

LETTERS

Homelessness goes on and on

Re: City hauls away RV, but homeless remain (June 12)

I read with interest the article about the Grant family that live in trailers at the Barton-Tiffany brownfield. (Located where the football stadium should have been built.) I remembered reading about them some month ago, so the saga continues. I almost croaked when I read, "later this month, Baird's division (the city's housing director) will present a report to council on further action to address homelessness."

A report. Later this month. Come on! This should have been worked on two years ago in consultation with the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and all the other groups out there that have information that could have resulted in an immediate action plan. I think all the personnel in the various departments and council members need to change their modus operandi! Obviously, what they are doing is not helping to resolve the homelessness problem in a timely manner.

The article also stated city politicians have pointed to a lack of federal and provincial funding. How many times have I read or heard that? Again, if the city had hired a professional lobbyist two years ago to go after some funding, maybe we would have some by now.

The only upside I see is that I can buy a bond and invest with Indwell's housing initiative. Unlike the city, I believe they make a plan, stick to it and then they get the job done.

Susan Woodrow, Hamilton

Poillievre willing to face reality

Re: Poillievre's vision should alarm all but the very rich (June 14)

Linda McQuaig goes to great lengths to paint Pierre Poillievre and his vision as a scary and cruel future for Canada. She makes no mention of the fact that the massive increase in national debt that has happened under Justin Trudeau's watch puts the very programs we hold dear as Canadians in jeopardy now and in the future.

The rich have the ways and means to largely avoid the redistribution of their wealth. Reaching into the pockets of the rich and middle class plays well with some voters, but the real danger is ignoring the future costs of continuing to pile up debt at the expense of future generations. Poillievre is willing to face this reality while Trudeau seems to avoid even thinking about how we will afford essential services in the future.

Calvin Ellens, Hamilton

Be careful what you wish for

Re: Taxpayers need a break (June 14)

A letter writer bemoans his Hamilton transit levy, for a service he claims never to use. He strongly promotes a "user pay" philosophy. I can only assume he will be happy to pay his road resurfacing levy, traffic signal maintenance levy, sidewalk repair levy, parking lot operations and control levy and white line paint levy. All taxpayer-supported city costs of which drivers, as road users, seem blissfully unaware.

Jim Young, Burlington

What do we offer visitors?

Thursday's Spectator had a beautiful insert beckoning me to "Discover Brantford."

I have visitors coming from Lithuania mid-September and am racking my brain for ideas of where to take them and what to do. My friends only have a few ideas. After Dundurn Castle, Sam Lawrence Park, Albion Falls and the market, I have no ideas.

I love Hamilton and wish we could also produce such a booklet. Or should I just take them to Brantford?

Dalia Jonikas, Hamilton

Questioning the numbers

Re: Doug Ford seems to think the Greenbelt scandal is over — it's not (June 11)

The article states exactly 350 irreplaceable acres of farmland are being lost daily to urbanization, gravel mining, and other development. That's an area three times a size of Burlington and almost the size of the city of Toronto every year.

I'm not sure where these numbers come from, but they make no sense. It's certainly not land being lost in the Greenbelt. New single-family home usually take up about 1/6 of an acre. Ontario builds about 25,000 single-family homes a year. That's about 4,000 or 5,000 acres per year or about 15 acres per day. High-density development occurs mostly an existing urban areas, especially in Toronto. Thus, very few new acres are required for these new homes.

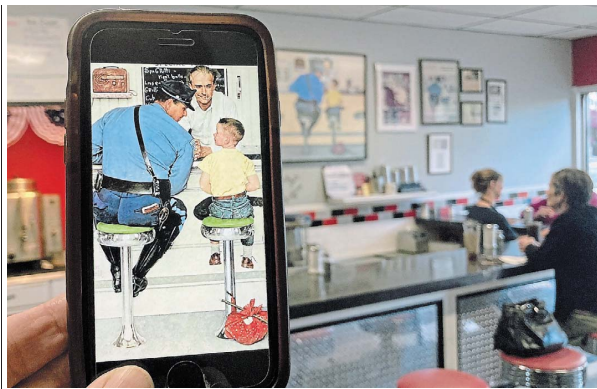
Driving south from Mount Hope, I see no development until I hit the border at Caledonia. There I see acres of farmland, being gobbled up by new homes. Obviously, the Greenbelt doesn't save all farmland. We've just created a situation where people just have to commute further to go to work. Maybe we should plan to run the LRT from Caledonia to Hamilton.

Gary Akema, Flamborough



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THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

The view from inside Joe's Diner in Lee, Mass., used by Norman Rockwell for his well-known 1958 illustration "The Runaway." Commenting on "The Runaway" and Father's Day, Thomas Froese writes, "In a way we're all homeless vagabonds."

A day to celebrate where we come from



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

In a way we're all homeless vagabonds, it seems to me, running from one fear or another.

In my case, when younger, I ran from home because of issues, and because any young man or woman, even from a fine home, needs to leave sometime to find some authenticity.

The first time I ran, I mopped floors in a mall and lived with friends. The second time, I sold vacuums and lived in a dumpy hotel called The Leonard.

By the time I announced to my father I was leaving again, this time to extended family, he said he'd break my legs.

Of course it's hard to get far with broken legs. Regardless, I left again. Fifteen years later my father — remember, fathers have their own fears — was still so sore that he told my bride-to-be that he'd boycott our wedding unless the prodigal son, so-to-speak, returned to make amends.

