



Surviving trauma: Pilot shares journey to recovery from PTSD

FILIFE FARIA, A humanitarian pilot, shares the traumatic event that led to his PTSD: “being taken hostage by child soldiers.” We chat over Chinese food about his work ferrying humanitarian workers and goods around countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. Filipe just got recertified for his pilot’s license, 24 years after the event that changed his life.

“I felt compelled to use humor as a coping mechanism, to brush it off,” Filipe says, describing his long road to recovery. After his abduction, he continued flying between hot spots, telling himself, “I’m strong, I can handle it. I knew what I was getting into in this work. If I can’t handle it, I shouldn’t be here. It would be an admission of weakness if I left. So I stayed.”

Filipe spent over a year in Congo during the nation’s second civil war. Despite Congo’s rich natural resources, much of its population lives in extreme poverty. The country, with some of the most plentiful natural resources in the world, has been plagued by colonization, slavery, and foreign interference. While resource extraction is massively profitable for mining companies, many of which are Canadian, much of the 105 million population live in extreme poverty. The numerous human rights abuse allegations against these companies are extensive.

Amidst the war, aid organizations operate. Working for a contracted airline, Filipe piloted planes moving supplies and humanitarians working for Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, Action Against Hunger, and the World Food Programme, to name a few. Hours before his life changed forever, he co-piloted a plane loaded with exam papers for Save the Children.

After landing on a dirt airstrip in Lusambo, three pick-up trucks with heavily armed child soldiers surrounded them, demanding transportation to Rwanda. The other pilot tried to radio base, escalating tensions. Guns were pointed at Filipe’s chest, and he pleaded for his life. The abduction lasted six hours, but the emotional aftermath persisted for decades.

“I didn’t seek therapy initially,” Filipe admits. “I bottled up the trauma, maintaining a facade of bravado for seventeen years.” In 2000, society and the medical community had significant gaps in understanding mental health. Despite having medical insurance that covers therapy, pilots who seek it often lose their medical clearance, which has only changed until very recently.

Filipe began his own research at Royal Roads University, focusing on PTSD among humanitarian workers. He could find no published literature on the topic, although awareness was growing. “Back then, it was assumed PTSD only affected military personnel,” Filipe explains. “Even in 2010, my doctors told me I didn’t have PTSD because I wasn’t a soldier who went to war.” Feeling dismissed by his doctors, Filipe persevered in his studies, determined to shed light on the mental health struggles of those in humanitarian work.

“Compared to military personnel, we’re in the same war zones, often longer,” Filipe says. He notes the modern treatments like Trauma-Release Exercises, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and psychedelic-assisted therapies. Back then the more traditional Cognitive Behavioral Therapy was the norm. Filipe’s extensive therapy, costing about \$10,000 a year, helped him function normally in society but didn’t completely eliminate his symptoms.

As the years passed, Filipe’s extroverted nature diminished. His professional life paused, he withdrew from social activities, and his relationships suffered. “My normal extroversion was gone,” Filipe shares. “I pulled away from friends and family, and my relationships fractured.”

It took 17 years for the full brunt of the events to hit him. A completely unrelated family incident pushed Filipe’s mental health to the brink.

By then, medical science had started to catch up, and he received a diagnosis of Delayed-Onset PTSD. The diagnosis brought relief and marked the beginning of his long path to recovery, which also meant sacrificing his pilot licence for six years, and his only means of income to pursue this path.

Filipe devoured literature, finding solace in Dr. Bessel van der Kolk’s book The Body Keeps The Score. Van der Kolk explains that you can try to suppress memories and trauma, but they stay with you trapped in your body. Thanks to employer-provided health insurance, Filipe had more support than most. Therapy is expensive, and he recognizes that many lack access to the necessary care. OHIP’s limited coverage for mental health leaves many without help.

Filipe believes humanitarian agencies should provide mental health training before sending people into conflict zones. His recovery is a testament to his determination and self-advocacy, even when his doctors were dismissive.

As we finish our meal, Filipe reads from his fortune cookie, “You have a strong desire to maintain peace.” We wander from Toronto’s Chinatown to the Annex and stumble into Caversham Booksellers, North America’s largest mental health bookstore. Filipe selects his reading list for anyone struggling with PTSD.

Peace to Filipe means “being kind to others. Everyone is struggling with something. Before speaking ill of someone, remember they might be dealing with something you don’t know about. As a professor once told me, most of the time people are unkind because they are dealing with something and you are just not aware of it and maybe they are not either.”

If you need mental health support the Canadian Mental Health Association’s website is a good starting point.

Chris Houston is the president of the Canadian Peace Museum charity that is fundraising to open a museum in Bancroft. You can read more at www.canadianpeacemuseum.ca



CHRIS HOUSTON
Special to The Times



Humanitarian pilot Filipe Faria shares his journey of recovery from PTSD. /SUBMITTED, Chris Houston

HH council does due diligence on Maynooth cell tower

To the Editor,
You may have noticed that there are a lot of new cell towers appearing all over the place, even near your home, and thought to yourself “How come I never heard about this? I would have liked to be able to ask my Municipality who this tower belongs to, what purpose it serves and why it was placed where it was.”

This almost happened to the citizens of Maynooth regarding a 90 metre (30 storey tall) Rogers cell tower proposed for a site at the west end of our village as part of the Eastern Ontario Regional Network’s ‘Cell Gap Project’.

