

Comment

Making a clean sweep — by myself

Take it from me: Mr. Clean (purple) works better than Swiffer



PAUL BENEDETTI

Recently, our cleaner fired us.

I know that sounds a bit ridiculous, but I can't think of another way of putting it. We weren't temporarily "laid off" because she's not coming back, and I'm pretty sure we weren't "restructured" unless that happened while I was sleeping. She may have been "rightsizing" her client load, but either way the family room needs vacuuming and she's not doing it.

I wish I could claim that I am utterly blameless in this scenario but that would be stretching the truth, and by stretching I mean imagine Doug Ford's Sansabelt slacks.

Though I was ceaselessly charming to our cleaner, often whipping her up a steaming cappuccino or regaling her with ear-piercing ballads from the shower, I may have misstepped once or twice.

It is true that, forgetting precisely what day she was coming, I may have inadvertently locked her out of the house a couple of times, the last incident being on a day when it was snowing and about minus-five out. Despite a grovelling apology (I'm actually pretty good at that having taken a night course on grovelling), we were given our marching orders.

This eventuality led me to reconsider the entire situation, including how we came to have a cleaner in the

first place.

I took what's left of my mind back to when we had three young children at home, were both working full time and commuting. You ask yourselves the following existential questions:

How much of Saturday do you want to spend with your head in a toilet?

Answer: Preferably none.

2. Would you rather go for a hike, visit a friend or Swiffer?

Answer: What is Swiffer?

I cannot recall precisely when we got our first cleaner, but I know it was during the busiest time in our household. Even now those years raising three children is a blur and I can only really remember the general stages of child development as described by psychologist Jean Piaget or perhaps made up by me.

Babies: Adorable

Toddlers: Still Very Cute

Kids: Asking for a ride

Teenagers: Asking for a ride and money. Much less adorable.

Young Adults: Asking for more money. Just taking your ride.

Semi-Adults: Gone. But, still asking for money.

It was at this juncture that we "took stock" as they say. Once we had taken the stock — in this case two cans of chicken — to the neighbours, we discussed the housecleaning problem. I thought that with only two people living in the house for the majority of the year (our youngest was away at school — and so now only asking for money by text) it seemed unreasonable to not clean the house ourselves.

To which my wife replied: "You mean unreasonable to not clean the house yourself."

Suddenly, she's a stickler for grammar. I got the point.

Fine, I said. We can save a lot of money, get much-needed exercise and have a clean house.

"OK," she said. "Just remember that in this case, two out of three won't cut it."

So, that is how I now find myself wearing yellow Playtex gloves. (Why do they have the word "play" in the name when it's the last thing you would ever do while wearing a pair — unless you're Dexter.)

After several weeks of this experiment, there are a few observations I would like to make:

For a room filled with soap and running water, bathrooms get pretty dirty.

Vacuuming is boring. Dyson could build a vacuum that sings, dances and blow-dries my hair and it would still be boring.

Dust is everywhere. And even if you consider it star dust, part of our infinite cosmos, it's still annoying.

If you are really in a hurry, just sprinkle a bit of Mr. Clean (purple) around. It makes your house smell clean even if you haven't done any work.

I now know how to Swiffer. (Believe me, it's not that exciting.)

So far, things have gone pretty well. I have kept the house "spin and span" as my mother used to say, even though I have no idea what that means. Only one small issue has come up.

I think I'd like a raise, but I don't know who to ask.

Paul Benedetti is the author of You Can Have A Dog When I'm Dead.

Bryan Wylie: A life of teaching and giving

Decorated educator's message: Slow down, look and listen



Opinion

THOMAS FROESE

It's the painters and the writers, the sculptors and the musicians, who tell us, the rest of us, to stop and look and listen. To pay attention. To see the holiness in the ordinary. This is the heart of the matter, the nub of it, the core of life.

The times when we manage to get ourselves off of autopilot are the times we see things — vital things — we'd otherwise miss. An old woman walks by. The wind rustles some leaves at your feet. A single note of music brings a memory you thought was long gone.

This is the sort of truth that Bryan Wylie knew. It's what he was about.

