

QUEERING COVID



THE COVID-19 ZINE BY THE QUIRK-E ZINERS

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INTRODUCTION

River Glen

This Zine was conceived because a group of Queer seniors, River Glen, Val Innes, Gayle Roberts, and Ellen Woodsworth, the Ziners in the Queer Imaging and Riting Kollektive, thought our personal and shared experiences of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic needed to be documented. From isolation to connection, from loss to creation, and from fear to a commitment to an inclusive, just and green recovery, we share our pathos, strategies, concerns and determination. We're angry that elders in care are dying of COVID-19 far more than others. We are the generation who created the Pride movement, faced down the AIDS crisis, realized our strength in numbers, protested, marched and won civil rights, and developed our commitment to social justice. From here we carry on. We work for change.



The members of Quirk-e challenge stereotypical representations of what it's like to be old and queer through their political involvement, their writing, art work and performances. We are committed to intergenerational and interracial dialogue. In non-COVID times, we meet weekly at Britannia Community Services Centre in East Vancouver. Now, with COVID-19 here, we meet weekly on Zoom. We receive support from Qmunity and from the Arts and Health Project, City of Vancouver.

An Unprecedented Moment in Time

Val Innes

This seems to me to be an utterly unprecedented moment, but perhaps I'm wrong about that. Perhaps those caught up in the end of World War I, the votes for women movement, and the 1918 flu pandemic felt the same as we do. However, here we are in 2020, at the confluence of multiple movements/issues challenging the status quo: the COVID-19 pandemic which has closed down much of a global economy based on constant growth, thereby interrupting the status quo; the Black Lives Matter movement which has gone global, and the Indigenous movement, both challenging systemic racism inextricably linked to corporate control and colonization. And always in the background, Climate Change looms, not the focus, but there, and eventually an unavoidable challenge to the human rape of the planet. Leading up to this moment, too, is the global "MeToo" movement, in the streets, media and courts challenging sexism and misogyny, particularly of privileged, white males. None of these challenges to the status quo are going away anytime soon, and the massive marches, protests and legal challenges continue.

And even as this all happens, the corporations and billionaires continue to lobby relentlessly for a continuation of unregulated capitalism, a return to the status quo, even as tens of thousands of us march for a new normal, a fairer more just normal that cares for all of us equally, that values those who sustain us rather than those who take. Will we bring about change this time? Change that is desperately needed in a global economic and political system that does not meet the needs of the people, the animals and, ultimately, the planet. It's a crisis, this moment -- but it's also an opportunity. It's up to us to take that opportunity.

A Pandemic Lament in March

River Glen

Every population is under the duress of COVID-19, and my community is one of them. I am a single, low income senior, a Cis female, and I use the label Queer. I also have a disability that fortunately leaves some quality of life, but because the qualification for any additional financial help requires onerous disability, I am not eligible. I gratefully received a \$290 bonus this month because of the impact of the virus on us seniors. In my case, it went to afford some of the delivery costs of necessary supplies because I am avoiding leaving my home with my

compromised immune system. Normally, I could call on family, friends or neighbours, but they are not able to help me. I am also spending more on groceries. I normally take advantage of community meals that help with getting a balance diet, but, of course, also provide social support. I realize how much quality of life and moral support I usually get from the queer community.

This year there was no Spring Fling or tea that Qmunity usually puts on. There will be no barbecues in the park this summer, or Pride events, or the Queer film festival, which are where I enjoy my friendships. As the year progresses through the seasons, many other of these important sources of support and affirmation will not be there. I usually buy most of what I need second hand, but thrift stores are closed, so that will mean doing buy new. I also have put off seeing a dentist for nearly a year, but I have been saving for a visit when I finally can get an appointment. I just hope the added time won't result in issues worsening and costing more to remediate, The same is true of a dermatologist I regularly see for pre-cancer removal. I know many in my community, especially homeless youth or those people with worse pre-existing conditions are suffering while I still have a home and most of my needs met. I truly want the most vulnerable to have as much support as our government can come up with.



without or trying to

Fear

Ellen Woodsworth

May 12, 2020

I am ripped out of my deep sleep by thoughts of my partner who is of Asian descent being attacked as we walk lovingly hand in hand along the Fraser River. I fantasize grabbing a stick and attacking him, telling her to run. I can't go back to sleep as I realize the terror deep inside me that she will be attacked by a racist. I think of the impact of racism that spews out of the mouth of the most powerful man in the world, sending the virus of racism around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic blamed on China spreads racism far more virulent than the disease and will not be contained.

It is gendered and racialized, attacking women and men of Asian, black and indigenous descent. In the US, the virus is killing much higher numbers of black people. It is a deep disease surging forth in manic magnitude as unforeseen as it is devastating to friends and families. It

rips apart societies already weakened by the disease. It rides on the tidal waves of economic collapse that has stripped women of their full and part time jobs while the military industrial complex and fossil fuel companies join hands to steal what government money is left.

