

# A fine imagination can save your life



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

I'm no expert, but I've been thinking about problems lately. And children. And their stories.

You know, there's that lovable bear, Pooh, exploring the Hundred Acre Wood. And Peter, the boy who never grew up but learned to fly. Or that tiny spider, Charlotte, determined to save her dear friend, a pig, from slaughter. And the little girl, Alice, sliding into a strange world where she's never quite the right size. And other stories, so many.

Children, if they're worth their salt (and most are), rarely allow adult hang-ups to slow them down. A large stuffed Winnie-the-Pooh that I found one day in Yemen, where children are loved dearly, sits in our home as a reminder. Take yourself too seriously (Pooh never does) and your problems will just increase.

I recently read about a girl, Jenna, who got out of sorts with her problems, seemingly delivered express by some troublemaker appointed just for her. The girl, comparing herself with others (never a good idea), sets out to find a different bag of troubles, lighter and easier to manage, only to discover that she'd rather keep hers.

Into this comes today, its many problems slung, apparently randomly, around the planet, eight billion or so bags if we each get one. Should we call today "International Day of the Problem?" The phrase "Houston, we have a problem," in fact, originated on April 13.

On April 13, 1970, Apollo 13, intended as NASA's third moon landing, blew an oxygen tank and appeared to doom its three-man crew to death in space. Astronaut John (Jack) Swigert announced "Ah, Houston, we've had a problem here," which, later, in the 1995 movie "Apollo 13," and in popular usage, became the well-known, "Houston, we have a problem."

It's true. Problems abound. Washington, we have a problem. Moscow, we have a problem. Beijing, we have a problem. Ottawa, we have a problem. Hamilton, we have a problem. And behind your front door? And mine? We have a problem.

My problems, so tiny in the face of the cosmos, have often involved waiting, like when sailing. You can raise your sail, but raising the wind is an entirely different matter. The other tricky matter is seeing half straight what a problem even is. Someone once said, don't stir a muddy puddle. It's not a problem. But don't ignore a leaking ceiling or it worsens. Know which is which.

There's no sense worrying about tomorrow, of course, because tomorrow brings its own worries and a fresh batch of problems. Some ship, if not a spaceship, will go down. Or maybe a ship will crash into some bridge. Maybe it will crash into your very life; like tomorrow, April 14, is the day the Titanic crashed into that iceberg.

But tomorrow, or today, like any day, we get out there with our assorted problems because, really, what choice is there? More so, if not you or me, who will help fix what's broken?

In the case of Apollo 13, the crew survived by using its lunar module, normally used only for the moon's surface, as a space lifeboat. With their God-given imagination, NASA engineers also figured out how to use only a plastic bag, cardstock, a spacesuit hose, and, naturally, duct tape, to jury-rig a carbon dioxide filter so those astronauts could breathe on their journey back home.

Which is to say that there are worse things to have than a fine imagination. It can save your life. This, by the way, relates to the power of story, the distilled truth found in fiction. Also, isn't it the imaginative children of the world who live closer to the unseen kingdom of heaven, more attune to its mystery, that enigmatic home that we long for and, yet, have somehow forgotten?

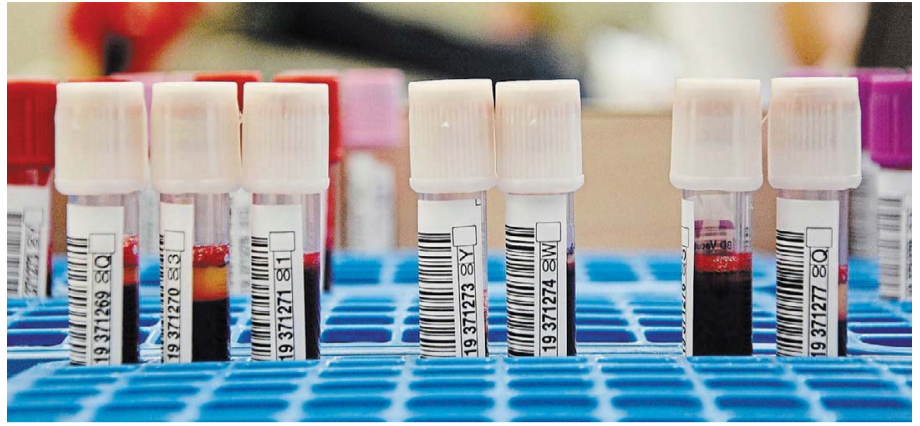
Some people will tell you otherwise, that children and children's stories and imaginative ways are just a waste of time. But you can ignore them. Those dull souls will never fly.