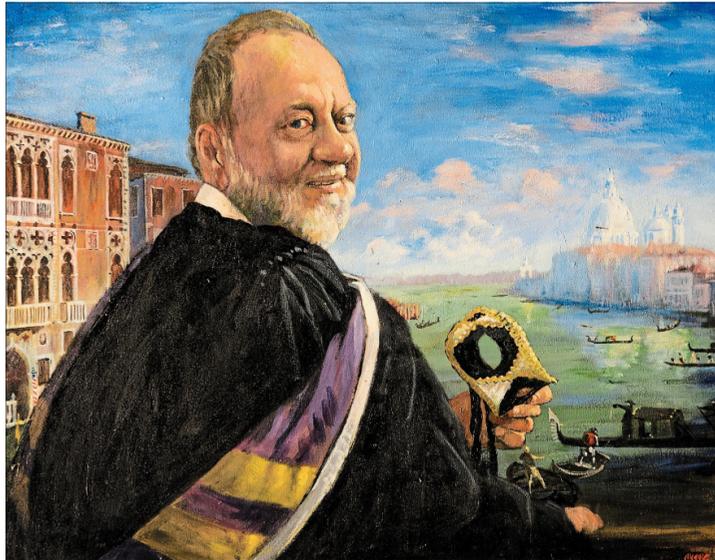
I wish I could have heard him teach. I wish I could have been nourished by his thoughts. But circumstances had me overseas during the years Bryan, here in Hamilton, delivered his annual lecture series on humanity's search for meaning through the arts.

No, the pleasure was never mine, not in this world, to observe how Bryan helped illuminate this community. For over a decade after his so-called retirement, Bryan taught on the arts and culture in libraries and churches and other community locales.

Slow down. Look. Listen. This was Bryan's public word, this after more than three decades at Hillfield Strathallan College. There Bryan had taught with distinction, so much that in 1989 he was awarded the Marshall McLuhan Distinguished Teacher Award.

He was just five when he gathered his friends on the street to play school, himself as teacher, complete with chalkboard. Later, in 1969, a young man who'd just dropped out of McMaster University, he started teaching Latin at Hillfield Strathallan. When Latin was soon-after dropped, he was asked to lead the English department.

Through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s Bryan developed the school's arts



A painting of Bryan Wylie as Senior Master of Hillfield Strathallan College, at the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy. The painting is by the late Doug Moore.

instruction. In fact it was through the arts — he was directing the play Godspell — that his spiritual conversion came.

"The student playing Jesus asked me, 'So, for the finale, do I return as Jesus or God?' " Bryan figured it out. "I had him come back as both," is how he explained it on Mohawk Radio's Art Waves.

Danielle Hourigan, a student of Bryan's before she joined Hillfield Strathallan's staff, told me Bryan was not only a consummate teacher, but one of those rare people who connected what mattered to him — his faith and his love of the arts — seamlessly into his life.

"He didn't want you to be like him. He wanted you to be the best of who you could be," she said. "If you're a street sweeper, be the Michelangelo of street sweepers."

After retiring from Hillfield Strathallan in 2002, Bryan's public lectures dominated his time. You'd often find him preparing — one presentation might have upwards of 300 slides — in his office at Philpott Memorial Church. Over the years he spoke to thousands.

He was largely self-taught through his many visits to museums across Europe. Florence and Venice, particularly close to his heart, are among the places his ashes will be spread.

It was in Florence where, last fall, Bryan took ill. He later recovered in Hamilton. I saw him one day. "You're looking good," I said to him. Shortly later, on a day I flew west over the Atlantic, he was gone.

This is the poem, the song, of Bryan's life. But this afternoon, along with several hundred others, I'll still have a chance to hear what Bryan has to say. I'll be at a memorial event put together by who else but Bryan himself.

Called "All Good Gifts," Bryan had planned it years ago. Even in his sickness, he had conversations with friends who made that final promise to him. Bryan is named as the event's director.

It will be a panoramic view of his life. On Bryan's request, TVO journalist Steve Paikin, a former student of Bryan's from the Class of 1978, will MC. Former students and friends will come from as far away as the U.K.

So there I'll sit with everyone, including the children, my children, all of us old enough, and, by a mysterious grace, young enough too, to keep this memory in a safe place.

Thomas Froese writes about news, travel and life. Find him at www.thomasfroese.com "All Good Gifts" starts at 1 p.m. at Hillfield Strathallan College.

