

COMMENT

“We believe that the relationship between the provincial government and The Beer Store should be revised to ensure that Ontario taxpayers receive their fair share of the profits from The Beer Store.

FROM A REPORT BY FORMER TD BANK CHAIR ED CLARK
Clark, the province's privatization scar, tabled a report Friday on public assets.

Giving for the health of it

Give a thought to how you can help during National Philanthropy Month



SHEREE MEREDITH

It starts at an early age. Watching my two-year-old grandson's pleasure in giving — ensuring everyone in the room has seen the beautiful moon outside, dragging the recycle bin to the front curb alongside his granddad or ensuring his one-year-old cousin has an equally big pile of Thomas trains to play with — underscores the intrinsic pleasures we derive from giving. Even more important, it reminds us that this gratification begins early in life and carries on until we die. It is central to our personal well-being as well as that of our community.

November is National Philanthropy Month and provides an ideal opportunity to stop and reflect for a moment about the value of giving — certainly for our communities but also for ourselves.

There is an abundance of research affirming that giving not only brings pleasure, but in very real terms contributes to good health, happier relationships, increased effectiveness in the workplace and stronger communities. The research demonstrates, for example, that giving:

- Can result in what has been called the “helper's high,” a joyful feeling followed by longer-lasting improved emotional well-being and sense of self-worth.

- Can reduce stress.

- Supports social connection and the feeling of belonging that increases the likelihood of a longer, more satisfying life as well as stronger community

As groundbreaking research by people such as Adam Grant from The Wharton School found, contributing to others without expecting anything in return is a key driver in propelling people to the top of the business success ladder.

At Hamilton Community Foundation, we have the privilege of working with a wide variety of Hamiltonians who share a common passion for strengthening our community. Some people do this through their leadership and tireless volunteer contributions to their neighbourhoods or local organizations, others through their financial gifts.

HCF's role is often to help people more clearly articulate what is important to them and their vision for what they want to accomplish, and then to assist in making this happen.

Research and observation tell us that for many Hamiltonians, it is a love of this city that connects them throughout their lives, and even when they move elsewhere.

We strive to link people, ideas and resources. We hear daily from people about the satisfaction and excitement they feel being part of efforts to strengthen and transform our community.

As a society, we invest millions each year in products that promise to improve our health, productivity and happiness. Perhaps National Philanthropy Month provides an opportunity to think about a different set of strategies to accomplish this goal. Perhaps instead of purchasing the newest anti-aging cream, supplement, self-improvement regime or stress reducer, we should think instead of maximizing the benefits of the simple act of giving.

This might begin with taking the time to reflect on your own vision for a stronger Hamilton. What would it look like if all citizens had the opportunity to reach their full potential and enjoy a high quality of life? Determining what is required to achieve this change comes next — learning about the issues and identifying what will truly lead to the changes that are needed. Finally, and most critically, ask yourself what you have in your control to make a difference. “How do I use all my resources: financial, time, networks, knowledge and skills to advance the things I believe are important?”

In November, as we prepare for the holiday season and the inevitable New Year's resolutions that follow, let's each recalibrate our “get healthier” plan and more deliberately engage in a personal action plan that builds on the simple act of giving.

Hamilton is known as a city that leads the country in its generosity of time, talent and financial resources. Let's continue to grow, strengthen and celebrate our national reputation.

Cheers to our individual and collective health!

Sheree Meredith is vice-president of philanthropic services at Hamilton Community Foundation. This year, HCF is celebrating 60 years of driving positive change for Hamilton. Learn more at hamiltoncommunityfoundation.ca.

“For many Hamiltonians, it is a love of this city that connects them throughout their lives, and even when they move elsewhere.

Aging: Like life, be brave, live fully

Celebrating my good luck and my mother's fearlessness



DEIRDRE PIKE

I had another birthday last week, my 52nd. I remember all my monumental birthdays, like 25, 30, 40 and 50, being so much more fun. This one is kind of bland and not nearly as festive. It's difficult to beat a 50th birthday on which you receive both an engagement ring and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. It's all downhill from here, I suspect.

