

LETTERS

Tackle the cause, not outcome

Re: Hamilton to experiment with new algae fighting tools, Dec. 4

Reading of this future work to clean up the algae in Hamilton Harbour reminds me of a dog owner fed up with cleaning up after his dog in the house and cursing the mess but never thinking of training the dog. You can't vacuum up the whole bay.

To fix the harbour, the whole community has to act to significantly reduce the nutrients flowing into the bay.

The city should put the \$500,000 into a campaign to get property owners to stop using fertilizers on lawns, to reduce hard surfaces on their properties, install rain gardens on residential, commercial and public lands and encourage green swaths along drainage channels in agricultural areas. Ban drain pipes from going into storm sewers. These are the simple steps leading to a big correction. There are many more.

The science is there. People do not understand how each one of us adds to the problem and how each one of us can contribute to the solution. Until we all care about the water and learn how we are harming it, the bay will only suffer and ourselves along with it. Remember where our drinking water comes from.

Bruce Mackenzie, Grimsby

More destruction on the way

It appears that Metrolinx is once again on its path of destruction of wide swaths of Hamilton. Not content with creating a large area on King Street that looks like a war zone and displacing many people (many of whom now live in tents), the powers to be are now embarking on a new wave of destruction.

The properties to be demolished are mostly in West Hamilton but not exclusively — the list of properties to be expropriated fills multiple full pages in the newspaper. Metrolinx's latest effort will see many more people displaced while our city councillors sit idly by. I pray this folly will end, but I don't hold much hope.

Paul John Phillips, Dundas

Use buses for LRT experiment

There has been ongoing debate regarding Hamilton's LRT project. A simple low-cost test to learn honestly what people think it would be like to have the buses on the route stop only at the proposed LRT stops for a month or perhaps even a week and review the comments.

This or something like it should have been done when the project was first brought forward as there would be comments from potential users.

Craig Thompson, Hamilton

Voting splitting needs to stop

Re: The Ford way of running Ontario, Dec. 5
Re: There goes democracy, Dec. 5

Columnists Edward Keenan and Joan Little effectively outlined staggering mismanagement by the headstrong Ford government. Alas, the Progressive Conservatives will be difficult to unseat in the next election given their strong majority, formidable fundraising and record spending on partisan advertising.

There's a real danger the three opposition parties, led by capable leaders, may well ensure another Tory majority if they split the anti-government vote. The 2022 election, when the Progressive Conservatives won 40.8 per cent of the popular vote while the NDP and Liberals had 23.7 and 23.8 per cent respectively, speaks volumes.

It's time the opposition leaders consider strategic co-operation as envisioned by Steve Paikin, host of TVO's Agenda. Paikin's "non-aggression pact," as he calls it, would see the parties divide ridings. They would choose candidates according to which person, party label aside, has the best chance of defeating a PC candidate in each constituency.

While a position co-ordination wouldn't necessarily end Progressive Conservative rule, it would offer hope of holding the Ford government to a more accountable minority at least.

Gord McNulty, Hamilton

Ford is on the right track

Say what you want about Doug Ford, but his move to override the courts by giving cities and police the power to dismantle the camps in our parks is the smartest move he could have made and basically the only move.

You have to wonder why Andrea Horwath is not on the list of mayors who have appealed to Ford weeks ago about the deplorable conditions our parks are in. Does she plan to walk in the parks and pick up the dirty needles herself?

The situation has become out of hand and it will only become worse, especially if our courts continue to allow our public spaces to become dumping grounds for drug paraphernalia and escalating violence.

Something has to be done and this initiative Ford has put forth is one of the best solutions anyone has brought forward.

Linda Ferris, Watford



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THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

The Costanzo family, of Dundas, from left, Gigi, 8, Roslyn, Viggo, 13, and Mike, watch the end of the solar eclipse earlier this year. The celestial event was a significant story of 2024 because of how it connected us as a larger human family, Thomas Froese says.

Something to get quiet about



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Here's a fun fact: "The Sound of Silence," the hit song by Simon and Garfunkel, has turned 60.

Its birthday slipped by somewhat silently (naturally) several weeks ago. It's a reminder about the importance of silence, and how we need it like we need food or air.

Now, silence is something you may not know if you have young kids, or if you're otherwise struggling in our discontented times, one voice or another screaming for your attention.

But in the category of 2024's Story of the Year, my vote goes to the solar eclipse, an event that got you, me and millions to look up, to take notice. Then we got silent together.

Imagine. Seen across a swath of Mexico, the U.S. and Canada, this eclipse unfolded on April 8. That's more than 5,000 years, according to NASA, after humans likely recorded an eclipse for the first time, with rock carvings found in what's now Ireland.

Now we easily take photos. A favourite of mine is of a local family huddled on their front porch, protective glasses on, watching the sky while eclipse shadows fade.

For a collective moment, we actually shut our mouths and opened

our eyes. It wasn't the nativity scene in the carol "Silent Night," but more of a Silent Day. Even the animals got quiet.

Maybe a car passed you, headlights on in mid-afternoon. Then we all looked up, together, at something larger than ourselves. It was eerily silent.