A stated focus of EORN’s ‘Cell Gap Project’ is “on building new towers to expand service where there is limited or no service.” As part of this project the council of Hastings Highlands has already approved six new towers, yet to be built, for Peterson Rd, Mink Lake Rd, Madawaska Rd, Musclow- Greenview Rd and east and west Baptiste Lake. Maynooth is not a cell gap and currently enjoys Rogers 5G cell service, Bell Canada’s 4G LTE cell service and our newly installed Bell Canada fibre optic cable.

In February our council was informed by a Rogers tower proponent, that as part of this Cell Gap Project, he was going to begin the public consultation process for a Maynooth tower, in accordance with Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada’s federally regulated tower siting protocol CPC-2-0-03. This protocol mandates a clear and well defined process that begins with an initial 30 day comment period. As the proponent attested in a document sent to council on April 1, the period he chose was March 1 to March 30. To inform the public of this comment period, ISED’s protocol required only a one time quarter page ad in a local paper and written notice to any property owner within a distance of 337 metres of the tower’s outermost guy anchor, which included only two residences. Under ISED protocol the Municipality of Hastings Highlands had no obligation and took no steps to inform the village of this tower.

On April 10, after the initial comment period had passed, a letter was sent to council informing them that the majority of the residents and business owners of Maynooth were totally unaware of this tower proposal and requesting that council address this situation by calling a public meeting.

At the April 17 council meeting a motion to approve the tower (a vote of concurrence) was a last minute deletion from the agenda when council determined that the Rogers proponent did not follow ISED’s protocol as attested in his document to Council of April 1, 2024.

At the May 15 council meeting, a petition was presented to council, requesting that council hold a public meeting to address the community’s concerns about the tower and the lack of public notice and consultation in the process. This petition was signed by 65 of 67 citizens and business owners approached in the village of Maynooth. To be clear, this petition did not include the signatures of residents of Hastings Highlands who do not live or work in Maynooth, and does not reflect the false narrative put forward to council by the Rogers proponent, of only 10 concerned commenters of a wider municipal population of over 4,000. This petition addressed the lack of commenters. Nobody

knew about this tower, including most of its closest neighbours.

At the May 29 meeting, council was to consider two competing motions, to approve the tower, or to convene a public meeting. A vote to approve the tower would mean no public meeting. After a fulsome debate, in which the Rogers proponent stated he was not willing to work with the council or the community to find a better site for this tower, council voted not to approve the tower (non concurrence) and the proponent and the Mayor pronounced the tower dead.

In a CBC Toronto Morning Radio interview on June 7, our Mayor discussed his disappointment with our council’s decision and revealed that even before the May 29th meeting had concluded, the Rogers proponent was on the phone with Municipal staff with a new proposal for a shorter tower.

At the June 26, council meeting, council was asked to accept a report outlining this new proposal, which noted that a shorter tower addressed community concerns about tower height and lighting. During the debate the Rogers proponent was unable to definitively answer questions about the height or lighting except to offer vague assurances as these issues are out of his control once a tower is approved. He also did not come to the meeting with any outline for public consultation about this new proposal, as he suggested would happen if the report were to be accepted. The result was council voting not to accept the report. The proponent stated to council, “There is no Plan C”, and the tower was once again declared dead.

The Rogers proponent did confirm to council that at any time he may take this process to Dispute Resolution with ISED’s direct oversight, per ISED protocol Section 4.3, “If a request for engagement is made at this stage, ISED will review the relevant material, request any further information it deems pertinent from any party and may then decide that the proponent has met the consultation requirements of this process and that ISED concurs that installation or modification may proceed...”

During the council meeting debates about this proposed Maynooth tower the community has repeatedly made the case that there was insufficient public notice or public consultation regarding this tower, and that the proponent did not follow ISED’s protocol Section 4, regarding public notification and consultation as mandated. At both the May 29 and June 26 meetings of council, our council was asked to vote regarding this proposed tower with specific instruction from our planning department. “The municipality’s role is to confirm whether the Proponent followed ISED Canada’s default Protocol and to review the proposal from a land use planning perspective only.”

In the face of corporate and political pressures, this council has said that the regulations in place must be followed when dealing with this municipality and its constituents. Council has done its due diligence and voted to respect the mandated rules of the process.

Respectfully,
Tom Newman
Maynooth, ON

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or email us at
info@homeagainbancroft.ca

The Cat Corner

Congratulations Mary Leigh Akkerman on your promotion to Home Again Cat Manager

Mary Leigh Akkerman has fostered Home Again cats for many years. Here are two:

Charlie was found outside, motherless, at about 4 weeks old. Luckily, there was a lactating mother cat in Mary Leigh’s house and she fed Charlie along with her litter who were just weaning away from nursing. He has grown into a big solid boy and is ready to be adopted now.

Frilly, a dilute tortoiseshell, was found in the No Frills parking lot at 8 weeks old. She was lucky not to be run over. She is taking medicine to fight an infection and ear mites and will be ready for adoption when our veterinarian pronounces her well.

Kittens are \$200 each, which includes their spay/neuter surgery when they are six months old, and a microchip. They come well domesticated where they have the run of their foster homes.

Charlie

Frilly

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