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LETTERS

Simple gestures matter

Each Friday, our waste collector (name not known yet) waves at our boys (William, 3, Carter, 1). He really makes their day, so I wanted to say thank you to him. With so many difficult issues going on in the world, it is people like our collector, and the time he takes to brighten someone's day, that gives us hope in our community. We plan on finding out his name and showing our appreciation to him in person.

The Callaghan family, Stoney Creek

Staying silent not an option

Re: "Who has the money for that?" (Nov. 16)
Re: "Hamilton students to take part in climate rally" (Nov. 14)

Kudos to Hamilton students and the HWDSB for realizing the seriousness of the climate crisis and doing something about it. If the writer thinks things are financially bad now for many people, and they are, what does he think the future will hold when heat, drought, floods and fire will threaten our food, homes and health? As Grant Linney wrote, we need to support our children and join them in fighting to save our planet. Staying silent is not an option.

Theresa Cardey, Hamilton

Audit personal energy use

Re: "We all need to do our part" (Nov. 17)
The letter writer, Jane Jenner, makes an important point and I would like to echo the ideas presented. There are plenty of ways in which we can make a difference when it comes to climate change (or as I like to put it, to "save the planet.")

Driving smaller cars, paying attention to our eating habits, insulating our houses all play a role. But it is more than individual effort that is needed. We need to change the values that drive our society, moving away from testosterone-driven, faster, bigger, higher, more powerful, and focus on right-sized living, not oversized.

To this end, I think it would be useful if our government were to institute personal "energy-use/GHG emission" audits to give us a baseline of our individual lifestyle (planetary) "stressors." This could be done easily now that we are so digitized: let's say whatever we buy or use has an energy-use/GHG emission value and it is calculated regularly and accounted for annually (like an income tax return) to give us a clearer picture of our personal stress on the planet. And hopefully it will give us an incentive to bring these down to a specific lower level. Too complex? Well, we've managed to send men to the moon; how hard can this new task be?

Renate Manthei, Hamilton

Where's our dog park?

I would like to raise an issue I am sure has been raised previously, but I feel needs to be raised again, and that is the total lack of off-leash dog parks on Hamilton Mountain. As a resident and a dog owner, it would be greatly beneficial to have somewhere I could take my dog for exercise and socialization without having to drive to either Ancaster or Stoney Creek, a feeling that is shared among my many dog owner friends.

As parents, we take our children to parks to allow them to run around and exercise, socialize, make friends and learn the correct behaviours expected of them with their peers. I'm certainly not humanizing my dog but these are exactly the social skills I want my dog to have and this cannot be achieved by keeping them in their own garden (if they are lucky enough to have a garden) or by keeping them tethered to the owner on a six-foot leash.

Dogs become assertive or aggressive when they don't know, or have not been trained, how to correctly approach another dog. The signals they give to another dog might read as assertive or aggressive, but they are mostly an attempt to meet or instigate play.

One dollar of licence fees is used to maintain and create dog parks - I wonder where this goes on Hamilton Mountain?

Irene Porter, Hamilton

Changing hiring practices

Re: "Removing a barrier to work" (Nov. 15)

I am encouraged by the provincial government's recent announcement it plans to introduce legislation that bans the use of Canadian work experience as a requirement in job postings or on applications. This is designed to address the existing lack of diversity in numerous professions across our workforce, in which highly competent visible minorities continue to be under-represented. The current requirement of Canadian experience maintains the status quo of this existing disparity.

A change in equity policies and hiring practices is long overdue. It is only by eliminating these systemic barriers that Ontario, as well as Canada as a whole, can take the first step toward becoming the welcoming and equitable province, and country, we claim to be.

Andrea Rado, Hamilton



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

Some of the names of Canada's war dead in one of our national Books of Remembrance in the Peace Tower in Ottawa. Commenting on death and what may follow, Thomas Froese writes, "Death, for all its sorrow — and brutality, especially in war — can also heighten our sense of life."

Pondering the end and what comes next

THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Speaking of war and death, here's something.

Forty-five years ago today, on Nov. 18, 1978, more than 900 people died in the Jonestown massacre. They were Americans in a Guyana settlement named after Jim Jones, a self-proclaimed prophet who'd been once lauded as an exceptional voice and humanitarian.

Jones' followers, interested in good things like racial and civic harmony, like social and economic justice, followed their charismatic and deceptive leader to death. This is when the phrase, "Don't drink the Kool-Aid," that is don't be duped, entered public lexicon. These people, in a different sort of war, literally drank cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. They took in a lie from hell.

I was barely a teen while watching the news that November day: bodies lying everywhere, looking like you or me or the neighbours, wearing jeans and shirts like they're dressed for any ordinary day. More than 300 of them were younger than 18.

Two thoughts. First, choose carefully who you follow. The world is full of liars. During times of upheaval and uncertainty, people are especially vulnerable to wonky thinking. Fear often leads us into it. And as the world changes, it's easy to let fear get the better of you. So don't.

Second thought. Anyone who's half-curious or half-alive, even some kid who happens to be watching the news, will naturally wonder about what comes after death. At best, we have a hazy sense, a faint light, of what might await. Sometimes that light might even come from a movie theatre. (Actor Leonardo DiCaprio, by the way, has signed to play Jim Jones in a movie now being developed about the Jonestown massacre.)