Yesterday, I learned from my friend Janice of the woman held captive in a tent at Oppenheimer Park for 15 hours screaming as all her fingers are broken and her body covered with cigarette burns, but no one intervenes. At least one woman, on average, is murdered by her partner every week, and thousands more women and children are beaten while alcohol sales go up by 55%. Women and LGBTQI2S people living in homophobic families or shelters or in tents or on the streets have nowhere to run to as the shelters are full. WISH is begging for funding for clean socks and underpants as even sex trade workers can't work and are not eligible for any supports because their work is invisible and criminalized. Housing is prohibitively expensive, so the women and children who are being attacked and raped are forced to stay in their single rooms hotels, apartments and homes in Beautiful BC.

Fear grips me as I throw my arm across my sleeping lover trying not to wake her. It is 2:30 a.m., but I must sleep. Fear for our future is paralyzing me. I finally slip out of bed to try to wrench myself out of the absolute abyss that is overwhelming the new reality of our lives, leaving me feeling defenceless.

What am I doing to stay sane ? Listening to webinars with Naomi Klein, Angela Davis, Arundhati Roy, Vandana Shiva and David Suzuki, Outright, UN LGBTQI CORE GROUP, YWCA and others talking about green actions, capitalism, women and women's leadership in the global context. I fight back, representing WTC on the Feminists Deliver working group. I work with the YWCA to convene a first meeting of women leaders to discuss the issues and develop a joint statement. I am part of the UN Expert Group Meeting to develop a Human Rights Framework for Inclusive Cities and a Expert Group Meeting on Gender. I follow Vancouver Council meetings and speak out on issues, joining with others calling for the City of Vancouver to develop a Feminist New Green Deal Reconstruction Strategy. I share the Hawaiian Feminist Economic Strategy which is going viral from my LinkedIn posting. More personally, I am trying to stay balanced by doing my four pages of writing each morning; I have joined a Memoire class. I am a member of Quirk-e, sharing ideas and concerns and trying to do some writing . Daily, I am faced with the silent and invisible violence of the pandemics, economic and social, collapsing and destroying the world that I have helped to build.

Meanwhile, the sun shines, the birds build their nests, have their babies being eaten by larger birds, and my garlic is three feet tall. I don't get to see my friends, but I cook for two seniors in my building, one of whom is being eaten up by cancer. Though desperate for contact, she can't hug her beloved granddaughter or me. I donate to strategic causes. I try to understand how we mobilize to minimize the impact and maximise the opportunities right now. Then I read Naomi Klein's latest article in the Guardian about how high tech is using this time to

take over the world, devouring all smaller companies in the field. They have started in New York City where they are welcomed with open arms by Cuomo who is already well invested in the field. Meanwhile, the insane forces of the dying US empire are thrashing around allowing hundreds of thousands to die while they try to prop up the collapse of their dynasty. Trudeau, meanwhile, hands out short term supports as do the Provincial governments while sitting behind closed doors planning the economic recovery without us.

Am I afraid? No, I am terrified.

My COVID experience so far. May 2020

Farren Gillaspie

There are three bubbles in my COVID-19 experience: work, my friend's home and my own home. I am considered an essential service, so there is my work bubble where I work with four disabled adults in a house. I am the supervisor and primary shopper, so it's a mask when I go shopping and hand sanitizer in the car. I just found out there is a danger of leaving hand sanitizer exposed in a hot car, so I need to consider that.



photo by Lenore Frank

Anyway, at work all our staff are restricted to working in one location. We have to take our temperature before we can come into the home, don masks immediately, wear goggles and gloves for any personal care, and wash our hands so many times. Hand sanitizer is discouraged inside the home and thorough hand washing is mandatory. All surfaces are sanitized multiple times a day. Encouraging multiple hand washings a day for my residents is challenging at best. When I wash my own hands at home, the happy birthday song goes around and around my head! The residents are cheerful despite the lock down, and we try to spice it up by reviving a large garden that has laid dormant for several years, spontaneous mocktails, and lots of zoom and face time with family members, who are not allowed to come into the home or take the residents out.

Another of my bubbles is my ninety-three old friend of thirty seven years who requires weekly grocery deliveries. I need to check her cupboards first; because of memory issues she doesn't remember what she needs. I wear my work tag around my neck, so people don't think I am a hoarder when I shop for all three homes at the same time. I must say I resented the mask at first, but now it is my way of saying I respect all of the front line service people. It's keeping

the people I care about in all three homes safe. Of course, I am concerned about getting infected myself. It wears me a bit thin, thinking I might bring the virus home to my partner, or to my vulnerable 93 year old friend. It's frustrating not to be able to get a definitive test to know if I am a carrier. Early on, I went to the drive-through testing station. Most of the health questions they asked me were a yes, but they are all my norm, congestion, aches and pains etc. My only piece of mind is that I have not had a temperature, which could have been a strong indicator.

No longer do I have any tolerance for crazy people who feel their personal rights are being infringed upon, and I skip all of the conspiracy theories popping up on my Facebook. We do have an ugly underbelly in Canada that is being exposed. I guess it's better, the devil you know than the one you don't see? The orange man south of the border only gets a cursory look on my news feed, so I can occasionally share an emoji! From my third bubble, my home, I am thankful for all of the considerate people who do take precautions, and the neighbours I toast from our back deck at least once weekly. Our friends and dining out pals meet regularly for



Health Care Worker, Mental Health and Addictions

photo by Cyndia Cole

zoom cocktails which we often refer to as quarantines. I appreciate my neighbour who, when returning my extension pruning shears, tells me he has wiped down the handle with san-wipes.

