

LETTERS

Taking their own advice

Bob Hurst's letter on Oct. 31 described his "disappointment" with the Spec's headline, comparing it with the CBC Hamilton. If you actually read both of the articles and not just the headlines, they both describe in depth who the accused was and what his relationship with the community was. I have a question. Why did the councillors, trustees and Bob, who was running in Ward 5, wait until after the election to voice their displeasure?

As for "boycotting" The Spec, I quote the letter: "Look to the underlying issues by having a dialogue rather than reviewing your actions and finding yourself blameless."

Good advice. They should heed it.
Chris Guthrie, Stoney Creek

Not what I voted for

Apparently the message that was echoing across Hamilton leading up to the election was "transparency." I think before the election, new councillors start their new term of office they may want to look up the definition of transparency because refusing to speak to The Spectator after their election is anything but transparent.

To be clear, The Spec has its warts as does any media entity but by and large they try to be fair on issues.

But to categorically state that they don't want to engage based on an article they disagree with is, patiently, wrong. Argue the issue with facts, disagree with the issue with facts, but don't disengage — that is not the way democracy works.

So if a difficult council decision results in a perceived negative report from a news outlet, are they just going stop communicating to the media? Are they only going to speak to a media entity that puts a positive spin on their issue? There is someone stateside that has done the same thing and look at the catastrophic results. Is that what we want?

Frank Bianucci, Ancaster

Transparency very short-lived

I've often been frustrated with politicians but never as outright angry as I am now regarding the five city councillors who will no longer speak to The Spectator. Transparency and communication lasted one day into this four-year term! This group is acting like juveniles who decide to pout instead of having a meaningful conversation with the Spec as adults should.

Politicians must not ever be allowed to determine what a news outlet presents, period. Otherwise we would never have heard about the Red Hill Valley Parkway slippery pavement or Sewerage or many other issues politicians hide from us. Of course the councillors did not make this announcement before the election, otherwise we would have seen them for what they are and voted accordingly.

Ray McGuire, Mount Hope

Dear Alex Wilson:

I was surprised, saddened and disappointed in your unwillingness to talk to The Spectator. Your position seems to be based on a Spec article which deals with the charges laid when a former community organizer was accused of assisting the escape of others who have been charged with kidnap and murder. I read that article at the time and found it reported the facts. It was not out of line with reporting other such events. How do you think The Spec should have framed this article? What elements of the story should The Spec have omitted in reporting the facts and details of this tragic event? What level or element of control would you place upon future articles in The Spec that deal with serious or contentious issues?

I think you've made a mistake in associating with this issue and this cabal which has decided to boycott The Spec. Your action in this case is not why the people of Ward 13 voted for you in the recent election.

In the future, I hope you and your colleagues around the city hall horseshoe will not be distracted from the real issues that face our community such as poverty, homelessness, affordable housing, and potholes, yes, even potholes and the condition of our streets.

Roy Lynn Varey, Dundas

No fresh beginnings

So, new councillors have been voted in and are touted as being fresh voices to sweep away the sins of the old. However, one is being called out for claiming an ambiguous endorsement from the outgoing mayor while another claims to be seeking accountability from council while deciding that he will no longer speak to the media due to perceived issues in reporting. These do not auger well for fresh beginnings.

Robert Sorrell, Caledonia

Where are you, Mr. Ford?

Where are you, Mr. Ford? Yes, it's a federal inquiry into the invoking of the Emergencies Act but as premier of Ontario you refuse to be "summoned" to talk about your role during the occupations of Ottawa and the Ambassador Bridge. Are you embarrassed that you did so little before the Emergencies Act was invoked? Or are you more concerned about currying favour with those who confuse their individual freedom with the collective good? It seems to me that a significant chunk of Ontario was not open for business as you stood idly by.

Paul Fraitch, Dundas



Writing about the U.S. midterms, Thomas Froese writes, "Ideals of valour and purity that a good flag can embody can bring a semblance of sanity to even the craziest of times, one hopes."

THOMAS FROESE

Taking the long view on democracy and life



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

It's a fall day in rural Illinois, near Chicago, and, as I often do, I'm reading aloud to my bride. We're across the border briefly. It's just the papers with us.

USA Today is in-hand. The Detroit Free Press and Kalamazoo Gazette, in the car's back seat. I'm looking for a Chicago Tribune. We pull into a food outlet where I find no papers, but, instead, near the corn, a display of American flags.

Thank you. Ideals of valour and purity that a good flag can embody can bring a semblance of sanity to even the craziest of times, one hopes. Yes, America's papers and radios and TVs are filled with the Nov. 8 U.S. midterms.

It's no small deal. During the last go, in 2018, voter turnout was its highest since 1914. Now, depending on who you believe, or, more so, who voters believe, America the Beautiful maybe continuing its strange march to some unhelpful place that might blow its noble 246-year experiment with democracy to kingdom come. Or rot it from within.

The paradox is that the times, notwithstanding a looming global recession, have been good. Of course, there are always those who will tell you otherwise. Because in politics it's easier to defeat your opponents by demonizing them. Easier to tell

of life's unbearable burdens, and how grand things would be if you're in charge.