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



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

NASA engineers figured out how to use a plastic bag, cardstock, a spacesuit hose and, naturally, duct tape, to jury-rig a carbon dioxide filter so the astronauts of Apollo 13 could breathe on their journey back home, 54 years ago today.



CHRIS SIMON TORSTAR FILE PHOTO

Paid plasma collection opens the door to privatizing Canada's blood supply, putting profits before patient needs in the market-driven global environment, Doreen Nicoll writes.

## Paying for plasma a slippery slope

DOREEN NICOLL

In the 1980s, hemophiliacs received Factor VIII treatment that was contaminated with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C.

The tainted blood scandal forced the industry to re-examine mitigating risk to patients. That included reconsidering the practice of pooling large volumes of blood and plasma from different sources.

An investigation into the tainted blood and plasma supply culminated in the Krever Inquiry (1997), with over 50 recommendations, including invoking the precautionary principle. That report and its recommendations are still considered the gold standard around the world.

Canadian Blood Services (CBS) became Canada's blood authority in 1998. In 2022, CBS held backroom meetings with Grifols, a Spanish multinational pharmaceutical and chemical manufacturer and the largest worldwide producer of plasma products.

These discussions would eventually manifest into a private-public partnership (P3) intended to privatize the Canadian plasma supply system.

The deal would make CBS a major stakeholder financially profiting from the harvesting and selling of Canadian plasma.

During a 2022 interview I had with Kat Lanteigne, co-founder and executive director of BloodWatch.org, she stated, "fundamentally, the question is and has always been, should we privatize blood collection in Canada? And,

should we be making a profit off of Canadian plasma?"

Lanteigne went on to say, "it's an unconscionable act because they (CBS) are a charity. And, that's getting missed in this discussion."

Over 40 per cent of the intravenous immune globulin (IV Ig) that is used worldwide is not based on clinical evidence. Even the auditor general of Ontario has determined that plasma products are being overused. Yet, profitability has led to the aggressive, for-profit plasma-collection industry.

Health Canada doesn't regulate for-profit plasma collection companies, they just license them. That means restricting these corporations falls on provincial and territorial governments.

In 2014, Ontario passed the Voluntary Blood Protection Act prohibiting for-profit plasma centres. That year, the Wynne government prevented a total of three paid plasma-collection sites from opening.

BloodWatch.org has confirmation in writing from Health Canada that should this contract be carried out, the plasma collected at these sites could be sold on the international market by CBS or Grifols without violating either federal or provincial law. That would undermine the plasma supply chain in Ontario and potentially across Canada.

Europe limits plasma donations to once every two weeks. CBS recommends donating no more than once every seven days. In the U.S., where folks can sell their plasma twice a week, over 80 per cent of the plasma is collected from vulnerable, poor and abject poor populations.

## Strong mayoral power is not moral authority

JIM YOUNG

The mayors of Hamilton and Burlington are in the news over strong-mayor powers granted to them by changes to Ontario's Municipal Act.

Hamilton's Mayor Andrea Horwath chose to use that power to overturn a council decision and build affordable housing on a city-owned Stoney Creek parking lot, while Burlington's Marianne Meed Ward recently announced she will not submit to a request by Burlington city council to relinquish her strong-mayor powers, stating:

"There (is) no ability for municipalities or mayors to 'opt out' of this legislation... Three of the new powers and duties under the legislation can be delegated to staff or council. Most cannot and are now established powers and duties of the mayor... I am committed to fulfilling these required responsibilities to the best of my ability and with the primary goal of serving the best interests of our community... It has appeared to me to be politically performative to delegate the three powers... It is more transparent and accountable to openly acknowledge these powers and duties exist, and then work with staff and our community to determine how we will govern together in this new context."