Most of all, I am appreciating nature. I'm not sure if it is the weather we have had or the lack of pollution, but all of the flowering shrubs, cherry and apple trees seem to be working overtime to cheer us up. I am equally appreciative to be living in Vancouver and appreciative of Dr. Henry. I really hope this crisis will serve as a reset button for a lot of our environmental woes and values that have not served us.

BE CALM, BE KIND, AND BE SAFE.

Dr. Bonnie Henry

INDEPENDENCE AND COVID-19

Chris Morrissey

“Would you like help with that?”

“Can I give you a hand?”

As a white haired 77 year-old woman, I am frequently asked these questions and others. As a lesbian woman, I’ve worked very hard to be independent. And been very proud of doing so. My responses are usually, “Thanks, I can manage. Or “I’m OK, Thanks”. Most of the time I can. Once in a while, I would accept the help, especially with electronic devices. Of course, I always tried first. Often several times. After many times and usually several hours of wasted time, I phone one of my friends to ask for help. Obviously not easily or with much graciousness, because by the time I get to that point, I’m frazzled, frustrated and very, very impatient.

There are tasks needing professionals. So I have turned to electricians and plumbers and other professionals. But during my lifetime I have painted walls, laid floor tiles and moved furniture innumerable times! Whenever I need help, asking doesn’t come easily. As I’ve grown older and there are things that are physically outside my ability. I still try and do as much as I think I can. Occasionally, I regret not having asked.

Then came COVID-19. I do fall into one of the more vulnerable groups. I have a mild case of OCPD and my age. I’m also dealing with a blockage my right leg, which makes walking a challenge and driving not safe. I am encouraged by many people in my life not to go out. I decided to follow their advice and self-quarantine for my own health.

Now I am really **dependant**. Groceries, pharmacy, trips to the wound care clinic, the doctor. There are so many occasions where I have to ask for and accept help. In order to take care of my health, I have needed help and support. I am very happy when one of them arrives with a week’s worth of groceries and when someone brings me homemade cookies. I am learning. I’m very grateful for my friends, and community. For all their kindness and presence in my life. I am learning that accepting help is also a gift to another.

When all this is over, I hope I can continue the lessons I’m learning during COVID-19.



MUSINGS OF AN ISOLATED SENIOR LESBIAN IN THE YEAR OF COVID

Patti Gallacher

Imagine living alone in your 70s as a lesbian in the year of COVID in Canada. I am in that position. I have an underlying medical condition, and with my advanced age, it was strongly suggested to me that I shelter in place in my quiet apartment in Richmond, BC. It has been over 3 months now that I have been shut in here, leaving only occasionally for senior shopping for groceries early in the morning. I have a weekly grocery delivery by a volunteer agency here, for which I do not have to leave home, and there are some free meals available for delivery, as well, that I do not take advantage of.

So, most of my needs are met without my having to open my apartment door and leave my suite. While armed with my cloth mask and hand sanitizer, I occasionally leave my place to check my mail, take out my garbage, and place my food scraps into the recycling bins area outside my building. Those are the only times I am likely to see any of my neighbours as they are also seniors sheltering in place. On any given day or evening, the halls are empty, and if I stood in the hallway and yelled, the echo would be deafening.

My family lives in another city, and I hear from them rarely. I have TV programs, my music to listen to, books to read, and the internet which I can use to contact my friends, everything I need to amuse myself within my the four walls of my apartment. I guess I am lucky with all my distractions. I have stopped listening the news about the pandemic; it is just too depressing and confirms why I am to live in such a lonely way. I am used to being a busy senior, walking outside almost every day, bustling about. A lot of my friends have cars and families of their own, and I am not invited to share their day, as they know I have to stay home during the pandemic.

Having no human contact has been the hardest, I haven't had a hug or human touch for almost 3 months now, with no partner, no kids, or grand kids to share their love with this old and grey lesbian. We are not allowed to have pets, either, which would at least offer some



contact with another living thing. I cry more now, and that seems to help. I don't know how long the current health crisis will last; some say it's ending, but I can't be sure. I may have to wait until a vaccine is made available, which seems a very long way off. I don't remember thinking I'd end up this way: old, grey, and alone.

I've now reached out to my LGBTQ community, to their newly formed writing group for older adults and seniors, where I can share my thoughts and writing online and for which I am very grateful; at least I can see their human faces on the other side of my computer screen. So, I will revert to my talents, some artwork, some writing, and singing, if I could find an online choir that would work. Meanwhile, I dream and cry and even laugh sometimes as an isolated by COVID senior lesbian.



DAILY WALKS

Cyndia Cole

Daily walks alone allow me time for reflection. I discover new perspectives.

COVID19'S FASHION MESSAGE

Pat Hogan

Masks come in all colours and designs
Some more dramatic than others
The hospital blue, the snouted mask
. . . Are they here forever?

