

LETTERS

No money, no project

Re: It could take \$26 million and four years to turn Main into a two-way street (Dec. 6)

Here we go again. What does this city council not understand about budgets? When you have no money for projects, you can't afford them, you don't do them. How much more in taxes will this conversion of Main Street cost us? As seniors on a fixed income, we are already stressed by the property taxes in this city. Also, rushing jobs never turns out well. Just wait until the time is right and the money is available.

Diana MacKenzie, Hamilton

There are alternatives

One has to question the rationale and high cost of the plans to convert Main Street into a two-way street beginning in 2026, or perhaps sooner. The justification — to make car travel slower and safer for all road users makes sense — but why delay at all when synchronized traffic lights, which already exist, are capable of doing both. In addition, the city could investigate “soft” speed enforcement techniques using existing traffic signal arrays that have been equipped to detect an approaching vehicle exceeding the speed limit and stopping it. A much more economic alternative is the expanded use of photo radar. Also mentioned but downplayed by council is the hope a Main Street conversion will ease traffic congestion when construction of the LRT begins. So far, no mention by council of the long-awaited need to significantly improve the quality of road resurfacing in the city. Certainly not a place for cost-saving measures. Ever think of what \$26 million could do for homelessness in Hamilton?

James Newman, Hamilton

This is front-page news

Re: Ontario passes motion to bypass committee hearings on new Ontario Place legislation (Dec. 5)

It is shocking to read on page 10, that Premier Ford will bypass debate and public hearings for his latest grabber law? This legislation gives the province dictatorial powers that override local laws. Surely this is front-page news.

Eva Marsh, Copetown

We've lost personal interaction

Re: Machines are here to stay (Dec. 7)

I strongly disagree with Deborah Gale's assessment of the need to increase self-checkout kiosks at the retail sector. We are heading down a path of fewer and fewer opportunities for people to interact with each other with a “good morning” or “have a nice day.” Many of us can remember our first job. Usually part time and possibly working in retail as a cashier or other job interacting with the public. We learned communication skills, social skills and responsibility to make our shift and get paid.

By switching to self-checkouts, we deny many, especially our youth, the opportunity to acquire job skills to further their employment careers. While employment theft is a concern, strong direction, a living wage and rules from each employer can be a deterrent to theft. We need to stop hunkering down in our places of living, going online and ordering everything from cars to groceries. We need the human touch back to improve our societal behaviours before it is too late.

Nancy LoSchiavo, Stoney Creek

Make CPR training mandatory

Re: Taylor Swift's music can save your life? A new report says ... yes (Dec. 5)

Loved Vinay Menon's column Tuesday regarding CPR and Taylor Swift. Hey, if they can make snow tires mandatory in Quebec, why can't we make CPR and first aid training mandatory in Canada? He has a good point, but not necessarily to Taylor Swift's music!

Linda Ferrie, Waterdown

We must fix primary care

Re: Fixing the primary care crisis is underway. Now we need action (Dec. 6)

Primary care is both the foundation and the heart of health care, and the column written by Danielle Martin and Andrew Pinto was so precisely right on, that I was moved to write my first letter to the editor. The changes and investment in primary care they discuss are exactly what we need to enable us to “fix” the entire system. My family is one of the very fortunate, enrolled in a family health team.

I was recently diagnosed with pneumonia, was seen within a day, expertly assessed (by a physician assistant), sent for an X-ray, the results of which were communicated to my family health team before I even arrived home, and within five hours of the initial visit, my husband was picking up my antibiotics at the pharmacy. What a different story this might have been for another senior without the care I was privileged to receive. Martin is a Canadian hero who with confidence defended our health system before a United States Senate subcommittee and who, if we would only have the good sense to listen to her, could lead us to the primary care system we need.

Rhoda Reardon, Burlington

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Having courage is what makes peace possible



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Courage is defined in Webster's as “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty.” Not that we don't know courage when we see it. But it's a good time to consider it because courage, it seems to me, is the story of 2023.

Then again, in war, courage might be the story of any year. God knows there are always enough wars. I read of a man with one eye because of what happened in America's civil war. When someone said in his presence that he'd lost an eye, he responded, “I prefer to remember that I've kept one.” That's courage.

Canadians don't follow every war. We don't know much about war in, say, Sudan. Or Maghreb. Or Myanmar. Or Yemen. We know Ukraine, where war's machinations still grind after almost two years, everyday Ukrainians still under Russian attack. There's courage.

And we know of Israel's brutal military attacks in Gaza, innocent Palestinian civilians caught in the bloodstained gears of war. It's like Greek historian Thucydides put it centuries ago: “The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must.”

Grieving Palestinians know courage.

Then, Israeli families still waiting for loved ones to return after Hamas' barbaric, Stone-Age-like massacre of Oct. 7. These families, too, know courage.

Hamas' military wing — to be clear, a terror group — is better acquainted with cowardice than courage. For Hamas to include Israel's destruction in its founding constitution is akin to evil that grew in Nazi Germany. We know how that ended. Learn about Hamas' Hitler-like leader, Yahya Sinwar.

Planning the Oct. 7 massacre for years, Sinwar knew two things. One, Hamas could lure Israel's military into Gaza and, in this, uphold changing geopolitical relationships. Arab nations, Saudi Arabia chief among them, were developing close-



SPENCER PLATT GETTY IMAGES FILE PHOTO

Soldiers, family and members of the public attend the funeral for an Israeli soldier on Monday in Jerusalem. Courage is like the oxygen we need. Hatred, on the other hand, is always self-defeating, like drinking poison, then expecting it to kill your enemy, Thomas Froese writes.

er political and economic ties with Israel. Hamas and its dominant supporter, Iran, couldn't stand it any longer.

