

## LETTERS

## No unruly mob rule

Fortunately, we still live in a democracy. Our democratic system allows people who are dissatisfied with a particular situation to demonstrate *peacefully*. Sadly, this was put to a test during a recent city council meeting. Twenty people were scheduled to speak to council regarding the police budget. An unruly mob, pounding drums, clapping and singing anti-police chants filled the gallery not allowing an orderly meeting to continue.

As so often is the case, these hooligans did not appear to have all the correct information. While our system may not be perfect, we have elected city council to represent us, not some boisterous and disorderly pack. It was doubly disappointing when it appears some of the newly elected officials were encouraging this mob mentality. It is a concern for most citizens when this pack, through their disruptive intimidation, caused the cancellation of the meeting.

Jacquie Reid, Hamilton

## George's basses are the best

It is my great fortune to have two of George Furlanetto's F-Basses. They are exquisite instruments, known the world over among bass players. A true gem of Hamilton. They should declare the factory up on McKinstry Street a UNESCO World Bass Site.

Owen Mahoney, Dundas

## Maybe God sees the irony?

Three weeks ago, I read that the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton is spending more than \$20 million to build a new church. More recently, I read that St. Martin's Manor will close after 75 years of providing service for the most vulnerable within our community, young mothers, children and seniors. It was operated by Catholic Family Services of Hamilton. They are closing because of "financial and operational challenges."

Does anyone else see the sad irony here? Maybe God does.

Rita Chimienti, Hamilton

## Builder profits the real culprit

In the article regarding the cost of building new affordable housing, it says the cost in 2018 was \$250,000 and in 2022 \$550,000. That is a 120 per cent increase. Skilled labour wages have gone up maybe 15 per cent in that time. Materials may have gone up substantially but are currently falling, though labour makes up more than half the construction cost. The real culprit is the builders/developers maximizing their profits.

At the beginning of the pandemic we ordered a house from a builder. With permitting and construction, it took two years to build. The builder increased the final price by 35 per cent. When we pointed out that Statistics Canada measured the increase in residential construction costs at 15 per cent over that time, the builder told us that if we didn't like the price then we could sell the new house and get our money back. Their price increase matched prices in the re-sale housing market and had nothing to do with construction costs.

Glenn Davies, Hamilton

## No Russians at the Olympics

The Russians want to participate in next year's Olympic Games in Paris "without restrictions, extra requirements, or sanctions" according to the head of their Olympic committee. This would normally be the case — a few doping incidents aside — but with Russia now laying siege to Ukraine, committing atrocious war crimes and upsetting the world order, many countries fervently believe that Russia has forfeited any chance to compete.

The IOC must ban all Russian athletes from this celebration of the human spirit since Russia's actions are clearly in defiance of the Olympic aim to contribute to world peace. Unfortunately, Putin's government does not understand that attempting to wipe a neighbour off the world map does not correlate with being a good sport.

Jim Warren, Hamilton

## If it seems like price gouging ...

Loblaws maintains it is not price gouging and that the fault for the rising cost of groceries lies elsewhere. I beg to differ. One-person households always seem to pay more if they just want to buy a small amount.

A recent example from my local Fortinos: The regular price of a 10-pound bag of Ontario potatoes is \$5.99; the regular price of a five-pound bag is \$4.99; the regular price of loose potatoes is \$2.49 per pound. So if you wanted to buy just two or three potatoes, you are paying the equivalent of \$24.90 for a 10 pound bag. If that isn't price gouging, what is?

Pat Wilson, Burlington

## How about Homer Trudeau?

The Ontario Liberals are currently wooing the leader of the Green party to jump ship and run for the leadership. A better idea would be to borrow a page from the federal Libs' playbook by getting anyone with the last name Trudeau. Justin's siblings perhaps, or his kids. Maybe an aunt or uncle. This would cash in on name recognition. Worked for the feds. May I suggest Homer Trudeau? Name recognition on first and last names.

Robert Wood, Simcoe



SCOTT GARDNER THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

A section of Ward 3 as seen from the top of the escarpment. Jeremy Cohen argues the ward needs investment, not a moratorium on social services as proposed by critics.

## Advocating for a safer Ward 3 for everyone

JEREMY COHEN

There is a vocal minority who are publicly lamenting the state of safety in Hamilton's Ward 3. They contend that people with mental-health conditions and addictions are "unpredictable" and that crime in the neighbourhood is out of control. Walter Furlan, in a Feb. 4 commentary, calls for a "moratorium" on social services in Ward 3 for residents in need. Those in crisis deserve help Furlan writes, but help should not come at the expense of the safety and social services available to housed residents.

I am an assistant professor at McMaster University, and a resident of Ward 3. Given the public call to turn Ward 3 into a "no-go zone" for social services, and the stigmatization and marginalization of persons with mental-health conditions and the unhoused in Hamilton, I worry that an emotions-based approach, over an approach rooted in evidence, will make the streets of Ward 3 less safe for everyone.

Publicly available crime statistics for Hamilton show a general decline in all types of crime. Hamilton's 2022 homicide rate is at an all-time low, and while there were slight increases in certain types of crime in 2021, the rates are generally trending downward. Property crimes committed by youths in the City of Hamilton decreased by 15.6 per cent in 2021, while drug offences decreased by 17.7 per cent.

There is evidence that encampments lead to increases in small

crimes in surrounding neighbourhoods. However, there is a lack of reliable statistics around encampments in the United States and Canada generally. What data does exist shows that crime rises in direct proximity to encampments only. One study shows crime rates increasing slightly after encampment were removed from a neighbourhood. As for supervised injection sites, a recent meta-analysis finds no evidence that these lead to an increase in crime.