Frowned on by some, lauded by others
Worn on the streets
And at the most elegant of places
By the young, the old, the queer, the bold,
This unforgettable memory will later be told.

And, If masks are here to stay awhile

Let's embrace their gift of care
And enjoy the crinkling of the eyes
That tell us a smile is there.

Under the mask, we're all the same
differences are muted by cloth --
Gender, age, lifestyle, and more....
Perhaps this is a plan of sorts???

Mask it up, have some fun!



photos by Val Innes

Two Months Into Isolation

River Glen

Gem woke as she did way too often, with a flood of adrenaline and cortisol, heart pounding and the thought of the pandemic rising up out of the fog of her clearing mind. She glanced at the glowing numbers on the digital clock...3:45 a.m.. She remembered it was around midnight when she got to sleep. Well she wasn't going to drift off again for that was an oft proven unsuccessful experiment. She felt the wood floor under her feet which were taking her with some spontaneous urgency to the toilet. Then she was drawn to the kitchen window, which she regularly did to assess the state of the world. With her finger, she pulled down an eye-level slat on the mini blinds and peered out. Not raining, not windy, no one in her densely populated neighbourhood out and about. The street light cast a circle of brightness down on the yellow tulips, making them glow against an otherwise black and white snapshot of the scene.

Were the flowers the sign of hope waiting to be noticed? It probably was the worst



thing to do but she made a cup of decaf coffee and opened her tablet. First she went to emails. Nothing she needed to deal with right away. Then she opened Facebook for the first time in this premature infant of a day. Gem could feel her blood pressure rise as she scrolled through the newsfeed. Gawd, she was a masochist letting tRump drill holes in her head and any semblance of peace of mind. It wasn't just the daily

assault to decency and reason but now terrible mismanagement of a crippling and killing pandemic. Of course, the crisis was only an additional layer over her years of concern about climate change, the grotesque economic inequality, another murdered black youth, murdered trans women, murdered indigenous woman and a person of Asian ancestry being abused. Oh good, a cat video and a cheery comment from a friend.

Gem also had her own challenges: a senior, having a chronic health condition, being low income and having concerns for her adult kids and her friends during these uncertain times. Gratefully, she reminded herself she had money for food and at seven could pull on her street clothes over her pajamas and go to the grocery store during senior hour for her weekly shopping. Which it soon was after the exhausting time reading articles and fighting ideological battles online. Mask on. It was still early-ish, grey morning light. There were a few people scurrying off to some essential job as she dragged her cart behind her. Jeeze, it echoed loudly in the canyon of high rise apartment buildings. Rounding the corner, oh yes, a line had already

formed. Gem found a place, maybe twenty people, at two metres apart, down from the store. It really didn't take long to be up to the last waiting mark on the sidewalk. The guard offered to spray her hands from the big bottle he held. Why not, she shrugged? Everything she had gone in for was in stock this time.

Once home, her big chore of the day accomplished, 7:30 AM and the day felt like a cliff that Gem was standing on the edge of, uncertain whether to jump or turn back and run to her bed piling the pillows on top her head. Too lonely, just lying there. She turned on some music, made something to eat. Flipped from TV, to internet, to her book, took out the trash and recycling. The community garden plot needed water, but she really was too tired from simply going to the store. Gem thought she should practice her ukulele for the Zoom class on Thursday...though she had little patience for practice before the pandemic, or she could write something for her queer writing group Zooming on Tuesday. The phone rang. It was her brother in Arizona, FaceTiming. He always had some black humour to share as he tried to stay sane in a sea of rednecks. As the day inched pass, a couple of more phone calls brightened it.



At 4p.m., Gem made herself get off the couch and go for her daily walk. On went the face mask, her beaked hat and dark glasses...to re-enter the larger world incognito. Still she felt exposed. She stepped off the sidewalk at least twice to let sidewalk hogs go by. Lots of people out in the fine day and trees splendid in their cherry blossoms. She was drawn to the walk along the bay, but it was challenging to try for social distance. Especially the runners who always seemed to brush pass. Her legs ached, but she reminded herself how her heart needed cardio, and maybe it would help her sleep at night. The beauty of the city, the water in the bay, the air drawn deeper into her lungs revived her, and with a little more sense of accomplishment Gem climbed the hill to home.

In the lobby, she saw a neighbour, and they exchanged pandemic status updates, leaving enough room to pass each other. Yesterday, Gem had sort of let her guard down when she agreed to go for a walk for the first time with her son and the three small grandkids. It was hard not to hold an out stretched hand to a little one, and during the course of the half hour or so, the little ones wandered to a meter or less from her. But even though it was dangerous in this new reality, it sure felt good to be together in person. The virtual, birthday party last month for the five year old had mostly depressed her and made the loneliness weigh down harder.

Gem didn't want to think too much as she sat quietly in the darkening living room. There were still hours before she might find respite in some sleep. If only she could embrace some creative pursuit to distract her. She reached for the tablet, and this time decided to write about her days.

A Difficult Journey

Greta Hurst

Last year, approaching my 83rd birthday, just felt like another year with some small changes. However, a month before my 84th birthday this year, it seemed many changes happened at the same time, one of them being moving and the other, of course, was COVID-19. Everything seemed harder and took longer to do. I had applied to two housing projects, one in Toronto that a friend is living in, and the other in New Westminster close to where I was living.

