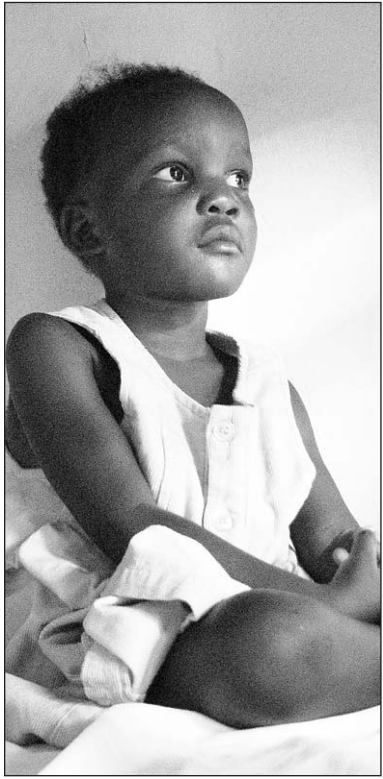


OPINION**Orphans want to be loved, wherever they are**

SPECIAL TO THE SPECTATOR

Abandoned a few weeks after her birth, three-year-old Hannah has a chance at a better life now through adoption.

BY THOMAS FROESE

It's hard to know most days what might go through the mind of any three-year-old, let alone an orphan from Africa.

They're too young to know how easily they can be tossed on the sea of adult shortcomings, too innocent to know about the hype of celebrity adoptions, or the sad fiasco involving Imagine Adoption in Cambridge, or even the West's growing aversion to having kids, period.

But if they could say something about it all, what might it be? Hannah, a three-year-old girl now in an orphanage in Uganda, might simply tell you her story.

It starts when she was a few weeks old and found abandoned outside a hospital in Mbarara, in western Uganda. She was then brought to an orphanage where they named her Hannah. That was almost four years ago. To this day, nobody knows anything about her father. Or mother. Maybe she died giving birth. Maybe not.

Hannah's Ugandan orphanage is a good one with kind Americans and Ugandans working together to

feed and clothe and show affection to several dozen kids. Games and songs, often about God's love, are part of the days. But Uganda has more than two million orphans left behind because of AIDS and civil war and too many things.

When they reach two or three, African girls in particular are often taken from their orphanages by an aunt or uncle to help in households. Rather than attend school, girls can carry firewood and water, or work in the fields all day. In their teens, when they commonly marry, girls will also fetch a bride price of so many cows. Then, still young, they'll have their own kids.

Hannah has no aunt. It's just her. But one day, some months ago, my wife, Jean, and I met this beautiful little girl. And, interestingly, long before that day, we were hoping to someday have a girl in our family with her very name. Now, after we foster her for two years, we can adopt Hannah in Uganda because we live there most of the year.

Hannah is just one of the world's 132 million orphans, children who have little chance for good health and education in a stable family.

Only about one in 5,000 will ever get adopted out of their often destitute countries.

It's harder to adopt from certain countries if you live in Canada. Still, Hannah would say to not give up on children like her, the world's neediest. And while some commentators believe it's better to leave orphans where they are, in familiarity, these folks have likely never visited an overseas orphanage. Many orphans won't find a good home even if they stay in their home countries forever.

Canadians have adopted kids, especially from China and Russia, and last year adopted about 1,700 from two dozen countries. Hannah would say thank you. Thank you for not tripping too much over the red tape. Orphans just want to be loved, wherever they're from. Even from Canada.

Some of us don't care much. We have a thousand places to see before we die and we're afraid kids will get in the way. What did Maclean's say on its Aug. 3 cover about children? "They can hurt your career, your marriage, your social life, your bank book. Why bother?"

Fair enough. Not everyone should have a child, just like not everyone should have a two-wheeler. But children aren't really meant to make anyone happy as such. They're meant to teach us certain things about life. The deeper joy comes through that.

My family returns to Uganda soon and Hannah will join our home. Besides a good international school, she'll have a brother, Jonathan, her age, and a big sister, Elizabeth. We'll all have lots to learn in an adventure that we'll travel through together.

It's funny how in this world we can't choose certain big things, like where we're born. But if she could, I think Hannah would also say this: "I'm glad I'm Ugandan. And I'm glad you've read this. Because, like you, I have a story. I am alive. And you should never, ever forget me."

