

The view from inside a busy hospital

RICHARD J. BRENNAN

"Help me, please!"

And the nurses and doctors came rushing.

An elderly woman was found by friends in her home alone in a bad way. Her cry for help at Hamilton General Hospital's emergency department is more than a call for pain relief — it's a deep fear she will never live in her home again.

An overdose patient's life had just been snatched from the jaws of death.

A man suffering from Alzheimer's disease struggles to make sense of why he is here. Anger mixed with confusion.

A man and an attending physician try to eliminate what caused his serious allergic reaction while on a trip from Dubai.

These are frames from what I have witnessed so far during my stay at Hamilton General Hospital, an extremely busy place.

Bells ring and codes blue come over the loud speaker with authority, as do codes white for mental health crises. There are also general in-house traffic updates as hallways become jammed with beds.

It all started with me feeling poorly recently, and when I could no longer swallow and speak, my wife correctly insisted we should head to the McMaster University Urgent Care facility on Main Street.

That's when things started to take on a new dimension.

We got our ticket to get in line and briefly explained my situation. (Actually, it was Vickie who interpreted for me, because I could only speak above a whisper.)

In no time, I was in the back of an ambulance after a hurried urgent care doc opined that I had epiglottitis, which can be fatal.

Two friendly paramedics whisked me away, doing their best to navigate through Hamilton's cratered roads.

At GH, once again things moved with speed and a bed was found in the emergency cardiac care unit, where I was checked out with a scope through my nose. Tests and medication would be my future.

Nurses, doctors and assorted staff wear comfortable shoes because they are on the run a good part of the day and night.

The demands are overwhelming, especially for the nursing staff. Doctors need this and that, and patients need constant attention.

"Emerg has been crazier than normal for the past two weeks," said one run-of-her-foot nurse.

That's where I spent the night. It was a din of noise. Call bells, people screaming out in pain, nurses trying to ensure that everything will be OK.

Amid all this, they monitor all their assigned patients for oxygen, heart and respiration, the drugs they need and whatever else is required to get them cared for and ultimately discharged.

From there, a room is found on 6S in the trauma unit, where ear, nose and throat patients receive concentrated care. It is peaceful, more or less.

I say this with all sincerity: the staff have been kind to a fault.

I am a bit of an outlier because I am not what you would call a trauma patient, given I can get around myself without assistance, and, best of all, I can get up and use the toilet.

Since arriving, I have inhaled enough epinephrine to float the Goodyear blimp.

Also known as adrenalin, it is both a hormone and a neurotransmitter produced naturally by the body to regulate the "fight-or-flight" response. As an emergency medication, it is used as the primary, life-saving treatment to reverse severe, life-threatening allergic reactions and reduce swelling, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

I have also been on a steady diet of antibiotics and steroids to fight the infection and bring down the swelling. I now just wait for the all clear from a no-nonsense ENT specialist.

Anyway, enough of me explaining what I have learned from the University of Google, and what I have experienced.

Since coming to the sixth floor, the woman next to me, who robbed me of sleep with her carrying on, went into cardiac arrest and later died. I wish she was still here.

That freed up another bed, which is an ongoing shuffling of the deck.

My new neighbour, sadly, is a mother who lost family members in a horrendous vehicle collision, in which she suffered serious injuries.

I just can't find the words. My concerns seem so minor in comparison.

As for epiglottitis, according to the Mayo Clinic, it is a rare, life-threatening medical emergency characterized by severe swelling of the epiglottis — the flap of cartilage at the base of the tongue. Because the swelling can rapidly block the windpipe, causing asphyxia, any sudden difficulty breathing or swallowing requires calling 911 or going to the nearest emergency room immediately.

RICHARD J. BRENNAN IS A RETIRED POLITICS REPORTER LIVING IN DUNDAS. HIS SUBSTACK HANDLE IS THE BADGER.



THOMAS FROESE

Reflecting on how Canada is on a journey, Thomas Froese writes, "We're born where we are for a reason, planted or replanted in one place or another for a purpose."

Nationalism, at its best, is really nothing to fear



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

One day, a few summers ago, I saw a pair of feet in old sneakers pass a row of small Canada flags placed along a walkway. It was in Charlottetown, P.E.I., on Canada Day.

Fitting, considering Charlotte-town is Canada's birthplace. The feet, of course, could be from anywhere.

So I photographed the feet and the flags. They seemed to show that, like you or me, Canada is journeying through its days.

Nations can also plot and scheme and rage through their days. You need not look far to see this. You need not be a professor of history or geopolitics, or a high-rolling poker player.

"You have no cards. We have cards." (No, you don't. We do.) "Have you lost your mind? Are you blind? Look at your hand. You have zero cards!" (Do you know the cards we have?)