Every year, I go to Toronto to celebrate Christmas with my younger daughter, where I stay with her, her partner, and my son who lives nearby. However, flying back home in January, I decided I didn't want to relocate to Toronto. It was too big, has too much traffic and has cold winters. Happily, a few months later I was offered an apartment in New West. Since I was living in a spacious one-bedroom and was now moving to a miniscule studio, considerable downsizing was needed. Fortunately, I have a friend living in the building next to mine who did the main decoration, so everything could fit in. My tiny apartment is livable, and all my favourite things are on the floor and the walls. I'm happy that I have it all around me.



Emotionally, it's another story. I knew aging was happening to me, but this year I feel OLD. It isn't helped by the pandemic we're living in. COVID-19 came into our lives sometime in January, and the virus spread rapidly. Lockdown in British Columbia happened in March, containing the epidemic by imposing ways of preventing people from contracting the virus by wearing masks, keeping a distance of six feet away from everyone else, and frequently washing our hands.

By the time I moved into Dunwood Place on May 20, lockdown had long been enforced. Only one person could use the elevator at a time, and signs were posted at every elevator door. The administration hadn't told me about the lockdown, and, worse, everyone seemed paranoid that they might catch the virus, particularly in seeing a newcomer as bringing the plague with her. Everyone had to wear a mask (no question!) once they left their apartments. Some people screamed at me if I attempted to join another person in an elevator. This I hadn't expected at all.

I learned that people had to smoke outside if they wanted to smoke as no smoking was allowed in apartments or anywhere inside the buildings. Very few wore their masks as outdoors it was considered unnecessary. Most seem to have few commonalities; however, I did get to meet some people whose paranoia was less evident, even though the people I generally meet in the halls seem very frightened of anyone not obeying the rules to the letter -- I thought I was in a 'funny farm'. I hadn't anticipated having problems with the people living here.

I found ways of entering and leaving my building (there are two buildings) with a huge garden in the center. It seems to me like a park which I'm able to see from my fifth floor window. It's particularly beautiful lit up at night. I go to an exercise class three times a week which very few attend as it starts at 9 a.m. When I arrived one morning not wearing a mask, the 'head,' who seemed to be in charge, screamed at me. I was now sure I was in a funny farm.



Living here for six weeks, I have somewhat 'cooled my jets,' meaning I love my studio apartment and have place for most of my prized possessions. I have a wonderful view from my fifth floor window that I enjoy even in bad weather (we have had a very rainy spring). I now wear a 'shield,' a non-medical visor similar to those worn by hospital personnel (\$10 at London Drugs). I discarded my last moving box on Friday and enjoy my apartment even more -- my decorator is very skilled! The real gift is the friend I have here; both of us go to the same church. I know I can do this and have a full life because I belong to a wonderful writing group beside the many wonderful people I know on the 'outside'. As well, the only way I'm leaving is feet first; definitely this is my last move. Wish me luck.

COVID RISING

Nora D Randall

Okay, to be truthful, I was binge eating and watching Netflix before the pandemic closed everything down, but COVID was the yeast in my couch potato loaf. I sat under cover and rose in the non-existent heat from the TV screen. If it wasn't for my dear dog, who is too much of a gentleman to want to pee and poo in the house, I would now be a loaf the size and shape of BC Place. Three times a day, I had to pull myself together and venture out in the neighbourhood, so he could



photo by Val Innes

avail himself of the facilities and gorge on spring grass (he has his own eating issues). After news of anti-Asian attacks in Vancouver, I made sure to greet every Asian I passed with a big smile and a greeting, and tried to train myself to notice if there were lone Asians standing at bus stops. I thought I could just hang out until the bus came, throwing in my white presence for what it was worth.



To be clear, I do not get the news on my TV. It is a 48" screen, which is way too big for reality. But my tiny, little, stupid, smart phone acts like a Tilt-a-Whirl pitching news of the world at me until I feel like I want to stumble off and throw up. But I can't. I mean I could, but that is my white privilege.

Watching my little screen is like being kneaded--punched down and slapped around. It tells me to educate myself by watching and reading the history of racism especially in Canada and the US, to protest against profiteering from COVID-19, to save the oceans from plastic, to know that children are being kept in detention separated from their parents on the US border, to know that refugee camps the world over are abysmal places for people to live and breeding grounds for COVID-19, not to mention our downtown Eastside. But we need to mention it. This is the short list.

After kneading, I'm back under the covers to rise again. I go downstairs to the all day supermarket to stock up on cheezies, pies and ice cream. Numbing myself with food and TV is a habit I have maintained since childhood, so cannot blame COVID. I am now in my seventies and have a fair bit of insight into my eating habits. I eat primarily for comfort when I am lonely, scared, or angry, but also out of boredom. The COVID lock down is a giant cheezie (cookies, bread, ice cream, chocolate) extravaganza for me. I am all of those things -- lonely, scared, angry, and bored. I troll Netflix for a queer comedy or crime drama that I have not seen. After three months of lock down, I am reduced to increasingly violent cop shows, but at least this violence is not real.