*Thomas Froese is a part-time Hamiltonian who lives in Uganda most of the year. His book, *Ninety-Nine Windows: Reflections Of A Reporter From Arabia To Africa And Other Roads Less Travelled*, is available at thomasfroese.com.*

Quiet, personal times are when memories of Dad can bring tears**PAUL BENEDETTI**

My dad died one year ago today, Aug. 8.

My mom will likely get everyone together for a dinner. Maybe they'll order Chinese food, she said. But I won't be there. I'll be on holiday with my family.

I don't know what we'll do that day, perhaps we'll raise a glass to him. Maybe I'll say something, but I don't know for sure.

Anyone who has lost a parent knows what happens afterward is a bit odd. For a while after Dad died, I wasn't sure how I felt. People would ask if I was all right and I'd say, "Yeah, I'm fine," but that wasn't entirely true. I wasn't sad exactly, I was just kind of flat. Life goes on and you have to go on with it, and you do. But there's something a bit off-kilter about it all.

Take Father's Day. My mom phoned me and said, "I'd like to do something for Father's Day" and I thought, "Like what exactly? Our dad's dead. Won't that be kind of weird?" But what I said was, "Sure mom, whatever you like." Well, what she liked was that we would all go to the cemetery that morning and "visit" my dad. I have to admit I thought this was almost funny, because pretty much the last place you would ever find my father on a Sunday morning was the cemetery. He didn't like them much and he didn't see the point in going there. He had a line he liked to use, "It's better to visit people when they're alive. They appreciate it more." He dutifully visited his aunts and uncles and cousins, often on Sundays, but after they died, I really don't remember him ever going to their graves.

So, it was a bit strange to get all the kids together and drive out along Plains

Road to the cemetery to "visit" Dad on Father's Day. But my mother wanted us to and who says no to their 81-year-old mother anyway? Everyone showed up and we milled around and tended to the gravesite and read headstones and generally stood around talking. But we really didn't talk about our father and even at dinner, nobody made a toast or said anything. There wasn't really much to say. It was Father's Day and our father wasn't here.

Actually, I find the "event" days — Christmas and Easter and Father's Day and the rest — not that tough. It's the other times, when you're in the car alone driving to work in the middle of the week and some small thing makes you think of your dad and your stomach does a flip, and before you know it tears are streaming down your face and you have to swallow hard and grip the wheel and you feel a bit like an idiot driving down the 401 crying. And then, as fast as it came, it passes, like those quirky summer showers, and you feel OK again, but just a little hollow inside.

And sometimes I wonder if it's just me and I don't really ask my pals who have lost their fathers in the last few years if they cry on the way to work because, well, because you just don't do that. But I was at a wedding recently and the brother of the groom got up and was giving a killer speech — all smart and clever and breezy — and he got to the line where he wanted to mention something his father once told him and he said the word "dad" and in that second his voice caught and his face crumpled and he stood there in front of a roomful of people and unstoppable tears rolled down his face.

"I'm sorry," he said, wiping the tears away, but he didn't have to apologize because everyone in that room who has lost someone close knows that, at any time and often when you least expect it, we're all just a word or a memory or a moment away from tears.

Paul Benedetti lives in Hamilton. He is a former Hamilton Spectator reporter and now teaches journalism at the University of Western Ontario.

MY TAKE**Home First policy a danger to caregivers as well as patients****BY JOCK MCGREGOR**

A recent letter writer pointed out that the patients are not the only people affected by the Home First policy of Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital. Caregivers are, too.

Let me tell you my story. I could tell of others, since I was a co-facilitator of a caregiver support group for many years, so I saw many other experiences that echoed my own.

My wife took sick at age 60, which began 17 years of increasing dependence on me.

It wasn't difficult to begin with, but as the years went on with her becoming progressively more ill, it became harder and harder for me. I was three years older than her and, as it turned out, eventually in deteriorating health myself.

In a perfect world one would expect that caregiver support from the health system would increase as the need increased. In fact, the opposite was true.

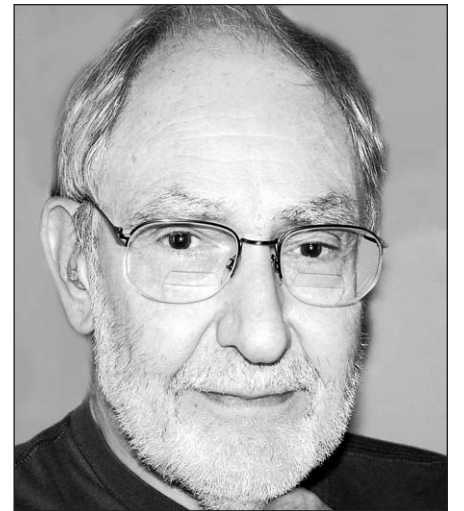
When it became clear to me that the load was more than I could manage on my own, my wife and I were allowed 60 hours a month of help. Fifteen years later this was reduced to one hour a week.

