

Let us take no child for granted



THOMAS FROESE

A young Hannah Froese enjoys the moment at the Froese family's former home in Uganda. The joke of creation, writes Thomas Froese, is it's the helpless children of the world who can show adults how to live.

THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

"Don't have children. For God's sake. Don't."

This is from the mother in Raymond Carver's story "A Small Good Thing." Her boy, hit by a car, is dying in the hospital.

Who can blame her? Or anyone else?

Years ago some friends of mine, not long married, said the same. "We're not having children." They're not for everyone.

Having children, it seems, is like going to Antarctica. Consider this 1912 London Times ad taken out by Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton: "Men wanted for hazardous journey: Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return is doubtful."

It's true. Children might step into one danger or another. They might disappoint you. Might leave you. Then there's the cost of children. And the planet's sustainability. Finally, to be honest, there's our lifestyle.

Some days it's easier to just play with the cat, you know?

People in rich nations are especially having few children. Much of the world, where children can be your best social safety net, is different. Even so, today's global birth rate of 2.4 children per woman is half what it was in 1970. When it's below 2.1, (Canada is at 1.5), nations can't sustain their workforce. So immigrants, often enjoying large families, are especially welcomed.

In either case, the children somehow keep coming. By the time you finish reading this, several hundred will have arrived into this world, suitcase in-hand, ready to travel through life. It's a good time to consider it because tomorrow, Nov. 20, is World Children's Day. Attention is especially focused on children's sense of belonging.

My youngest, Hannah, who is Ugandan-born, would know something about it being a child of the world, and belonging, and even adoption. What did she say one day some years ago after I'd asked her what she liked best for her Christmas gifts? "Mommy, daddy, brother, sister."

And isn't this the nub of it? The joke of creation?

The grown-ups, invited to join creation as cocreators, need the world's children just like the children need them. We need each other like we need air. How else, without a child's example, would any grown-up learn to be less driven, and less cynical, so that they too might be adopted? Because nobody can ever earn adoption. And it's the helpless children who are able to live with their hands open instead of closed tight.

In this it's the children, the trusting ones with the dirty faces and uncontrollable laughter, the little ones who don't worry about much of anything this side of heaven, who, according to Jesus, are the ones who will inherit that very kingdom. It's a remarkable paradox.

But what about Antarctica? And the risk? Hundreds of people, in fact, responded to that old London newspaper ad. Imagine.

And my friends who'd never have children? They had two boys who are now young men. Life, somehow, changes.

Now those boys will change the world. Like my children. Like yours will. What choice do they have? What choice does anyone have?

Recently I drove some distance to my old neighbourhood. I went past Ball Avenue where Rob Slingerland lived, past what we kids called The Wheelie Track, past the paper factory with the big, round clock, past the park where my red-brick school once stood, there, across the street from Paul's house, where I often found myself as a boy.

Paul had three brothers and two sisters in a home that today doesn't seem much larger than some rich family's garage. Two adults plus six kids. Was existing, how that small? I never noticed. Not as much as I noticed the warmth of Paul's mother, and her cookies.

Returning there, it seems, is good for my inner child. So take time to care for that child of yours, too.

No, don't take any child out there for granted. Don't take having children for granted, either. Some people, sometimes in tears, would love nothing more.

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

LETTERS

Waterfront lost?

The developers have ruined a great deal of the views of Lake Ontario in Toronto with solid glass and concrete and are now increasingly coming after Hamilton to do the same.

With height restrictions dropped, we too could well be denied the vistas of our waterfront. I suggest the planners visit cities along the Great Lakes such as Chicago, Cleveland, Buffalo and others where, in their smart planning, they have preserved the waterfront for the people.

The highrise buildings have been constructed away from the waterfront and the downtown is within walking distance of the lakefront. This unobstructed waterfront has been preserved for the people to enjoy.

This continued assault in the way we grow our cities is unprecedented. Under this provincial government, I feel we are living in an autocratic society headed by a vindictive bully.

Jackie Beaudin, Hamilton

A brighter day

What a wonderful story of remembrance and caring and connection regarding the grave of the little girl who died way back in 1881. So amazing that this grave has been since so lovingly tended through two world wars when we were on opposing sides as well as all that has gone on in Germany in those 140 years. It is reassuring to know that such kindness exists in the world and that it takes just a few people to reach out and make a difference. Thanks to Jeff Mahoney for bringing us this story to brighten our day.

Brent Ellis, Dundas



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The main things

I have not seen any financial modelling to show the impact of the projected new home building. Certainly current landowners will benefit but the city will have to budget to build infrastructure — sewers, roads, electricity, etc. What is the projected tax revenue from this expansion? Surely that is part of the picture. In other words, if it costs \$20 million in infrastructure but the city gets a tax lift of \$5 million to \$10 million a year, then one would expect this to lower, or balance out future tax increases. Or perhaps use the net income for other infrastructure costs?

