

CAMBRIDGE SLANT

LETTERS POLICY Letters up to 400 words and guest columns up to 800 words may be sent to the Cambridge Chronicle. Submissions must be received by Monday at 9 a.m. to be considered for publication in Thursday's Chronicle. Letters and columns must be signed and must include a daytime telephone number for verification. Letters and columns may be authored by up to two people. If you are sending a thank-you letter, please limit the list of those you are thanking to 10 names. We reserve the right to edit letters for content and length.

SEND LETTERS TO Cambridge Chronicle & TAB, 9 Meriam St., Lexington, MA 02420. EMAIL cambridge@wickedlocal.com. FAX TO 617-629-3381.

EDITORIAL

Schools need more teaching, less testing

When standards-based education reform came to Massachusetts, we had assumed the emphasis on core academics would not detract from other important subjects. The MCAS tests, required for math, English and science, would mark a floor, not a ceiling. Teachers and administrators had their own, higher standards for achievement, we assumed, and a broader idea of a complete education. We considered fears that what wasn't tested wouldn't be taught to be an insult to the professionalism of the state's educators.

It now appears we were wrong, at least when it comes to many school administrators. School districts have cut back on art, music and elective courses in order to concentrate on math and English. New tests have been added in the years since the MCAS was launched in the early '90s. The state now requires science testing. Federal laws require yearly testing in every grade, so the time spent on tests has multiplied, from 30 hours a year in 2000 to 95 hours a year today.

Just one test has been dropped over those years. The state's 1993 Education Reform Act called for a test in U.S. history as a graduation requirement. But that requirement was postponed again and again, and in 2009 the Gov. Deval Patrick administration canceled it altogether.

But that decision came with a cost. It turns out that which isn't tested really isn't taught — at least not with the requisite seriousness. School districts across Massachusetts have reduced course offerings in history, civics and geography. Certified

social studies teachers are being replaced by teachers with other specialties and other interests. They may try their best, but it's hard for a teacher who doesn't love history to inspire children to study the past.

This summer, in one school district, we were pleased to see that parents protested an administration decision to remove two certified social studies teachers from a middle school. School officials said the move was prompted by the need to hire two teachers trained in teaching English Language Learners. Social studies will still be part of the curriculum, but will be taught by teachers certified in other subjects. That decision does a disservice to all students.

Massachusetts' neglect of history shows in its scores. Bay State students regularly lead the nation in scores on standardized tests for math, English and science. But on one long-running test of U.S. history and civics, Massachusetts hasn't finished in the top 10 in nearly 30 years.

Parents, students and teachers agree that Massachusetts schools need more teaching and less testing. State officials should seek a waiver from the federal government to cut back on annual testing in English, math and science. But they should introduce tests in U.S. history and civics, in at least two grades.

The commonwealth and the nation were founded by men who believed nothing was as important to the success of our democratic republic than the active engagement of citizens who understood its history and institutions. Teaching those things must be a core function of our schools, not an afterthought.

GUEST COLUMN

Haiti native asks fellow residents for help

By Marie Nirva Tancyl

My name is Nirva Tancyl and I have been a Cambridge resident since 1996. This city has been a salvation for me and my family. So much so I have not moved out since I moved in. I owe this city and all my neighbors so much of my life. Before I moved to Cambridge I went through many hardships in trying to provide for my family. No matter how hard it gets though, it is always my family that helps me pull through and the very reason that I'm here.

I grew up and spent most of my life in a small town in Haiti called Arniquet. It's the type of place where literally everyone knows everyone. I grew up there, like most Haitians in that time, in a simple tin roofed two bedroom home. Next door were all of my cousins, aunts and uncles. My father was a well-respected soldier in the military and my mother was a devoted housewife. We were never rich with money but always had a lot of love and support.

In a place like Haiti, support is very important because you never know where your needs will be met. My parents made all the sacrifices that they could to educate myself and my siblings. Their hard work and compassion brought me and my sister to the public health field. My sister and I worked as



Marie Nirva Tancyl, a native of Haiti and longtime Cambridge resident, is asking for help to send donations to Haiti. COURTESY PHOTO

nurses in Haiti for over 15 years. In 1993 I made the decision to move to the U.S. in order to save my life and continue to provide for my four small children and family.

Immigrant life is not an easy life. Your body and mind are never truly at rest. I was constantly worried about myself and my family. How will they eat today? Will I have time to eat today? How will I pay my rent and the home of my family? And every year, what will happen when hurricane season comes?

It's no secret that Haiti has been plagued with a number of issues over the years. However the desperate state of our country has been more publicized since the 2010 earthquake. Hundreds of thousands lost their lives and many more living have also, in a sense,

lost their lives. I was very thankful to have had all of my loved ones and home survive, but I know many who didn't.

It has been a struggle for all Haitians, abroad and at home, to move on. Out of concern for my family and for the future I have dedicated a portion of my weekly allowance for the past six years to building a safe place for my family to go in the event of an emergency. Each week myself and my sister gather \$20 or \$40 to send back home to build this house, brick by brick. I never thought it would be the only place my cousins and their children have just a few years later.