Such are today's world headlines, swagger from what's become a kindergarten's sandbox.

In either case, in July 1867, a northern nation of people, hewers of wood and drawers of water, was born. They were given cards, so to speak.

Mountains of natural resources, for one. And a peaceful political evolution that left a gentler spirit flowing through its generations.

The young nation punched above its weight. From sea to shining sea, it embodied a certain spirit of refuge.

Ah,road, it fought sacrificially for friends and freedom. At home, it was a balm of healing for the foreigner.

Not that it's a perfect place. But while journeying, it eventually got its own flag, one with a bold leaf to reflect its calling, this restorative, healing spirit.

Speaking of feet and flags, its soccer team eventually developed and brought its people together, this in 2026, a summer surprise just when these people needed some bringing together.

It reminds me of children marching around a soccer pitch in East Africa during their Kampala school's annual International Day — hundreds of kids, mine included, some sitting on parents' shoulders, waving flags and placards, wearing national colours and costumes.

They're from Uganda and Pakistan and France and South Korea and dozens of places from the world's family of nations, these children then running to the field's many food tents. In Canada's case, this always involved getting Kraft Dinner in hand.

Now, briefly, about the World Cup's postgame "Handshake for Peace" protocol involving team captains. Can't organizers learn from hockey — thanks, Canada — and have all team players formally shake hands so the moment has some meaning? Just saying.

Of course, you can't shake hands

after a sporting match with your feet. A hand is not a foot. And a foot is not an eye. An eye is not an ear and so on. It's good to remember how this relates to the world's body of nations. Different countries have different roles.

This is why nationalism, at its best, is nothing to fear. We're born where we are for a reason, planted or replanted in one place or another for a purpose.

Nobody should feel doubt or shame about this, even as nobody should have inflated hubris. We're dependent on each other.

Canada Day this week was a time to think about it.

The other thing that the world's nations can think about before going to bed at night is that even the best of them — the best empires, if you will, or the worst — won't last forever. Not any more than you or I will.

The Assyrians fell to the Medes, who fell to the Babylonians, who fell to the Persians, who fell to the Greeks, who fell to the Romans. It would make for fine and entertaining football to see these old powerhouses of history running after a ball on some pitch in their robes and sandals.

But if we're talking about journeying and finding a measure of joy on that journey, numbering your days is a good place to start. Because one more day that you're here is one less day that you're here.

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

LETTERS

It's disappointing to see foreign flags

On the road, you may have noticed many different flags on cars with the FIFA World Cup of soccer going on.

I find it disappointing to see many of them flying flags of their country of origin and not the Canadian one.

I was born in Europe and came to Canada when I was a teenager; however, I prefer not to display the flag of my country of birth while Canada is still in the tournament. I find it disrespectful to our adopted great country and our new home. So let's proudly fly our red and white maple leaf and go Canada go!
Gerry Molon, Antigonish

Fans a big part of the World Cup

The last few weeks have been just fantastic watching the World Cup.

It has been great to see soccer fans from around the world coming to see their countries play and the stories about the fans, especially about the Scots almost drinking Boston dry, having parades down the streets at seven in the morning led by bagpipes and the fans from Norway showing us how to row an imagi-

nary boat. And we've seen both the Scots and Norwegians attending baseball games, fans enjoying American culture by eating at the Waffle House and trying ranch dressing.

But most important of all, it has been good clean fun. Thank you all for coming.
Fred Eason, Hamilton

Team Canada should play here

Canada has dumped a ton of money into these games. However, being a host country is worth nothing. All games are important, but the last game (Los Angeles) and the next one (Houston), are nowhere close to Canada.

Shouldn't hosting get you those games on your own soil?

Is FIFA just pandering to the U.S. by giving preferred games to U.S. cities? Do they have any more money awards in mind for Donald Trump?
Pat Stevens, Grimsby

Keep library card policy in place

Re: Libraries are for learning, not crisis intervention, June 30
Louis Frapport's column was extremely well written. Every

sentence spoke the absolute truth of how this ongoing problem affects the general population and it's troubling to expect this to be the norm and for library staff to contend with the ongoing issues in the city core.

If we are to attempt a revitalization of a once busy, enjoyable and secure downtown, then our "city leaders" need to do their job and whatever that entails to stop this behaviour with open drug use from affecting citizens, visitors and businesses.

Give us back a Hamilton to be proud of. Stop this constant debating and keep the card policy.
Barbara Noble, Hamilton

Banks profiting off charities

Today I made a generous donation to Mission Services and found out the bank providing the credit card took 5.1 per cent of my donation as a processing fee. I think that's outrageous.

Banks should exempt charities when charging their usual fees.
Paul Doesburg, Hamilton

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