



SUSAN ZAMBIASI  
Community Editorial Board

Susan Zambiasi is a freelance writer. She is married to Ben Zambiasi. They have a daughter Aja.

## Writer, husband swap roles, but they're still on same team

Since the beginning of September, there has been a major reshuffling of duties at the Zambiasi household.

After four years of being a stay-at-home mom, I am studying full-time in Brock University's education program here in Hamilton and Ben has taken over as the primary caregiver and household manager.

In other words, every morning while I sit gnawing my fingernails in a classroom trying to absorb all the responsibilities and duties that come hand in hand with a teaching career (that will

be an article in itself when I recover from the shock of the first couple of weeks), my husband is busy rearranging, restructuring and reorganizing the kitchen, bathroom and laundry room in an effort to make our house run with the same precision as a well-trained military unit.

Biting my tongue, I just smile and let him enjoy his new job. As long as he is with Aja, I am happy.

Aja has had the biggest adjustment to make. Instead of going to the park every day, playing dolls and watching

her favorite TV programs, she now helps mow the lawn, accompanies Daddy to the garage for oil changes and tire rotations, and is forced to watch TSN and the Golf channel.

But all in all, the transition has been smoother than expected. I am ashamed to admit that I secretly hoped that my armchair quarterback would find the domestic game too tough, but I am thrilled to see my child happy, eating healthily, spending quality time with daddy, and experiencing a whole new world.

Plus, I also get to implement my new skills as a teacher candidate by applauding his enthusiasm, respecting his choices, delegating responsibility and appreciating his organizational skills.

But most importantly, I am aware how fortunate I am to have a partner who is willing to try so hard to keep our family balanced while I pursue a career path that I have always wanted. For that, Ben gets an A-plus.

suez@execulink.com

### AGGRESSIVE DOGS

## Deterring ownership is the key



JOAN LITTLE

If you think pit bulls and planning are unconnected, think again. Ontario's urban "intensification" guidelines mean taller, denser development instead of sprawl into outlying areas — more people closer together.

Attorney General Michael Bryant's aim to ban or control pit bulls is timely, but problematic, and requires extensive consultation.

First, what is a pit bull? The Canadian and American Kennel Clubs don't even recognize the breed, so proving in court that an attacker was a pit bull won't be easy.

And why only pit bulls? Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers, Akitas, German shepherds, bullmastiffs, and presa canarios have all made the black lists of insurance companies, which are increasingly leery of insuring the owners. In 1998 a Stouffville eight-year-old was killed by a neighbour's bull-mastiff. In 2001, two massive presa canarios killed a California woman in her apartment hallway, resulting in a four-year jail term for the owner for involuntary manslaughter.

Years ago, Dobermans were the status symbol for street punks, but appear to have given way to pit bulls, which can be lethal weapons in the wrong hands. Children under 10 are the most frequent bite victims, and large, aggressive dogs can inflict horrific physical and mental damage.

A 2000 Vet Med Today report listed the dog breeds responsible for human fatalities over the previous 20 years. The top three were "Pit-bull-types," Rottweilers, and Shepherds. But a 2002 CBC Marketplace episode named German shepherds, cocker spaniels, rottweilers and golden retrievers as those most prone to bite.

So it's a crap shoot. But if I had to be confined with an angry dog, I'd want it to be a Chihuahua! Unfortunately punks with aggressive dogs don't rush to license them, but stepped-up checks on dogs for licences, I believe, will become inevitable. Microchipping should be mandatory, because it makes dogs traceable.

Breed bans may not work because crossbreeds will be a problem, but deterring ownership of aggressive dogs is key. Increase maximum fines under the Dog Owners Liability Act (now \$5,000). What about graduated licence fees by size or breed, and requiring proof of liability insurance for certain dogs? And make homeowners' policies state prominently if bite coverage is excluded.

As people live closer together, risks increase, and province-wide rules are desirable. Pit bulls and planning may not seem related, but in today's world of intensification, they are.

Former Burlington alderman and Halton councillor Joan Little is a freelance columnist.



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

Spectator columnist Thomas Froese with his wife Dr. Jean Chamberlain Froese and their daughter Elizabeth Katherine, in a November 2004 photo when they were at Entebbe International Airport in Uganda, Africa. It was during one of more than a dozen flights the young Hamilton family has been on since Elizabeth, now 15 months, was born.

## The view from 50,000 feet

Aloft with my frequent-flier little girl, I see how vast the ocean is, and how small my boat is.

SALZBURG, AUSTRIA ♦ I love my daughter, all 15 months of her, for many reasons. One is that she's more like her mother than me.

Especially while flying. My wife Jean and I continue to be aid workers in the Middle East and Africa, so this is often. In fact, diaper-clad Elizabeth Katherine has already been on more than dozen flights and four continents.