Day became night. It's no small deal.

These celestial events remind us that we're connected as a larger human family. They remind us we're vulnerable, even in our sophisticated and artificially-intelligent times, to mysterious forces.

And Advent — tomorrow is the second Sunday of Advent — is an especially apt time to think of it. Because Advent, a season of waiting, is also a time of reflecting on light and darkness.

Into this comes Jesus, the rabbi-teacher from ancient Israel, especially known for his passion to love and heal people who weren't particularly easy to love.

He'd see them fully, in all their ways, and then love them, regardless. In this, the iconoclastic provocateur turned lives, then history, upside down. This is Christ. "I am the light of the world. Come follow me."

Now seasonal lights dot our neighbourhoods and cities.

They pierce the darkness. And maybe the order of earthly things is still being upended in surprising ways.

One illustration I appreciate is

Raymond Carver's short story "Cathedral."

It's about a blind man, Robert, who visits a weed-smoking, heavy-drinking, hard-living character; the story's unnamed narrator, a man who's disconnected from community and life and himself.

Ironically, it's Robert, the blind man with a long Gandalf-like beard, who sees life more clearly. So he helps "Bub," his host, the narrator, see his own need, and, in this, helps him find a measure of peace and freedom.

This, after the two men draw close, and after they, strangely, hand-on-hand, literally draw a cathedral, together.

Not that Carver cared for religion. He didn't. But he cared for healing. And good writers leave room for mystery, the sort of mystery found in cathedrals, those old stone edifices built masterfully with care and patience, sometimes over generations, with the hope that they'd eventually capture even an echo of heaven.

You've heard of the recent restoration of Paris' Notre Dame Cathedral?

Even so — and here's the funny truth of it — the real house, the actual place God wants to live, isn't in any majestic stone building. It's, surprise, in you. And in me. In our fleshiest innermost being, our most vulnerable, even dark, places.

This is what Jesus claimed about God's lasting home, where, like in a sort of eclipse of the heart, the light will overcome the darkness.

It's something to think about. It's really something. It's something to get quiet about. Wherever you are. Because it seems to me that this is not the story of the year. It's the story of any year.

FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

A very spooky non-urgent 911 call



WILLIAM THOMAS
OPINION

At about the same time Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow was launching an educational ad campaign to reduce the number of 911 calls tying up the city's emergency lines, Cori's husband Mat was curling up on the couch in their living room in Kingston to watch an episode of their favourite series "What We Do in the Shadows."

As Chow explained to reporters during a news conference at Toronto police headquarters that three of every 10 calls to 911 do not constitute emergencies and are clogging hotlines, Mat was watching the scene in this creepy, dark, funny, horror series where Shanice discovers her roommate Jenna in bed and unconscious and screams "Siri! Call 911!"

It's important to note that the Toronto mayor did not single out the woman who called 911 for directions to get home from a Drake concert or the guy who dropped his nose ring down the shower drain or the person who complained an Uber Eats order was taking too long. So she had no reason to suspect

what Mat was up to.

You see, when the TV character yelled "Siri! Call 911!" Cori and Mat's own household Siri followed that command and dialed 911 as well.

As Toronto's mayor was explaining that all 911 calls require an immediate response from police, fire or ambulance officers, Cori and Mat's phone rang. Annoyed, Mat answered.

"This is 911, what's your emergency?"

"Ah, no emergency," replied Mat, who could barely hear the dispatcher for all the screaming going on because apparently we do a lot of crazy, scary things in the shadows.

"Everything's fine," said Mat.

"But you called 911."

"No, I didn't call 911. There must be some mistake."

As mayor Chow was scolding Torontonians about non-urgent 911 calls, like the woman who had misplaced her cellphone or the guy who'd been given a bad haircut, the dime dropped for Mat.

"Oh, OK. It was Shanice on TV who called 911 when she found her roommate Jenna unconscious and ..."

"Siri, the call came from your household."

"No, no. It's all a big mistake because ..."

"Then why is there so much

screaming?"

"Because the 911 ambulance showed up and Jenna wasn't dead after all, and she jumped out of the ambulance, and everybody screamed. Plus she's a vampire."

"So, you did not call 911?"

"No, Siri called 911."

"Is Siri your wife?"

"No, Cori's my wife."

Dispatcher, who always gets the last word: "The police are on their way."

Minutes later, in rode the Kingston cavalry with sirens whining and lights flashing and a family of four so spooked, it was as if they were watching a really scary episode of "What We Do in the Shadows."

After everything was explained, things calmed down.

The SWAT team was not called, and Mat was not arrested, although "Manhattan Night Club," the fourth episode of the series, was completely ruined for him. Siri's the one who should have been charged with making a non-urgent 911 call and Alexa should be put on notice. For the record, Jenna, who is a vampire, is fully recovered now and her official status is listed as undead.

In the retelling of this story, Cori's neighbour Violet repeated "Siri, call 911" and her Siri called 911. When Violet's sister Vera retold the story to me, her Siri called 911. Me? I don't have a Siri or an Alexa and I've only called 911 once to report a propane tank that died at the start of a barbecue dinner party.

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