Though I eat enough for a high school football team, I am starving. TV only increases my sense of powerlessness and isolation. I worry about my health. I know other seniors are connected to the world and politically active even though they are stuck at home. I am not. I send money to groups I don't belong to and sign online petitions. The world is out there, and I am in a bubble of numbness. For me COVID-19 is the perfect storm of isolation.

The world is calling me to action, and COVID is telling me to stay home. I remind myself of a character in a Bergman film I don't remember the name of. At the end of the film, he is walking down the road, then turns and walks back, then turns and walks forward, then turns . . .

It's a difficult road for the transgender person at any time, no matter what else is going on in the world, but if you add a pandemic, self-isolating and increased transphobia to the journey, it's a struggle. COVID-19 makes all the issues more complicated. But, as Lari says, the walks during quarantine are a life-saver, and the technology we have now makes such a huge difference! So he's working on trying to hold the broken pieces together, so he can keep on working and keep his head above water. . . .

To Walk This Earth

Lari Souza

As I grow wiser, so does the pain within me.
It grows because of who I'm not -- of who I have never been.
It inevitably grows as this Earth proclaims us as sinners.

As (in)humanity (un)naturally erases us,
We make ourselves hidden and silenced.

But,
Somehow,
Somewhat,
We are still here.
Suffering in silence.
In desperate need to be ourselves.
In desperate need to rip our chests apart, and
To assert our manhood and queerness in a world that denies us.
As the stabbing pain grows, so does my wisdom.
It asks me to wake up,
To open my eyes to yet another day,
And to manifest my transness --
With pride.
And I once again, shed a tear,
For my soul aches.
And yet,
It is what I desire the most.

To walk this Earth proud of all that I am.
With humanity by my side.

Fear

Gayle Roberts

Until COVID-19 revealed its invisible self to all humanity, fear for me had been minor. My earliest recollections of fear were as a preschool child. Occasionally, my parents and I would spend a weekend with my grandparents. They lived in what seemed to me was a gigantic house with three levels. The first floor was the “living” area consisting of a kitchen, living room and a sitting room for special occasions. The next level was reached by walking up a flight of stairs to two bedrooms and a bathroom. A rather long walk along a poorly lit hallway led to yet another



flight of stairs which led to the third floor. My bedroom was the sole room at the top of that second flight of stairs. For me, it was an abandoned room which few people ever entered and, if they did, it was only in the light of day. On all four walls of the room were large drawings and photographs of strangers or relatives whom I assumed were long dead and unknown to anyone. But in some strange way they were not truly dead. Each night as I climbed the two flights of stairs to the isolation of my bedroom, I felt increasing fear. Out of the corners of my eyes, I could see those portraits moving their eyes to stare at me.

When I was older and in elementary school, fear reasserted itself. This time, it was the ubiquitous bully. If he had reasons for wanting to fight me, I have long ago forgotten them. I attempted to try to dissuade him from fighting me using logic—“Why do you want to fight me? If I beat you that doesn’t prove I’m right and if you beat me, that doesn’t prove you’re right.” Eventually, I agreed to fight him; the risk and fear of a black eye or a bloody nose was preferable to almost constant harassment. We met after school and were quickly at the centre of a circle formed by his friends and mine. The fight was more or less a draw with each of us inflicting and receiving a few painful blows. Even to this day, my strangest recollection of the fight and its consequences was that afterwards the bully wanted to be my friend.

Childhood fears, imagined or real, usually end with adulthood. For most young adults fear is replaced by the joy of independence and sometimes stress as they adapt and discover their unique path in life. This is a time of determining what skills they wish to acquire, where they wish to live, and often with whom they wish to live. For some, however, unresolved feelings from childhood spill over into adulthood. What may have been childhood feelings and fears becomes adult shame and fear of discovery. Such was the case for me. My earliest memories are of shame for wishing to be a girl. And shame created secrecy. I was in my late teens when I first overcame my fear of discovery and revealed my wish to someone. The period

from my twenties to early fifties was one of pride in my educational achievements and skills as a teacher. It was also a period of fear as I revealed my gender dysphoria to my relatives, friends and fellow educators. By the time I was in my mid-fifties, I had discovered that my real gender identity was that of a woman not a man. That revelation led to my two greatest fears ever. One was presenting in public as a gender-variant woman and the other was returning to teaching at the school I had left the previous year as a man and was now returning as a woman. Would I be derided or even physically attacked? Fortunately, nothing of significance occurred. Nowadays, I am so comfortable presenting as a woman that I seldom think that once I presented to the world as a boy and a man.

Until the past three or four months, and at my age of almost eighty years, I believed that for the remainder of my life I would be mainly stress and fear free. Then suddenly COVID-19 appeared. Now, I must live for awhile in isolation, avoid shopping except for necessities such as groceries, avoid large groups, make sure I stay at least 2 metres from others, and wash my hands with soap and water more frequently and carefully than I have ever wished to do. Despite my checklist of safe behaviours, nearly every day, I recall something I did which I shouldn't have done, try to correct my mistake and then worry for a couple of weeks whether I am about to become a statistic—yet another heavily tranquilized patient with a ventilator in my throat as the last means of saving my life. While constantly reviewing my daily activities, my mind inevitably turns to my loved ones. I worry about them and myself. What would it mean to them and to me if I or they became sick? Every day, I find myself drawn to the almost constant news bulletins about COVID-19 and wonder if a vaccine can be created, and, if so, how long must humanity wait with uncertainty until it is discovered.