It comes to mind because my bride and I — we married 23 years ago — took a road trip recently. We knew our destination, but didn't realize that it was in Norman Rockwell country, where the renowned American illustrator had lived for

many years.

In small-town Massachusetts, three hours from Boston, we even found ourselves in Joe's Diner, the location in Rockwell's illustration, "The Runaway." It shows a runaway boy sitting in a diner, a large policeman beside him, the boy's message bag of belongings nearby. It's No. 302 of 322 cover illustrations that Rockwell drew for The Saturday Evening Post.

As you might imagine, it's close to my heart.

I've had a print of "The Runaway" hanging on one wall or another for more than 30 years. Then, somehow, I was there, unplanned, sitting on that diner stool with my burger and fries and astonishment, really, wondering about it all: running and grace and ungrace and these important matters.

I share for two reasons. First, I'm not alone. Neither are you. No family is perfect. Some are great. Most are a mixed bag. Some are toxic. In fact, before stumbling upon Joe's Diner, my bride and I, while driving, learned about one family while listening to author and journalist Philip Yancey read his backstory, his recently-released autobiography, "Where the Light Fell."

When he was a one-year-old, Yancey's father died. Needlessly. Then his mother led the home with ungrace, if not, sometimes, religiously-driven evil. Listening, at times I thought my head would explode. Philip somehow managed. His old-

er brother Marshall? Not so much. In her 90s, mother sent Marshall a contrite letter. His response? "It's 45 years late."

"What power has kept them from speaking for half a century? The same force of stubborn pride that so often divides families, neighbours, politicians, races and nations," writes Yancey.

His many published titles have sold 17 million copies in dozens of languages. Now we know why these books often explore human suffering, disappointment and God's grace.

So, no, we're not alone. I share also because it's Father's Day weekend. And despite messy families, and sometimes messy fathers, it's still a day to celebrate. We're not celebrating a perfect world or perfect people, after all. We're celebrating where we come from: life, even from brokenness. This is the human condition.

My own father, by the way, never broke my legs. And years later he did attend my wedding, giving a father-of-the-groom speech better than most. Later, he knew his grandchildren well. I made sure. So with some work, and some grace, sometimes roads can lead to surprising places.

If I live long enough I'll keep that old Rockwell print for 30 more years. To me it expresses the good grace, if not good humour, that's involved in breaking those difficult family cycles that need breaking.

In my own family we've even named our dog Grace. Like that other grace, Grace needs care. Plenty. Daily. But when this dog runs, especially between some favourite tombstones, you should see her go. THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM.

Can we reverse the biodiversity crisis?

BRIAN MCHATTIE

Faced with a global biodiversity crisis, countries around the world are responding with Canada and Hamilton (yes, Hamilton!) playing an important role.

In December 2022, the world came to Montreal to address the biodiversity crisis: the result was signing of the Global Biodiversity Framework committing countries to protect 30 per cent of land and waters by 2030.

A number of positive actions are being taken at city hall. In March 2019 Hamilton City Council declared a Climate Change Emergency, and in August 2022 supported a Climate Action Strategy establishing a well-funded Office of Climate Change; in June 2023, Hamilton council signed on to the Montreal Pledge — Cities United in Action for Biodiversity. Council has also supported the Urban Indigenous Strategy which has the potential to provide a leadership forum for "land back" discussions with local First Nations and urban Indigenous peoples who have been protecting these lands for millennia.

This month, city council is expected to approve the Hamilton Biodiversity Action Plan. Although we are all eager to see this happen, it is important to temper our enthusi-

asm with concerns over whether the plan will lead to systems-level change, as this is not Hamilton's first big environmental plan.

Way back in 1990, the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth planning department took the bold step of preparing a plan known as Vision 2020 following on the United Nations report, Our Common Future.

As a member of the Hamilton Naturalists' Club, I sat on the task force on sustainable development supported by the largest public consultation process in Hamilton history, resulting in the 1995 Towards a Sustainable Region Official Plan document. Despite so much effort, the plan's policy recommendations to protect natural areas failed spectacularly. In fact, I bet many of you have never even heard of Vision 2020 despite that date passing just four short years ago.

What went wrong? While full of well-researched ideas, the land use planning system in the city didn't change. Senior municipal planning staff continually put forth land use applications from developers situated in and around environmentally significant areas, recommending council approval. The development applications were approved one by one, resulting in the cumulative removal of hundreds of thousands of trees, significant loss of wetlands,

and a legacy of channelized creeks. By all accounts, this approach continues today with implementation of the warehouse plan around the airport and expansion of Highway 6 with the headwaters of several streams, wetlands and forests hanging in the balance.

One of the few developments that was stopped occurred in the Pleasantview area of Dundas in 1995. Both the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth and the Town of Dundas supported a large housing development. The Dundas Conservancy Society appealed council decisions to the then Ontario Municipal Board and won.

Clearly no more habitat loss can be sustained, full stop. Moreover, in order to achieve ecosystem integrity, the Biodiversity Action Plan must lead us to ambitious levels of habitat restoration never before seen.

As noted American ecologist Aldo Leopold stated in his seminal 1949 work, "A Sand County Almanac": "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." Way back then, he was talking about values. Following our Hamilton community values of stewardship and justice, lets all participate in habitat restoration and most importantly get involved in overseeing the municipal land use system to ensure that the Biodiversity Action Plan will be more successful than Vision 2020.

BRIAN MCHATTIE IS A NATURALIST, PARTIALLY-RETIRED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNER AND FORMER WARD 1 COUNCILLOR.