I was told by the case manager that this was strictly for my wife — that this was all she was entitled to since she had a full-time caregiver living with her. I, she went on, as a caregiver, was entitled to no help at all.

As it happened, I eventually came down with the flu, so badly that I was surprised to survive it. This happened between visits of the personal support worker, so my wife and I were entirely on our own. Not surprisingly, my wife got the flu also.

And when I recovered sufficiently to check on her, I discovered her near death.

After her nearly three months in hospital, I was expected to take my wife home.



I refused. I was sure that if I had, we both would have died before long.

Fortunately, a long-term care bed was available then, and with it, far more and better care than I could have given her at home.

My wife was there, except for some more hospital visits to get through crises, for two more years until her death.

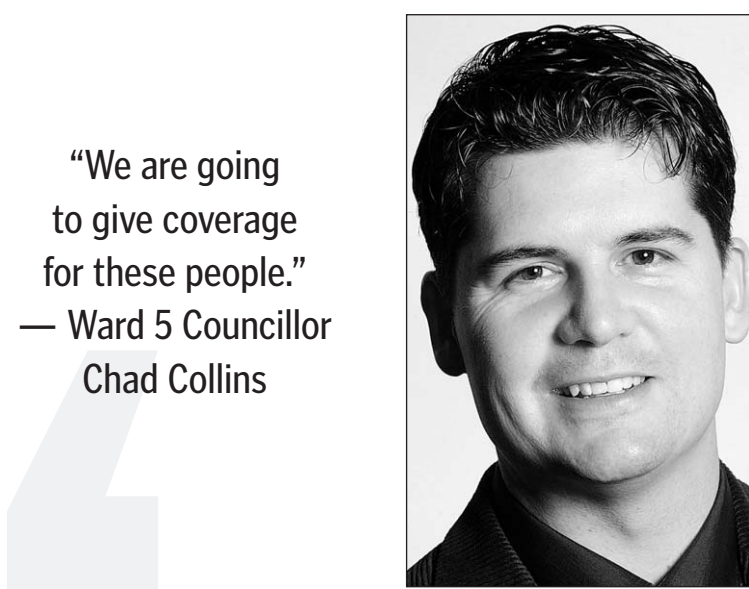
The part this played in my recent health is probably open to argument. However, I seemed never to fully recover from the flu that ended my wife staying at home. Things came to a head when I collapsed a year ago.

I was living alone by then, so no one knew about this. Some of my friends got concerned about me and finally persuaded the police to enter the house to check up on me.

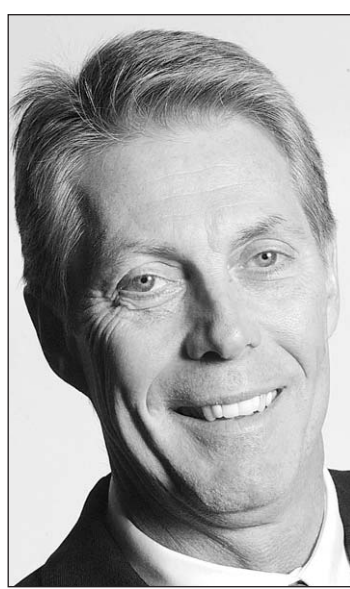
They discovered me unconscious on the floor, where I had apparently been for at least 48 hours, near death. It took two months in hospital, followed by several months of physiotherapy, to recover.

And at that I might have been lucky. I know of caregivers who died before their care-receivers.

Jock McGregor lives in Hamilton

HEARD THIS WEEK Regarding the city providing compensation to flood victims

"We are going to give coverage for these people."
— Ward 5 Councillor
Chad Collins



"We need to know what the implications and consequences are."
— Mayor Fred Eisenberger

BY THE NUMBERS**Consumer complaints**

38% — A new global poll for Complaints Are Us Inc. indicates that four in 10 (38%) people surveyed in 23 nations have complained about a product or service in the past year.

The survey of over 23,000 respondents from nations representing 75% of the world's GDP is the first to quantify consumer complaints on a global scale.

Residents of Canada (44%) tied with those in the United States (44%) in making complaints about products and services in the past year—putting them in the top 10 of the consumer complainant nations.

Source: Ipsos Reid