Am I stressed? Am I fearful? Certainly. Even with a lifetime of stress and occasional fear, nothing has prepared me for what is now being called the new normal.

MAY 25 ERUPTS IN BLACK LIVES MATTER

Ellen Woodsworth June 5, 2020

“I need to act,” I say as I explain why I joined thousands of people at the Vancouver Art Gallery to support Black Vancouver. Now I am being told to self-quarantine, wear a mask and gloves and not to go to any more demonstrations for two weeks. My partner asks me to move my personal items out of the back washroom. “Do you want me to move out?” I ask. The tensions are barely contained. She heads out to take the COVID-19 test. As a doctor of Asian descent who works with seniors, she has many reasons to be worried.

The fault lines are exposed by the deliberate murder of George Floyd, a gay man, by black people calling out for medical supports to address the high numbers of black people getting infected and dying from COVID-19, by the thousands of blacks who do not have accessible voting stations, the extreme disparities of wealth and income between black and white Americans and sudden loss of over 3 million jobs. Trapped in homes by the quarantine since March, black people on May 25 release a pent-up explosion of fury at the endless systemic, systematic violence against people who are black, exposing the rot at the heart of the USA. The protests quickly spread across the US and around the world screaming out:

“BLACK LIVES MATTER, BLACK LIVES MATTER, BLACK LIVES MATTER”

The powerful eruption was soon joined by hundreds of thousands of black, Asian, indigenous and all colours of people rising up and marching together wearing masks that say, “I can’t breathe”, Floyd’s last words.

Black Vancouver called for the demonstration I joined, which grew to over three thousand packing the Vancouver Art Gallery plaza and all the surrounding streets. There were rallies across Canada. Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, BIPOC, people talked about their exclusion from the educational system, the sexualized violence against black women, the closed job, housing, and educational opportunities. The historic dailiness and extreme nature of the violence towards blacks began to emerge. It was like a massive eruption of pus exposing the disease festering since the foundation of Canada exposing the rot and giving it a name. Then a black woman and then an indigenous girl is killed; then a black man and several Asian women are attacked. Here. In Canada. This week.

We turn to each other and begin to talk. We share hashtags like #differenttogether. Our organizations and institutions begin to act, holding webinars to hear black activists, sharing articles, books on racism for children, putting an intersectional lens on our work and releasing statements signed by thousands, and slowly our governments began to speak over a continual, pounding, violence coming from the President of the US, who tweets to protesters

“you loot, we shoot”, calling the Navy to the White House with bayonets fixed to their guns, while he descends into a bunker. In the US, former Presidents from both parties George W Bush, Carter, Obama, and former Defence Secretaries Colin Powell and others, former leaders of the military, governors and mayors, all begin to speak out saying “we support the protestors”. The Mayor of Washington DC, Muriel Bowser, paints and renames a two-block plaza 'BLACK LIVES MATTER' in enormous, street wide letters. Trump allows his guards to blast peaceful protesters off the steps of a church, so that he can stand and hold up a bible for the photo op, while the minister and the congregation huddle, crying in pain. TV cameras catch the anguish and rage that he has violated the Christian faith so blatantly. “Can this be a turning



point?" Images comparing him to Hitler begin to emerge. "Has the crucible cracked open?" We must not turn back. Now is the time to finish pushing the doors open".

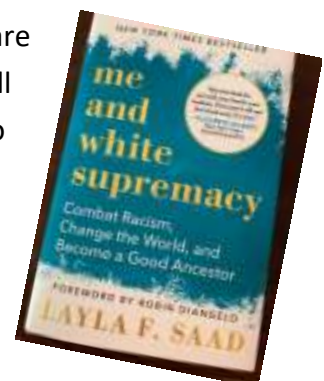
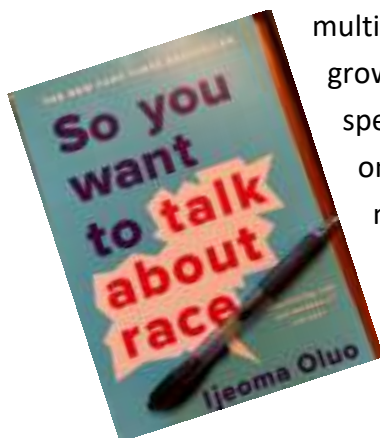
The unchecked viciousness of the Alt Right that has grown over the past several years is finally confronted. Women feeling the power of the "me too" movement, emerge again in support of our sisters and brothers. Trump thrashes about, desperately hanging on to Presidential power, as he tries to divert people's attention from his refusal to address the spread of the COVID-19 virus and desperately ignores the millions unemployed and the thousands dying. He is called out for his inability to be a leader for all Americans. He has lost his chance to be a world leader, by attacking WHO and calling COVID-19, the Chinese virus, encouraging a new round of anti-Asian racism. He attempts to invade Venezuela, isolates Iran and mocks their pleas for medical support. He has pulled out of the Nuclear Arms agreement and is calling for more military spending. People wonder aloud "How insane is he"? "Will he start a war?"