The Squirt knows one word. Just one. It's "hello." But words can be powerful things. I personally don't like to use more than I have to. This is because, by nature, I am, or at least I was once, painfully shy. Yes, playing hide 'n' seek with this kid meant calling Search and Rescue to find me.

Elizabeth, on the other hand, will say "hello" to anyone (of any colour), anywhere (of any political or religious stripe), anytime (even if you're trying to sleep.) She'll give a snappy "hello-hello-hello" or maybe a more deliberate "hell-ooohh!" with a wave and toothy grin, and playful swat to your head. Realize, though, that her "hello" can mean anything from "good night" to "I'm hungry" to "I have a stinky."

Now flying around the planet, glamorous as it seems, has its challenges. Even before sky-terror, staying alive was one of them. The airlines don't want you to dwell on this, so they offer various in-flight distractions. Air Emirates, one carrier we use, based in oil-rich Dubai, wins awards for providing things like video consoles to every passenger. Entertaining. But they just numb and dumb us down.

I mean, in case of that panic-driven descent, does anyone really believe that, as safety rules



THOMAS FROESE

say, putting your head between your legs will help much? Think about this. Upon impact, where exactly will your head go? Does anyone really want to be found like this? And life-jackets? Have you ever heard of even a single rescue from the Atlantic Ocean? This is why I use flight safety-drill time to build my nest. Shoes off, books out, pillows and blankets everywhere, along with a noticeable yawn, so anyone sitting nearby, besides my wife of course, understands I don't want to say "hello." Elizabeth, standing on a seat if possible, waving to her fans, does enough of that. Jean, an obstetrician, also seems to genuinely enjoy interacting with virtually anyone.

It all works quite well except for the rare times when I fly alone, like recently, here to Salzburg, where I'm attending a conference on how globalization impacts poor countries. It's a reminder how humanity truly is a global family, how we're accountable to each other, how we need to, in essence, say "hello" to one another more often.

No, private personalities or not, we have a pro-

found effect on each other. My strengths and joys, like my weaknesses and disappointments, reach beyond me. They touch those around me, sometimes in very distant places. Economically, globalization shows what's true relationally: "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

It's been said that this great truth, first penned just so by poet John Donne, is both comforting and disturbing. For me, this is especially clear when flying, vulnerably, at 50,000 feet. I get perspective on the petty worries that seem so large on the ground. I see how vast the ocean is, and how small my boat is. I see how my little girl, like all children, somehow lives more like the rest of us are meant to: a bit closer to heaven.

So if you and I have not yet met on these pages, Elizabeth would, I'm sure, want me to re-introduce myself after my summer repose. Soon we three return to our home in Yemen, an impoverished Muslim country in the Middle East. From this ancient place, I will write more, while Jean will continue her work improving health care among the world's most needy women.

And Elizabeth Katherine? I suspect she'll keep learning things about this world that we might not imagine.

Until next time then, from each of us to all of you ... hello. And hello again.

Hamiltonian Thomas Froese is an editor at the Yemen Times. He column, Letter from Yemen, appears every other Saturday. E-mail: 140765@sympatico.ca

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MARK BULBROOK  
Community Editorial Board

Mark Bulbrook lives in Hamilton. He is the former executive director of the Hamilton AIDS Network and the Ontario AIDS Network.

## Mattie had a great gift, a great message, and he was so young

Matthew Joseph Thaddeus Stepanek is likely a name you're not familiar with. Allow me to introduce you to one of Earth's greatest peacemakers.

Everyone knew him simply as Mattie. This was a young man filled with love, compassion and an unwavering passion for life. Mattie was a poet, a philosopher and a peacemaker. He believed in all humankind: Size, shape, colour and religion did not matter. What mattered most to Mattie was love.

I was first introduced to Mattie when he was about 9 or 10 years old. I was watching the Oprah Winfrey Show. On stage sat this small child in a wheelchair. I thought I was about to watch an episode about childhood diseases or how this boy had raised some money for muscular dystrophy through a bake sale in his backyard.

Little did I realize I was about to be embraced by the wisdom of an articulate, gentle soul, capable of capturing the very essence of life and all that it offers at the end of a pen. His were not

ordinary poems, just as Mattie was no ordinary boy.

He called his writings "Heartsongs." He wrote about the beauty of life, its gift to breath in all of its glory: To exhale by giving back tenfold what we received. He spoke about life, as though that very day on the Oprah show would be his last. He needed to tell all of us about his important lessons he discovered along his short but bountiful journey.

At the age of 13, on June 22, Mattie's journey on earth ended. He died in the

arms of his mother Jeni. Jeni had made this journey before. Mattie was her fourth and final child to die from a very rare form of muscular dystrophy. Jeni too has it. Mattie once said, "People tell me I inspire them. And that inspires me. It's a beautiful circle, and we all go around together, with and for each other. What a gift."

For me, and indeed all of us who came across him, Mattie was our gift. Website: www.mattieonline.com

markbulbrook@hotmail.com