

# Lessons from a silly old bear



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

Lately, when wandering around and doing nothing in particular, I've been reminded how the world would be a more peaceful place if we bothered more with Winnie-the-Pooh.

Now you may think an imagined bear who is of little brain and doesn't wear pants isn't someone to spend great amounts of time with. On the other hand, Winnie-the-Pooh, who's 100 years old in 2026 (Happy Birthday, bro), has been following me around for years.

First, here's today's fun fact: April 11, 1954, is known as the most boring day (hold that thought) of the 20th century. A slow news day, apparently it was entirely void of anything important happening, this according to a Cambridge University computer program True Knowledge (now Evi).

Just saying, today can be a very Pooh-like day. I first learned of Pooh when I learned to tie my shoes. I kept learning right into a university philosophy class — thank you Prof. Leo Groarke — where we read Benjamin Hoff's "The Tao of Pooh," a primer on Pooh's ways. It's best summarized here:

You: "Hello Pooh. What are you doing?"

Pooh: "Nothing."

You: "Why nothing?"

Pooh: "Because it's a nice day."

You: "Yes, it's a nice day. But you could be doing something important."

Pooh: "I am. I'm listening to what the birds and squirrels are saying."

You: "What are they saying?"

Pooh: "That it's a nice day."

This is Pooh. Unless he's getting the last drop of honey from his pot, he doesn't try hard at much.

A stream of water flows over a rock. It gets there sooner or later, wherever there is, by simply being itself. It's a modest approach to life.

You know when something happens in the right way at the right time without you getting your paws all over it? You realize even if you tried to make things happen perfectly, you couldn't have done it better, you'd have just messed it up. That's being of little brain.

True, you need a big brain to fly a rocket to the moon. But when you turn to look at Earth, that blue ball suspended in vast nothingness, you don't let your brain get in the way of the enjoyment and mystery. This too is being of little brain. It brings that peace.

Keep in mind A.A. Milne, from Winnipeg (thus "Winnie"), created Pooh after Milne's First World War experiences. The real-life Winnie, a friendly black bear cub from White River, Ont., was a mascot for Canadian infantrymen in England.

Healing from war trauma, Milne later wrote the book "Winnie-the-Pooh." Published in 1926, the book about Pooh and life in the Hundred Acre Wood connected him with his son, Christopher Robin, and with a gentler world, one of small adventures, not grand, destructive ones.

A young man like Owen Hebbert, among the brighter students I've taught and who's now studying Milne's literary career, can share more. Which is to say I've discovered the best students out there, like Pooh, don't confuse knowledge with wisdom. They're not educated idiots.

Imagine Pooh now on a world peace tour. In Australia, where kids are getting by with less social media, he'd easily speak in high praise of boredom.

Kids: "What does this have to do with world peace?"

Pooh: "When you're at peace with yourself, you're at peace with others."

This is what he seems to say when I see him, whenever I pass that rather significant stuffed Pooh bear that sits large in a space in our home — I told you he's been following me. I purchased the family keepsake in, funny enough, Yemen, during the Second Persian Gulf War. It's a daily reminder our so-called enemies love their children very much, too.

Pay attention, then, is what Pooh seems to say. Pay attention to life, to death, to everything in between.

Even small messages can lead to peaceful moments if a bear is willing to sit still enough to notice them.

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



DISNEY

This is Pooh. Unless he's getting the last drop of honey from his pot, he doesn't try hard at much, Thomas Froese writes.



GEORGIA KIRKOS

McMaster experts such as Dawn Bowdish work tirelessly to counter misinformation that drives vaccine hesitancy, Paul O'Byrne writes. This is a community challenge, he adds.

## A matter of trust and understanding

PAUL O'BYRNE

As McMaster's faculty of health sciences classes of 2026 prepare to graduate and I prepare my final convocation address as dean, I have been reflecting on an important lesson learned during my 40 years at the university: clinical evidence matters most when it is both understood and trusted.

McMaster University led the way in establishing the concept of evidence-based medicine. The term was coined by faculty member Gordon Guyatt, in an influential 1991 paper published in the American College of Physicians Journal. As difficult as it may be to believe today, many clinicians did not initially embrace the idea of using established evidence as a compass to guide clinical decisions.

Even at McMaster, the home of problem-based learning, clinicians were reluctant because they had well-established standards of care. Change was hard, but evidence-

based medicine has become widely adopted and understood.

I am very proud that the methods now used worldwide to establish the quality and impact of clinical evidence are McMaster innovations, originating here in Hamilton. The British Medical Journal recognized this as one of the 10 most impactful medical discoveries of the 20th century, together with other brilliant innovations, such as the structure of DNA, the discovery of insulin and the development of pacemakers.

We changed the world of clinical medicine, but experience taught us that evidence is not enough if it is not understood and trusted.