Hamas leadership also realized how Palestinian civilians could be human shields. The disturbing carnage, especially over time, would force Arab nations, along with the watching world, to condemn Israel. So while Hamas can't defeat Israel militarily, it can try to trigger, slowly, its ultimate dream, the end of the Jewish state.

In either case, courage is what you'll find in the fog and hell of it all, of war, among both the just and unjust.

You might also find courage next door.

“I'm completely at your mercy,” is what a Jewish physician said when we finished a recent conversation. It was a plea, because the truth, he told me, is that Jews in our community can feel more threatened than in Israel.

He knows. After Oct. 7, he volunteered his medical services in Ashdod, Israel. When back, he learned of a Hamilton public school boy. “Are you Jewish?” his schoolmates asked. “Yes,” said the boy. “We'll find you and kill you,” was the response.

Despite such animated anti-semitism, an old global sickness

that Canada isn't immune to, the physician hangs an Israeli flag outside his front door. Courage.

Courage is like the oxygen we need. Hatred, on the other hand, is always self-defeating, like drinking poison, then expecting it to kill your enemy. There's a better way.

“Let us put an end to wars, let us reshape life on the solid basis of equity and truth,” is how Anwar Sadat, former president of Egypt, put it. Forty-five years ago, on Dec. 10, 1978, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Sadat, jointly with Israel's prime minister, Menachem Begin.

A former military commander, Sadat, as Egypt's president, attacked Israeli forces in 1973's Yom Kippur War, the fourth Arab-Israeli war. He understood war, and Israel, well. But later the more statesman-like Sadat became the first Arab leader to officially visit Israel. Then, after decades of hostilities, Egypt and Israel made historic peace. It still stands.

Courage is what makes peace possible. Even so, Egypt's Arab neighbours never forgave Sadat for it. And militants eventually assassinated him. There were cowards then, too. It's something else to remember.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM

Wishing and hoping

DEIRDRE PIKE

I've had a song on repeat this week, waiting for one hope-filled lyric to come around again.

“A long December, and there's reason to believe, maybe this year will be better than the last.”

This year has been a bit rough in our dwelling place, with grief as our new housemate. Fifteen days into January, my mom died. Her unexpected death at 88 came as a surprise, “like a thief in the night,” but it was not a total shock.

Eight days later, my partner's mom died at 95. Corry's death was expected, but not right at that moment. Hello, 2023. Hello to grief.

My mom was not part of the death-denying culture. She read the obituaries every day. We often joked about her last wish to be carried out of her apartment in a pine box. I told her she'd have to fall and hit her head pretty hard for that to happen.

“No half-measures,” I quipped, and she would laugh in return.

Ultimately, it took three falls over six months and required an unwanted move from the apartment she loved to a retirement home she loathed to get to that figurative pine box.

In fact, we buried her ashes in a rosewood box just last August, in her hometown of Glencoe, Ont.

The morning she died, I awoke to a message from the emergency room doctor at London's University Hospital. I knew I was on my way to say goodbye.

I calmly gathered up the things I might need for the day ahead and hit the road, wishing and hoping the DNR order would not be needed before I arrived.

A nurse walked me down to the emergency room bay where my mom was lying under a light blue blanket, breathing with an oxygen mask. I felt calm as I held her and stroked her hair, telling her how much I loved her and what a great mom she had been.

Then I had a realization. I wanted her to have some personal things around her as she died, so I made a quick trip to her retirement home, making it back just in the nick of time. My mom took her last breath under a treasured quilt with her favourite silk scarf around her neck for style and warmth.

Hardeep, one of many caring nurses, responded kindly to my request for scissors and a container to cut and save a lock of my mom's hair.

Kennedy, another nurse with loads of compassion, listened to me tell stories about my mom while she removed the IV and catheter. Then together, we washed my mom's body. It was so peaceful.

Six months after she died, I received an invitation to a “Compassion Symposium,” marking 10 years of the 3 Wishes Project. It was new to me, but when the day was over, I knew my mom and I had experienced the very benefits of this made-in-Hamilton project, now replicated far beyond Hamilton, including in the U.S. and the U.K.

Dr. Deborah Cook, an intensivist in the ICU at St. Joseph's Healthcare, is one of the founding members of the project designed to help patients and families “make meaningful memories at the end of life.”

Sometimes the three wishes include bringing in the family pet, tasting a favourite food or experiencing the outdoors one last time.



DEIRDRE PIKE

Lucy Pike celebrates her 88th birthday at the Keg, just eight weeks before she died on Jan. 15.

On other occasions, Dr. Cook says there isn't time for those responses, and three simple measures — thumbprints, ECG tracings and locks of hair — help to ease people's grief. Dr. Anne Boyle, a palliative care doctor at St. Joseph's who helped give rise to this project, says it's not just for the family and patients, but 3 Wishes “provides the foundation for building resiliency in clinicians.”

One resident who was finding conversations about death and dying difficult found understanding through the task of sourcing one man's request for a last taste of real maple syrup before he died.

Death is hard, especially in an ICU or emergency ward. You never know what might ease the pain and even create positive memories for those dying and those left behind, but 3 Wishes is willing to have the conversation.

DEIRDRE PIKE IS A FREELANCE CONTRIBUTOR TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR. SHE CAN BE REACHED AT DEIRDREPIKE@GMAIL.COM.