But it's a different show, a documentary, "After Death," that I recently saw in a local theatre that poked me about this age-old question of what's after death. It explores so-called near-death experiences. They've dramatically increased in the 60 years since modern medicine has made it possible to sometimes resuscitate people who are clinically dead.

Consider "Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences," by Dr. Jeffrey Long, a radiation oncologist who founded the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation.

The foundation's database now has about 5,000 names, people worldwide coming from various walks of life, all giving accounts of another dimension. They're fascinating.

Sharing about out-of-body experiences, some tell doctors details of their life-saving operations, otherwise impossible to know. They often speak of mysterious light (although sometimes of hellish darkness). There's often unconditional love, as if all the love of the universe has been lavished only on them.

There's deep peace, and colours and music so otherworldly that they're indescribable. Some, as if in a celestial doorway, claim they've seen loved ones previously dead.

Think of leaving a two-dimensional, black-and-white painting to be awakened in a three-dimensional, colour room. The painting — "Do I have to return?" — is the earthly dream, while the room is revealed as eternal reality.

The point, though, is not to fixate on death. Or near-death. Or even what may follow death. It's to be reminded that death, for all its sorrow — and brutality, especially in war — can also heighten our sense of life. Emily, in Thornton Wilder's play "Our Town," from the other side and revisiting her 12th birthday, put it this way. "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it — every, every minute?"

Here's something else, something to find in the Peace Tower in Ottawa's Parliament Buildings. They're our national Books of Remembrance. There are eight. Every day at 11 a.m. a constable turns a page in each book so all the names, about 118,000, of Canada's war dead can be seen by the viewing public in any given year.

It need not be Remembrance Day. Or the Saturday after Remembrance Day. You can see them any day. That's what pilgrimages are for, to remind us of what we value in life. So go and look sometime. It's later when another book — the Book of Life — will put the mystery of death behind us.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

Bold thinking and urgent action needed

MIKE COLLINS-WILLIAMS

The Greater Golden Horseshoe is the fastest growing region in North America. Between July 2022 and July 2023, Canada's population grew by 1.15 million — a larger increase than the entire United States of America, a country nearly 10 times our size.

There are incredible growth pressures on Hamilton, requiring a paradigm shift in terms of planning for long-term growth. That means difficult decisions will need to be made to ensure we are building for the future.

The Ontario government recently announced it would reverse changes made to official plans of several municipalities, including Hamilton's. The province indicated the need to rebuild public trust in the planning process and while it takes the necessary steps to achieve this, it is critical all levels of government persevere with their efforts to significantly increase housing supply.

Hamilton faces a housing crisis across all incomes, housing types and tenures. Because of this crisis, critical groups of our local workforce like teachers, health-care workers and construction workers are leaving our city to find attainable housing. These are the very people who keep our cities running. Bold and transformative action is required to get more shovels in the

ground and ensure we are building responsibly for the future.

The modifications made to Hamilton's official plan were intended to uphold the province's own objective for increased housing supply, choice and balanced growth. While some modifications, such as eliminating an arbitrary 30-storey height limit and expanding Hamilton's urban boundary, may be politically unpopular, they are necessary to accommodate population growth. The changes needed to fix the housing crisis will be disruptive if they are to be transformative.

Hamilton's current official plan is built on outdated population forecasts. Those forecasts were generated prior to the federal government nearly doubling our annual population growth. The official plan adopted by council in 2021 planned for only 35,000 new homes by 2031. Since then, council has signed a housing pledge that commits its support to the building of 47,000 homes over the next 10 years.

That leaves a 12,000-unit gap between the city's plans and the reality of future growth. That difference has a direct impact on our housing goals. If we don't plan for the coming growth, Hamilton's affordability crisis, economic competitiveness and ability to retain workers will worsen.

Hamilton's own planning staff

and a peer review of the department's work both concluded a boundary expansion is necessary. To put it bluntly, you can't pack an extra 500,000 people into Ontario every year and accommodate all that growth just with intensification. Hamilton needs a multifaceted approach to increase its housing supply and provide residents with access to a variety of housing options that meet their needs — and that means building up, in and out.

Building up, with taller buildings around transit stations and on main streets; in, with missing middle infill projects in existing neighbourhoods; and, out, with new communities in our suburbs. The City of Hamilton is positioned to do exactly that by providing a range of new housing through: a) an urban boundary expansion; b) adopting other provincial modifications such as the removal of the 30-storey height limit; and c) increasing density on all BLAST network corridors. Council has the opportunity to carefully review the provincial modifications and adopt key changes.

Hamilton's housing crisis can only be solved with a multi-pronged approach that considers both urban and suburban needs. Residents deserve nothing less. Our city offers a vibrant and welcoming environment, and this is our opportunity to build a better future for everyone who lives here, and everyone who chooses to live here in the future. It will require bold thinking and urgent action, but if we work together, we'll make that future a reality, one home at a time.

MIKE COLLINS-WILLIAMS IS THE CEO OF THE WEST END HOME BUILDERS' ASSOCIATION.



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