The lack of trust in clinical evidence became most obvious in 2020, when as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, society seemed to shut down overnight. Of course, our hospitals did not. Our students and faculty were essential members of health-care teams working in strained environments

during the pandemic. It was vital that we continued to train and graduate health-care students. McMaster's deep integration within our hospital systems reflects our responsibility to this region.

During the pandemic, the level of distrust in evidence-based treatment approaches was so high that the U.S. surgeon general issued an urgent health advisory on the severe harms of medical misinformation. While this was a particularly difficult period, I remain concerned today about how easy it has become to misunderstand and misuse health information generated on AI platforms and propagated on social media.

AI will be an immense benefit to medicine. It is improving diagnostic skills in some areas and enhancing our ability to discover and develop new drugs, such as antibiotics to fight drug-resistant bacteria, as recently demonstrated by McMaster scientist Jon Stokes. AI is also a risk. The information it provides is only as good as the information it can access, and unfortunately, some of this information is fraudulent or misleading.

A good example of what we need to address is vaccine hesitancy.

Measles rates are rising because misinformation has eroded public confidence in highly effective vaccines. Vaccines remain one of humanity's greatest medical achievements, eradicating diseases such as smallpox and polio. Despite these ongoing challenges, McMaster experts such as Dawn Bowdish work tirelessly to counter misinformation that drives vaccine hesitancy.

Another recent McMaster innovation which has become subject to misinformation is an inhaled COVID-19 vaccine, created by McMaster researchers Fiona Small and Zhou Xing. Vaccines undergo rigorous clinical trials before being approved for use, and this inhaled vaccine is currently in testing and is proving to be safe and effective.

We are all responsible for building confidence in medical decision-making, grounded in the best available clinical evidence. The health-care professionals graduating from McMaster are well prepared and deeply committed, but combating misinformation depends on more than the knowledge of well-trained health-care professionals. It is a community challenge.

We can all help address it in our everyday conversations by being curious, asking questions, and sharing credible resources.

PAUL O'BYRNE IS VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND DEAN OF THE MICHAEL J. DEGROOTE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AT MCMASTER UNIVERSITY.

### LETTERS

#### Put focus on front-line officers

Re: Put the brakes on police pay, April 9

I found this letter thoughtful, but it still misses the central issue. Hamilton's policing cost problem isn't complicated. It's overtime — and overtime is what happens when you don't have enough officers to do the job.

When shifts come up short, officers aren't normally forced to stay — they're asked. But when staying no could mean longer emergency response times or leaving a neighbourhood exposed, many feel they have little real choice. That's how burnout happens and why more officers continue to leave.

What's increasingly difficult to state seriously is the posture from some members of council, and even members of the Hamilton Police Services Board, who criticize policing costs while opposing the staffing levels needed to reduce them.

Coun. Cameron Kroetsch, who sits on both, has been a consistent voice against increasing police resources. You can't argue for better service while resisting the people required to deliver it.

If we're going to talk about costs, let's be honest about where the increases are. Between 2022 and 2025, senior leadership compensation has risen roughly 34 to 37 per cent. Front-line officers, excluding overtime, have seen increases closer to 12 to 15 per cent while carrying the operational burden.

Residents don't care about political positioning. They care

whether they feel safe walking downtown or standing at a bus stop.

If the people making these decisions won't fund the front line, they should at least be honest about the trade-off: fewer officers, slower response times and a city that feels and becomes less safe.

Brian Lewis, Hamilton

#### Nice break from doom and gloom

I read the paper every day. Invariably, every day I read too many articles regarding personal injuries or death, people being wronged, world disorder and just utter pain and suffering all around. That goodness for Jon Wells and Lorraine Sommerfeld. I would love to see more of these types of articles than the doom and gloom of our now reality. Thank-you to both these decent human beings for lightening up our day.

Catherine Castellan, Hannon

#### More boulders won't do the job

Re: Will more boulders keep cars from plunging over the escarpment? April 8

Mitigate or educate, that is the question. Coun. Tom Jackson says more boulders may be needed to stop vehicles from flying off the Mountain brow. I would suggest that at the reported speed of 160 km/h, teen drivers will hit the boulders and launch themselves into the abyss. After all,

this is a demographic that uses bear spray and eats dishwasher pods on a dare.

Phil Beard, Dundas

#### People need to take responsibility

How much do we have to protect people from themselves? What happened to being responsible for yourself? Barricades everywhere to keep people from going too close to the edge of a waterfall, the edge of a trail with a drop-off, rules for no right turns on a red, bicycle lane barricades, turning one-way streets to two-way — when does it stop? When will this city start to get our highly paid police officers out on the street to enforce current laws?

It seems today common sense and taking responsibility for one's actions is a thing of the past. There are reasons people get hit on our roads, people fall from the edges of waterfalls and cars drive over the edge of the escarpment and erecting more barricades or putting in more rules won't cure it.

Diana MacKenzie, Hamilton



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