Hamilton does have one crime problem. Residents of Hamilton believe that our city is plagued with crime at levels disproportionate to actual rates of crime. The assertion that crime is rising against all evidence to the contrary is a well-documented phenomenon. Arguments against increasing social services for vulnerable populations, including the unhoused, are based on criminological claims about Ward 3 that have little evidence to support them. Instead, this rhetoric perpetuates false narratives around those most in need.

I agree with Furlan that we need to invest in meaningful programming and facilities for our youth — which already exist — while also building friendlier public spaces. However, I question the sincerity and good faith with which this proposal is put forward. Why is funding for those in need, and those at-risk, mutually exclusive? Services for those in need are already underfunded, spaces in emergency shelters are at an all-time low, and more

of our neighbours are food and shelter insecure.

If crime reduction is the issue, access to local mental-health services reduces crime in surrounding areas. Since crime rates are higher in disinvested and structurally disadvantaged neighbourhoods, incentives for landlords to rent properties, housing-centred approaches, and other systemic, environment-centred methods make for safer neighbourhoods.

What actual solutions do Furlan and his supporters put forward to solve the issues facing our neighbourhood, beyond calling for a "moratorium" and a "no-go zone" for services for high-acuity individuals in Ward 3? Read that sentence carefully. How will cutting social services for our city's most vulnerable populations help? Perhaps the question should be, who benefits from this proposal?

If we want to build a safer Ward 3, we need to support our most vulnerable populations rather than make their existence untenable. When our discussions around mental health and the unhoused are linked to crime over care, we are making a statement about who counts and who is deserving of our attention. I am not going to claim to have solutions to the problems faced by those most in need, but I know that the evidence-based paths we choose should benefit all residents of our ward.

JEREMY COHEN LIVES IN HAMILTON'S WARD 3.

## The language of the heart is universal



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

BERLIN There are 60 stairs to Tante Eva's third-floor apartment on Friedrichsruher. I reach them after walking from my hotel for five kilometres, walking to see this city of my birth, flowers in hand.

Earlier, Eva, 91 and living on her own, navigated these stairs, boarded a bus, travelled to a favourite bakery for "kuchen," that's cake, then returned, arms filled, back up the stairs. Then the sweets are laid out with coffee, lovingly poured in her modest apartment of five decades.

Eva's husband died when she was young, but she's enjoyed a life of singleness, nursing and travel. Her only sibling, my mother, Hannelore, died in Berlin 52 years ago, her two children, by then, in Canada. For five decades, like clockwork, Eva has since sent packages to Canada with affection and chocolates, "German vitamins," as they're called, to my children.

"Der Lieben alle, ich sende Euch viel Liebe," she wrote recently in her striking script. ("Dear all. I send you lots of love.")

Travelling Uganda to Canada, now I'm receiving this affection in person, receiving German lessons, of sorts, in this hip and reflective

city that's green with neighbourhood playgrounds and parks. The lessons aren't exactly what Frau Pfeffer taught in German class in my Niagara high school. They're heart language.

Even so, "Mein Deutsch ist nicht perfekt" (My German isn't perfect). So extended family, Siegfried and Andrea, join Eva's party to translate. We talk for hours, share photos, then meet another day to complete the puzzle more, the picture of a man, and my sister's, early years in Germany. Like old letters and 8mm film shared by Eva — look, there's my mother helping me to walk — it's all like gold.

In Eva's childhood it was always her and Hannelore, two sisters running together through life, even through war. In the spring of 1945 — Eva was 14 and Hannelore, 16 — about 200,000 people perished in the Battle of Berlin, including tens of thousands of civilians. In 12 days. Imagine. Whenever bombs fell and the girls were moved to safety, it was "immer die Fotoalben" (always the photo albums) that their mother protected.

Because the story of ones being is all that any of us have, really. Eva's story. Mine. Yours. The neighbours. Stories of being, filled with power and grace. Consider some of Canada's immigrants now, poignant stories etched into faces, not unlike how each stroke and curve in Eva's handwriting reflects something of herself.

By the way, while Canadian schools carelessly abandon cursive writing, eager seven-year-olds in Germany's public schools, after mastering it, are rewarded with their own fountain pen. Highly-innovative Germans value cursive. Why? It builds memory and language in ways printing can't.

My mother, when 16, used cursive for her 1945 biographical novella, "Zwei Mädels erleben den Weltkrieg." (Two Girls Experience the World War.) Like Eva, she became a nurse. But my mother always wanted to be a journalist. I think about it, not the first time, back in my hotel, in Room 411.

Outside my window, in grey winter sky, is the jagged top of the historic Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, left blown off to show Germany's history. Thirty years ago, while a young reporter during my first return to Berlin, I worked with street people in the church's surrounding public square, Breit-Scheidplatz.

Some urinated on the old church. One young man, running from Dutch authorities, wore a tank-top showing Christ crucified upside down, saying, "Jesus didn't die for my sins. He died for his own." That's all another story. But as I look out the window, sitting beside me is my mother's wartime manuscript, typed by Eva, now graciously gifted to me.

What's left to say? It's good to drink the water from where you come. Aber die Dinge, die wir, jeder von uns, weitergeben. (But the things that we, any of us, hand down.) Gott sei Dank geben wir auch Gutes weiter. (Thank God we hand down good things, too.)

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. SEE THOMASFROESE.COM.

