around the council table, including a new mayor and several new councillors. Competing platforms full of promises are being unveiled and healthy debate is taking place.

We've heard about plans for transit, strategies for building more housing, and ideas to bring more decorum to city hall. These are all welcome and important, but we need to hear more about how candidates, whether incumbents or newcomers, are going to reclaim a culture of ambition in Hamilton — the larger vision or goal for the city that will make the community something greater than it is today.

What could this look like? Take for example light rail transit. Most candidates have declared their support for the project and thus it is not a ballot question for the first time in a long time, which is fantastic. However, LRT is a starting point, not the finish line. So what is the end goal? Some will say the goal is to build more

rapid transit citywide. That is perfectly good, but what about something more ambitious? How about a goal that seeks to make Hamilton the most sustainably connected city in North America?

Alternatively, there is the Chedoke Creek spill into Cootes Paradise. Candidates are pledging to support cleanup and to ensure better transparency in the future. Again, these are positive steps, but beyond the short-term cleanup, could our ambition extend further? How about restoring Cootes Paradise into a pristine natural jewel that will become a defining landmark?

These goals might seem lofty and removed from the everyday concerns of municipal life, whether it's fixing potholes or collecting garbage. However, having a sense of ambition is what keeps us from sliding into the mindset that "good is good enough." It's the difference between managing problems, instead of solving them. Moreover, ambition makes Hamilton punch above its weight.

We've done it before as a community, so let's hear more about reclaiming ambition in Hamilton as we look to the future.

PAUL SHAKER IS A HAMILTON-BASED URBAN PLANNER AND PRINCIPAL WITH CIVICPLAN.