I have been overwhelmed with the constant messages asking for my help and I have nothing left to give. I'm a 60-year-old grandmother now who is

still working to make ends meet. And yet my heart aches because I can not do more to help the people I love. I have received messages from Thierry Tancyl, Jean Bobby Tancyl, Emilio Tancyl, St. Anne Tancyl, St. Jean Tancyl and Dylan Tancyl, and all of my cousins. All of them are asking me for help because they are all now homeless. Their homes are all gone. All they have are each other and the shirts on their backs.

Though I'm eternally grateful they are still here with me, I'm now burdened, as all Haitians living abroad are, to help. How can I ever have enough money to fix such a large problem? I'm asking all of my Cambridge neighbors to please find it in your heart to help me help them.

My daughter, Stephanie Guirand, and her friends with Black Lives Matter Cambridge have helped me to organize a donation drive. We have ordered a shipping container for the donations to go to Haiti.

To donate, email blmcpaypal@gmail.com and say it is for "Haiti."

For information: Blmc-cambridge@gmail.com; [facebook.com/events/1125799440832562/](https://www.facebook.com/events/1125799440832562/).

—Marie Nirva Tancyl is a Windsor Street resident.

AT LARGE

My 6 seconds with Springsteen

By Peter Chianca
pchianca@wickedlocal.com

I met Bruce Springsteen this week, or at least I think I met him. The whole experience was so quick and surreal that it seems like one of those dreams that fades away a few seconds after you wake up, leaving you with just a vague feeling that it was about something really cool.

Like meeting Bruce Springsteen.

Bruce was at the Harvard Coop Monday to promote his new memoir "Born to Run," at an event that gave fans — at least those of us who managed to snag one of the rare tickets available online — a chance to spend a quality handful of seconds with the Boss. Sure, I'd have preferred a 45-minute sit-down like the one he had with Terry Gross on NPR last week ... but a few seconds are better than no seconds.

All in all it was a festive gathering — the people in the line with me couldn't have been nicer, and the event couldn't have been organized any better. But after an hour or so, as my portion of the line made its way into the bookstore, up the various flights of stairs and around the stacks of books toward Bruce Central, I felt my palms getting sweaty.

He's here, in the building, I heard the 15-year-old fangirl who lives in my head saying. You're breathing the same air!

I am clearly not a well man.

Then came the blurry part. I recall coming out from behind one of the bookshelves and there he was,



Wicked Local's Peter Chianca (right, duh) got a chance to meet Bruce Springsteen at the Harvard Coop Monday, Oct. 10. WICKED LOCAL PHOTO

greeting fans just a few yards away. The well-oiled Bruce-meeting machine took over from there, zipping me up to the short line in front of the dais, confiscating my phone to be handed over to one of a phalanx of Coop employees snapping photos, and then placing me by the foot of the stage.

Bruce looked smaller and older than he does from hundreds of feet away during a concert, but not *much* smaller and older — the man was by no means shriveled. (He could still pass for much younger than his 67 actual years.) He was clad in jeans and a black leather jacket which, as it turns out, was *exactly what I was wearing*. Clearly we were on the same mental wavelength, or possibly I was some kind of deranged stalker. Maybe a little of both.

But none of it really registered until he was finishing up with the fan just before me. Wanting to make sure the photographer was all set before sending the guy on his way, he asked in a concerned tone, "Ya got it?"

It was then, when I heard the voice — the voice that sang "Thunder Road"! The

voice that had been coming out of my tinny little speakers since I was 15! — that it suddenly seemed real: Here was Bruce Springsteen, he was standing *right there*, and he was here to meet *me!* (And a few thousand other people, but also *me!*)

Next thing I knew there I was, gripping his hand — he has the most Bruce Springsteen-esque handshake you can imagine, firm but not intimidating; it was a hand-shake that says, "Nobody wins unless everybody wins." His smell was musky, like a recently extinguished bonfire. The leather of his jacket was soft and supple, like a really, really expensive couch.

"The book is terrific," I managed to say. "Thank you so much for writing it."

"Thank you very much," he said in his trademark low rasp, but not in that perfunctory way that most people say, "Thank you very much." It was a sincere, eye-contact-enhanced, handshake-accompanied "Thank you very much" that quite frankly put all other Thank you very muches to shame.

He thanked us very much! said the fangirl in my head.

Then the Coop guy handed me my phone and I was back out on the street.

It may have been over in a flash, but it was still striking to me that an artist of Bruce's caliber would stand for hours greeting fans who would no doubt have bought his book anyway. It's the latest salvo in his four-decade effort to engage directly with his audience, whether it's through his recorded work, his concerts, or now through a single shared moment with a lucky few who got to come out.

What it comes down to is that hosting an event like Monday's in Cambridge is probably not something Bruce Springsteen has to do to be successful — but it means a lot that he does it anyway.

At least to me, because now I've got a picture with the Boss — so it must have been real. Take that, Terry Gross!

—Peter Chianca writes about Bruce Springsteen for *Blogness on the Edge of Town* and is the author of "Glory Days: Springsteen's Greatest Albums." Follow him on Twitter at [@pchianca](https://twitter.com/pchianca).

Cambridge Chronicle & TAB

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ATTENTION

Submission deadline for election letters

The deadline for submitting election-related letters is Friday, Oct. 21, at 10 a.m. Election letters must be 250 words or less and sent to Cambridge@wickedlocal.com. The last print edition in which these letters will run is Oct. 27. We reserve the right to print a representative sample of these letters if the volume we receive is too large for print.