Then there's so-called identity politics, the exaggeration of differences in race or gender or religion or class or go down the list. As if nothing on God's green Earth transcends human differences. As if differences have no purpose. As if we've never faced larger giants, world depression and war, for starters, while different, sure, but united.

United. Imagine this. Some candidate stands up and says this: "For seven decades, we, the west, the world's 'One Per Cent,' have had more wealth and peace than anyone on Earth, more daily conveniences than even history's kings and queens. This, from the leadership of both my party, and, in truth, my opponent's party, alternating power."

Or how about this? "I'm a human being. So is my opponent. So I stand here with knees knocking because of the magnitude of political life, a vocational office that, in its highest reaches, has the potential to annihilate human life itself. I humbly, then, request your vote. But if you choose my opponent, we'll still be OK. No, really. Go in peace."

Would it fly? Even in Canada? Where we're proud to be moderate and, well, not American? No, in some ways, when facing spiritless despondency, we're not so different. A friend, a Canadian in BC, who's American-born-and-raised, put it this way: "We're at different

places along the beach, but the same waves are coming at us."

This is it. Even in good times, sometimes because of good times, people can feel discontent. Empty. Envious. Angry. In difficult downturns — Canada has seen 12 recessions since 1929 — the temptation is also to catastrophize, to believe hopeless Chicken Little. The sky is falling. No, maybe day is becoming night before day returns. Life, even economic and political life, has rhythms and seasons. Fall becomes winter becomes, thank God, spring. So take the long view. Take the long view on democracy itself. Be civically engaged. Be especially wary of the enemy within yourself. Read, for example, "Our Own Worst Enemy: The Assault From Within On Modern Democracy," by Tom Nichols. Heed the words of someone like 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Maria Bessa.

In all this, a nation isn't unlike a family. Pierre Poilievre — yes, that Pierre Poilievre — said as much when recently describing his family as "a complicated and mixed up bunch... like our country." Not to endorse Poilievre. Or anyone else. Sometimes I'd vote for the local dogcatcher over the options presented.

It is, however, to endorse authentic and vulnerable stories. Our common stories. This is what's missing in today's angry and shaky political discourse.

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

Passing on stories so we remember



DEIRDRE PIKE
OPINION

Some people collect Pokémon cards. Others gather cards adorned with sports stars or stock car photos. I collect funeral prayer cards.

So, I was very sad when I left Marg Harris' funeral last week, not only because her light here had been diminished by her bodily death, but also because I came out empty-handed.

Marg was a 21-year resident of Dundas, a wonder woman who advocated with, and helped name HOPE, Hamilton Organizing for Poverty Elimination. Her friends attribute her as the inventor of "youthening," (a better word for aging), co-founder of a walking club, and a master Brain Gym instructor. She was a proud Liberal, something unique her daughter said, for a Saskatchewan native.

I keep a little pile of the cards from recent funerals underneath a Galway crystal Celtic cross with a single spot for a votive candle. At least once a week, I light the little wick and say a prayer for the people whose images and snippets of stories grace those cards, and for those who have died with no cards and no one to remember them.

With the double-bitter Feasts of

All Saints' and All Souls on the Christian calendar this week, we leapt into November, our first Month of Remembrance in this pandemic plateau. For over two years now, people have been unable to mourn the deaths of their loved ones with robust rituals tending to their grief and allowing others to grieve and grieve with them.

If I am unable to attend the funeral of someone and pick up a prayer card, I have taken to a practice of journaling a little story about them instead.

When I learned of Tim Webster's death in Ottawa last week, a person I knew for only a speck of time, I recalled his life-changing impact on me. By remembering and retelling the story, I brought him to life in my mind's eye.

When I left Hamilton in 1998, I left a place where I had just really started to make some connections in the GLEB community, as it was known then. I had begun the coming out process as a lesbian, outside my Catholic community of Regina Mundy up on the mountain. What happened downtown, stayed downtown!

So, when I arrived at St. Joseph's Parish, Ottawa, that same year, to begin my time there as a pastoral associate, I was still very closeted. My "roommate" and I bought a place in the Byward Market and settled in. On my first day, Tim called me up

to his office. He was the accountant, and I had some paperwork to complete. He asked me if I had a partner, someone who would be sharing my benefits with me. I said, "No." I felt flushed.

He asked a second time. I repeated, "No." I was getting fidgety and thought, "finish these forms and quit trying to find out if I'm a lesbian."

While he moved his pen across the paper, I looked around his office. In the corner, his bicycle leaned against the wall. I noticed the rainbow sticker immediately.

When he asked me the third time if I had anyone who could share in my benefits I replied, "Well, I do live with Pat but..."

"Pat or Patricia," he asked. It was all business. It was the first time I would ever have benefits for my same-sex partner.

We want to tell our stories or have our stories told so we know our life has or had some meaning, as Canadian comedian, author, and memoir-writing teacher, Deborah Kimmert says.

I suppose I've been thinking about this more than usual as death surrounds us daily, and my own mortality looms ever-nearer, just like my 60th birthday next week.

Tim may have died not knowing how huge his impact was on me with his "third time's a charm" question about benefits for a partner, but let his same-sex partner of 30 years, Claude, know the story.

It is in the passing on of these stories that we remember, we celebrate, we believe. And, we help keep each other alive.

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