READERS WRITE

LETTERS WELCOME, 250-word maximum, full name required.
Send to letters@thespec.com

Most councillors not interested in research

RE: BACKYARD CHICKENS

I have been following the story of the acceptance of urban backyard hens in municipalities surrounding Hamilton for the last year or so, and was hoping that Hamilton would follow suit for various reasons, from food security to the recognition and celebration of Ontario's agricultural heritage.

Coun. Jason Farr brought motions forward that would see staff update a 2012 report to see if Hamilton should follow the example of other Ontario municipalities.

I watched the April 11 debate through livestream, not something I normally do, and I was surprised at how dismissive many of the councillors were, basing their arguments on incomplete information.

Remember, the motion was to authorize the city to do a report ... not to allow for these backyard hens.

Apparently, most councillors don't feel they need to research issues brought forward. Instead, they base their decisions on incomplete information and, apparently, a fear that packs of coyotes will descend on the city ... too many Saturday morning cartoons?

The chicken debate, which was based on achieving a better understanding of an issue, demonstrated who cares about being informed. Councillors Farr, Green, Merulla, Vanderbeek and Johnson voted for learning more. The rest voted to go with their own preconceptions. On how many other issues is this the case?

Beau Daniels, Hamilton

Kinder Morgan doesn't need our money

RE: KINDER MORGAN DEBATE

Kinder Morgan does not need our money to build the Trans Mountain pipeline. Money is not the issue. The issue is strong, determined and effective opposition to the pipeline. And that won't go away, only strengthen.

For good reason: One major spill would be catastrophic to B.C.'s coast, because when dilbit sinks, it can't be cleaned up.

Connie Kidd, Hamilton

Climate leaders don't build pipelines

RE: TRUDEAU'S PIPELINE PROMISE (APRIL 11)

Indeed the prime minister must act on his promises!

The question is, which ones? The promises he made, publicly and repeatedly, for Canada to lead the world in climate action, making the future habitable and safe for our children and their children?

Or the private, behind-closed-doors promises to the fossil fuel industry? These promise "stranded assets" from investing in 20th century technology that no longer serves humanity, abandonment of our Paris Accord goals and a tragic legacy for our prime minister who articulated such dreams of being an international hero. Climate leaders don't build pipelines.

Ruth Pickering, Hamilton

No fossil subsidies with my money

RE: KINDER MORGAN DEBATE

As the recent ice storm moved through our area, I found myself wondering about comments made by our prime minister regarding the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Trudeau's calculations fail to include the costs of climate change and pipeline/tanker spills, and only focus on potential short-term financial gains. Trudeau is using the same flawed logic that many corporations use when air and water pollution are shared with you and me while the profits are hoarded by the CEOs and stock holders. These ignored shared costs are referred to as "externalities."

The "externalities" from tarsands extraction are long-term real costs that affect the bottom line for all of us and must be taken into account. We know that projects increasing extraction of tarsands bitumen, which will be burned and will release increasing amounts of greenhouse gasses, will exaggerate the frequency and severity of these costly extreme-weather events.

In the long term, projects like the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline are not in our interests, even financially. I object to my tax dollars being spent to subsidize the fossil fuel industry and hope we can start a tax revolt: #NotWithMyMoney!

James S. Quinn, Hamilton

PCs making false membership claims

RE: ELECTION ETHICS

Recently I received a call from the Progressive Conservative Party, asking me to update my membership. I asked him the source of his information and said I have never been a member. He quickly said OK and hung up. A friend in Toronto received a similar call, same party. From the privacy policy of the PC Party, I learned that Elections Canada provides a list of electors and the party collects other information from publicly available data. I felt the call I received was unwarranted and the tactic unfounded in truth. At a time of controversy and scrutiny about political party methods and messages, a call such as the one I received serves to provoke ill will toward that party.

Janet Rush, Hamilton

The real gas-plant villains got away

RE: GAS-PLANT SCANDAL

Following the established principles of nimbyism, when the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) accepted the bid from TransCanada Energy (TCE) in September 2009 to build a 900-megawatt natural gas-fired power generation facility in southeast Oakville both parties knew or ought to have known that TCE's chances of obtaining the needed construction permits from said city were less than zero. This nefarious decision alone led to the \$1.1 billion cost to Ontario taxpayers. David Livingston's misguided hard drive wipe and subsequent jail time is the kind of tactical sleight of hand and false closure that continues to protect the real miscreants that set this fallacious process in motion.

Phil Beard, Dundas