The other consideration for our new council is to determine priorities. Keep the main things the main things. If we have no chance of appealing the provincial decisions on this, are we wasting time, energy and expense on things with little chance succeeding? A strategic planning session early in this term with a prioritization exercise is a must.

Glenn Gibson, Hamilton

Train projects

The proper place for TH&B103 is the Hamilton Museum of Steam and Technology. It does not fit the era represented at Westfield. Moved to the museum, it can become a long-term exhibit as it undergoes restoration which could and should include operation. Vancouver did a similar project during Expo 86; a three-year restoration of CPR locomotive 374 which continues to be a tourist attraction downtown. For Westfield, a replica of an engine similar to CPR 374 would be an economical and appropriate solution to accompany the 1890 Jerseyville station. We have the know-how locally to complete both these projects.

Bob Bratina, Hamilton

Baby Huey Trump

A Spectator reader argues the liberal press are responsible for the demise of Donald Trump. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Trump is a Baby Huey man-child with a self-inflated narcissistic opinion of himself and limited intelligence. The Donald merely got played by the real men of power in the world. Rupert Murdoch, the Koch brothers and others of the ultrarich used him and manipulated their presidential puppet pulling his strings to control the stock market. World leaders like Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un caressed his massive ego to undermine the United States. And now that Donald Trump has lost the presidency and his usefulness Murdoch will cut his legs from underneath him and toss him aside like yesterday's news.

Gary Johnson, Hamilton

Cathedral project

Thank you for the incredible story of the research done by Vince Lepore, reported by Kate McCullough Nov. 11. A teacher who felt it was time to follow up on what happened to the young people who participated in the two major wars, and were part of Cathedral High. And not even a history teacher! Thank you to all who participated.

Jane Evans, Hamilton

No more Trumpists

Please, no more letters from the dwindling pond of Trumpists. I appreciate you are trying to present a wide range of divergent opinion, but it's not all created equal.

This nauseating Trump cheer-leading makes our community seem less intelligent.

Margaret McVey, Burlington

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New council must stand up to province

City planners, like conservation authorities and citizens, have been taken out of the game

WAYNE MACPHAIL

Doug Ford's recent unheeded and multi-pronged assault on the environment has been an early Christmas present for developers in Hamilton and around the province.

They get an expanded urban boundary that will destroy vital farmland and choice pickings in the formerly-protected Greenbelt. Plus, Bill 23 will neuter pesky conservation authorities and citizens who would challenge developers' plans at the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT). And now, developments over 30 storeys are to be welcome within the city limits. As someone who has fought against unsightly and unnecessary towers in my neighbourhood and has carried signs at recent Stop the Sprawl rallies, I'm alarmed at the alacrity with which developers have been pandered to on every front.

Thanks to the province's wilfulness, the city's planning department, like conservation authorities and citizens, appears to have been taken out of the game. At best, city planners can plead for better design in towers

that punch through the 30-storey height barrier. The city's chief planner, Steve Robichaud, has recently warned, "density without design equals disaster." However, as we've seen with Vancor's ongoing development at King and Queen streets, a 25-storey development can get OLT approval with the city rolling over after the developer made laughably minor cosmetic changes to the project's design. So even on the esthetic and urban design front, without political will, I hold out little hope that developers will be reined in.

City planners really seem like they are now in the role of the hapless babysitter in charge of the children of overindulgent parents. They can try to make tantrum-prone developers behave, but with no real authority. Ordinary citizens, whether they are fighting for the environment or more, better-designed neighbourhoods, or both, are left in the cold.

A provincial and municipal planning approach that should consider first the safety, security, food security and overall livability of neighbourhoods and cities has been usurped by influential developers who profit from suspiciously prescient speculation, have little

regard for urban planning principles and who will grab whatever they're given and lobby for more.

Hamiltonians have been clear about maintaining our urban boundary. We've been vocal about the vital role the Greenbelt plays in protecting headwaters, flood plains and migrating species. We've spoken with one voice about the need for developers to consider proper planning, good design and the needs of communities when they step into our neighbourhoods. We all understand we need to increase density and welcome newcomers. We believe necessary density can be creatively achieved within city limits — in existing, underused spaces — and be bounded by the sensible constraints of good planning.

I only hope that the new council, purged of most of the pandering predecessors, will finally have the guts, the collective conscience and commitment to stand up to the province and to developers and will speak for common sense, common people and the common good. I am cautiously optimistic.

WAYNE MACPHAIL LIVES IN HAMILTON'S STRATHCONA NEIGHBOURHOOD.