Effective municipal government is not derived from any special "powers" granted to one elected of-

ficial over other, equally elected, ones. It derives from the successful interaction of elected officials, city staff, residents and stakeholders in that unwieldy and often untidy process we call local democracy.

Democracy is not threatened by this messy discourse, even by profound disagreement. It is, in fact, strengthened by these characteristics if they are conducted with honesty and integrity.

Democracy is, however, threatened by absolutes of power, by the imposed rule of one pillar of authority over others. Those who would employ strong powers should be mindful that the power bestowed upon them derives from two sources: There exists a "moral" as well as any "legislated" authority to govern.

Strong-mayor powers come from a provincial government that has not been friendly to municipalities, cutting the time for municipalities to consider amendments to city plans, reducing development charges paid to municipalities for infrastructure costs, pushing municipal expansion into the Greenbelt, failing to see the value of fourplexes in solving a housing crisis and undermining local decision-making at every opportunity.

Is this the model of governance we want the mayors of our cities to follow?

Prior to Premier Doug Ford's changes, the Municipal Act provid-

Frequent plasma sellers experience higher rates of lower blood protein levels, increased risk of infection, and liver and kidney problems.

The for-profit plasma industry has targeted racialized and disadvantaged neighbourhoods drawing from those living with chronic poverty, the unhoused, university students and middle-class families suffering economic hardship.

Selling plasma often becomes an important source of income to make ends meet.

However, selling a part of one's body should never be a viable solution to poverty.

The World Health Organization (WHO) had a goal to make worldwide blood and plasma donations 100 per cent voluntary by 2020. The WHO also believes every country should be working toward self-sufficiency.

Paid plasma collection opens the door to privatizing Canada's blood supply, putting profits before patient needs in the market-driven global environment. That will turn blood and plasma into commodities to be bought by the highest international bidder.

This push for privatization is happening after CBS received \$20 million to open 11 plasma donation centres during COVID-19. Donation rates were so overwhelming that CBS planned 11 additional donation centres.

BloodWatch.org has organized a letter-writing campaign and is encouraging Ontarians to contact Health Minister Sylvia Jones, their MPP and MP requesting the Ontario Voluntary Blood Protection Act be upheld.

Bravo Mayor Andrea Horwath for making Hamilton a "paid-plasma-free" city.

Hear from those who know exactly why Canada needs a moratorium placed on paying for plasma.

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ed sufficient powers for elected officials to govern our cities. Mayoral and council powers were presumed, by most of us, to come from the electorate, from the ability of elected councils and an elected mayor to collegially or acrimoniously, arrive at decisions they felt were best for our cities, the very act of being elected bestowed a definitive moral authority to govern, a moral authority that strong mayoral power is utterly bereft of.

While understanding that mayors Horwath and Meed Ward may see extra powers as expedient or efficient in pursuit of virtuous ends, the use of these powers undermines our democratic processes and as such, we must in good conscience, question their use of them.

Our mayors would serve our cities better by ignoring the "strong power" bestowed by a divisive government, allowing such powers as may be "delegated back to council" under the act to be so delegated, relying instead on the moral authority conferred by the electorate.

When Ford's housing strategy fails, as it seems destined to do, and he runs out of ways to backtrack and flip-flop, voters will demand accountability. When that happens, Ford will happily deflect responsibility for his government's failings back onto those municipal mayors who used strong-mayor powers to push through his failing agenda.

It would be unfortunate to lose two good mayors in a backlash against the short-sighted strong-mayor powers the province dangled before them in the guise of political expediency.

BURLINGTON'S JIM YOUNG OCCASIONALLY COMMENTS ON LOCAL ISSUES.