So far I haven't had to deal with any health issues related to aging so I count myself lucky in that regard. Nothing has changed too much except now each time I dutifully ask my doctor about a new spot on my skin he quips breezily, “You're just getting old!”

Last week Renée and I were doing some investment planning and the guy helping us wanted to forecast our finances through to the age of 95. No thank you! I've heard Bette Davis' quote repeatedly, “Old age ain't no place for sissies,” so I know old age ain't no place for me. Studies are showing we're all living longer but not only are we not prepared financially for that longevity, our communities aren't prepared with proper housing, income supplements or other necessary supports for the kinds of health issues we'll face.

My mother also had a birthday last week, the day before mine. She turned 80. Now that's monumental and we're celebrating as much as we can in London this weekend at one of her favourite restaurants. I'm even breaking my own non-gambling rules to take her to the Western Fair slot machines at her request. We're only spending one dollar for every year we've lived so she stands to lose more than I do.

My mom has aged well and fashionably but not without pain. While old age might not be for the faint of heart, I think for many people the same can

“My mom worked elections, ran blood donor clinics, and co-ordinated drivers for the Canadian Cancer society.



Deirdre and her mom.

COURTESY DEIRDRE PIKE

be said about living. While I have lived my life without physical pain, my mom has lived with arthritis for as long as I can remember. She had to leave her potential career as a hair dresser because of the pain in her legs when she was still a young woman. However, this did not stop her from giving me some of the best pageboy haircuts in Strathroy back in the day!

While I had to experience my dad's death when I was 32, my mom's mom died when she was just 11 years old and the last of nine kids in a farmhouse in Glencoe, Ont. She still grieves that death each December. She was given one name only, Lucy, after the nurse who looked after her mom. Guess they used up all the middle names on the older kids. To make me more like her, I too am middle-nameless.

She left high school to become a Bell telephone operator because she was told girls didn't need education, just a husband. When her dad lost the farmhouse she moved to London to live with a family friend and find work, eventually joining the London Free Press. This young farm girl did not let the fear of the big city stand in her way.

“Deirdre's teenage years are not for the faint of heart,” would be a truism in our family. I caused both my parents a high level of angst as I tried to navigate my identity as a lesbian in our small town, turning to drugs and alcohol regularly to soften the journey. Their love never ended.

My mom worked elections, ran blood donor clinics, and co-ordinated drivers for the Canadian Cancer society. She still volunteers with the VON to help the “old people” (her words) by taking their blood pressure and hooking them up to other supports.

Fear of the unknown is one of the strongest fears we face. We don't know what each day will bring let alone decades from now. I look to women like my mom for lessons on aging well and living more fearlessly. Happy birthday, Mom!

Deirdre Pike is a freelance columnist for the Hamilton Spectator. She is aging in Hamilton's Strathcona neighbourhood and can be reached at dpikethepec@gmail.com or @deirdrepik.

25 years after The Wall fell

The hard truth is, walls are still being built in the hearts of humans



THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA — It was still morning in Berlin on this Sunday when candles at the Church of Reconciliation were lit to honour yesteryear's dead, the brave souls who ran from the uniforms and helmets and strong-armed authorities, who ran for freedom that was torn away, even as their flesh would be torn by barbed-wire and vicious dogs and bullets at that wall.

Even during the wall's beginnings, when one side of a Berlin street was boarded and barricaded, dumbfounded residents stood on the other side and waved to loved ones. And they cried while watching a woman named Ida jump to her death, as she tried to escape to freedom through her third-floor window.

The remembrance took me by surprise. I had just finished a workout at an African locale, a wanting one-star hotel, when I passed a television. And stopped. And watched, alone, but then as if a thousand stood on my left, 10,000 on my right, because this is how it is with freedom and its cloud of witnesses.

Witnesses like at the Brandenburg Gate, Germany's mystic centre, where 25 years earlier to the day the unthinkable happened. Watch, now, the flags and colours and flares and everyday people chipping away at that heavy wall with whatever they had: pickaxes, sledge hammers, even their bare hands. It was so sudden, now atop that wall, singing, even with laughter and a beer, over the unexpected absurdity of the moment.

The view returned to today and a CNN reporter, a German-American, Fredrik, shared his personal history about his journalist father in Berlin — East German spies called him “The Tiger” — and how the family managed. Back to more old, black-and-white scenes. Family photos.

But this could be any family's story, really. Your story. Mine. Yes, I was born into it, in West Berlin, in that cold era when bravery wore common clothing,

when it faked passports and ran in the night and jumped from windows because freedom is that deeply embedded in humanity, in our DNA, running all the way back to Eden — and without it nothing in life makes any sense.

Nobody knows how many people perished at Berlin's wall. The official record, 136, is wrong. What's known is how everything collapses when systems become more important than people, when ideology towers over common decency, when evil — which is ‘l-i-v-e’ spelled backward — finds new and creative ways to lie and steal and destroy.

Then, on that television, Berlin's mayor spoke, live, about injustice and also about personal responsibility. And finally Germany's chancellor rose and talked about the impossible, about dreams coming true, as if a lion might lay down with a lamb right in front of the cameras to show a glimmer of utopia or eternity or what's beyond even the wildest imagination.

When the chancellor finished I stepped outside where I smelled the fresh Ugandan rain. I looked at the impoverished African streetscape and then up a nearby hill to my home. Then I jumped on the back of a boda-bodam (a putter motorcycle taxi), and thought about it all — the hardship and hope of this world, of human nature.

We can blame the Communists or the Nazis, or we can blame the Muslim extremists or Attila the Hun for that matter, but there's more to this story, a deeper truth that says something else, that says there is no “us” versus “them.”

No, there's only us, all of us, muddy and glorious both, created in God's image, just a little lower than the angels if we believe the ancient Scriptures. Yet the line dividing good and evil doesn't cut through any city as much as it cuts through, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn put it, the heart of every human being.

And so walls of hostility are still being built — in troubled nations, in communities, in families. This is the rest of the hard truth. But brave souls are still running too, running to get over or under or around these walls any way they can, dying, and somehow living all the more, with every step they take.

Thomas Froese is a Berlin native and a Hamiltonian part of the year. He's the keynote speaker at the Hamilton-Burlington-Brantford 2014 Peace Breakfast at the Hamilton Convention Centre, Nov. 25. Read him at www.dailydad.net and www.thomasfroese.com.

THE SPEC

BRIEFLY

Short and excerpted comments sent to letters@thespec.com

Patients are just an expense to hospitals

I suspect we will not see wait time billboards in hospitals in Ontario because our hospitals do not need patients to be profitable. Hospitals here are funded with a global budget that they use to pay for services. In our system the patients are an expense and the focus is on limiting their access to hospitals. In the U.S., hospitals have to work to bring patients in to generate their operating capital. The billboards are a sign that they want you to come there for health care; wait-lists are bad for business there.

PHEROZE JEEJEBHOY,
HAMILTON

HHS admin 'less about patient care'

If any of the dozens of presidents, vice-presidents, directors and other overpaid administrators were to give up even less than one per cent of their pay, or refuse the pay increases they will surely get this year, it is likely that Lakeview Lodge and quality patient care could continue. But Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) administration is more about business and less about patient care. Credit goes to the front line nurses and doctors who have to work at HHS.

DEAN CORKINS,
HAMILTON

Spec's Neighbour section 'brilliant'

I Am Your Neighbour insert in Friday's paper was brilliant. I enjoyed reading this extremely positive spin on our city. Are any more planned?

To know and see real beauty in your back yard is wonderful. To read the positive messages of citizens and business owners speaks volumes. Thank you, Spectator.

CLARENCE PRINCE,
HAMILTON

Liberal win due to lazy voters

The premier has told the party faithful that the Liberals won a majority in the recent provincial election because voters agreed with its convictions. I beg to differ. The Liberals won because 50 per cent of the voting public chose not to get off their fannies and go cast their ballot. We truly get the government we deserve.

JOHN VALERI,
WATERDOWN