At home, I try to make sense of it all. I am overjoyed that black Americans have risen up again in massive numbers and gone into the streets, despite Covid 19 to demonstrate against white racism and white supremacy. How can I stay home and watch blacks, Indigenous and Asia people being tear gassed, violently beaten, shot with rubber bullets and put in jail? I, a white woman, a lesbian whose partner is of Asian descent, stay at home? I am as tense and disturbed as I was when the COVID-19 virus was announced, and we were forced into quarantine.

I look at the incredible changes in the world because black Americans are marching in protest leading hundreds of thousands to join them. Here, there's the silent, black masked statement of our PM on one knee at a demonstration on Parliament Hill, the statements by the Premier, Health Officer Bonnie Henry and cabinet ministers, and the incredible statement and programme of action by the President of UBC. There are three demonstrations this week in Vancouver alone.

I watch the mounting pressure to address Canadian racism. There are daily personal statements by black people on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Lives are being shared differently with friends, tearing the mask off the assumption that Canada is a happy

multicultural family with equal rights for all. The call to address all racism grows. Books like "" show us the way forward. They are speaking to the deepest sense of our being. They call on us to rise up with them and take action. I nod to my black neighbour and say, "good things are happening these days." she looks me straight in the eye without a smile and says "yeah". The words "**I am not a racist**" are not enough.



HARDER TIMES ARE COMING

barbara findlay

Harder times are coming.

The earth is burning.

The nation next door has lost control of a pandemic.

Economies are crumbling.

The racism that this country was built on . . . the theft of land, slavery, 'coolie' labour, exclusion of POC in favour of white immigrants into my lifetime . . . is in full ugly view.

The question we need to know the answer to now is how we will, each of us and all of us, move through this.

Because in Canada we will have more choices than many.

Will we be kind, recognizing the interdependence of all of us, or cruel, leaving 'other' people to die while we do not.

Or will we just continue our current indifference to the suffering of humans, from unclean drinking water here to climate refugees abroad.

The more privilege we have . . . looking at us, white folk . . . the longer that indifference will be possible.

So: now is the time to look into our souls, find the measure, each of us, of who we are and how we want to be.

None of us is getting out of this alive.

The question is how we want to go.



COVID-19 in the "Factory"

Jan Bruce

I live in an Extended Care Unit in Vancouver, BC. Since April 3, 2019, my experiences and observations of the living in the "factory" have been varied. The "factory" metaphor evolved from the repetition of tasks performed by staff every day. There's a list of basic care that needs to happen: wash face-check mark, wash underarms -check, medication-done, and so on. The care is personal, but there is rarely time for asking a question and listening to the answer. The resident is a cog in the wheel of the care facility factory.

When families and friends come in, they often fill the social and emotional needs of residents. Some residents have no visitors, and often visitors will say a friendly hello or a kind word. In their presence, staff are friendlier and act as one would expect.

Some parts of life in the factory have changed with COVID-19. The factory workers now wear personal protective equipment (PPE) while they are around residents. Visitors are forbidden inside the building. One exception to the no visitor policy is that if the resident is about to die, the family can visit one at a time. I'm not sure how beneficial that is for the resident departing this world, but families do need to say goodbye.

Since the COVID lockdown, I see that family and friends play another important role. Their presence in the common areas provides oversight in the factory. Their eyes and ears provide a level of security for residents from the blatant misconduct of the workers, such as the unkind word, the improper feeding positions, and the mocking of dementia patients. There is a different level of respect for residents when visitors are in the building. Under COVID-19 restrictions, that is now missing.

This weekend I witnessed a care aide sparring with an elderly resident with dementia. In general, the resident seems very sound sensitive and becomes agitated with loud noise and voices. She said "shut up," and the aide started telling the resident to "shut up". Events escalated until the elderly resident burst into tears. And it continued, even though the resident was visibly distraught. This was witnessed in the busy dining room with other care aides, nurses, and residents present. Nobody told the offensive care aide to stop harassing the elderly resident.



Where is the compassion? Where is the oversight? These incidents are not new. There have been numerous reports written by social policy advocates and advocates for seniors and disabilities. Families have complained to government MLAs for generations. Methods of care delivery and their failings have been well documented and reported, so they are well known. Unfortunately, it has taken the disproportionate amount of deaths due to COVID-19 in residential facilities in Canada to bring this problem into the spotlight. Of all the COVID-19 deaths in Canada, 82% have been residents of Long Term Care Facilities. That is the worst record by far of all other 1st world countries.

Here is another personal example of inadequate care. After four months of continually asking to have my toenails trimmed, I finally had them trimmed. Four months! Does nobody think about the mundane care Residential Facilities don't provide? Visitors/families or a podiatrist usually have to do nail care. Everyone has them, and they grow. Advocating from within the walls of the factory often falls on deaf ears. Certainly, I sent numerous emails about the toenail situation. Mine have been trimmed, but what happens to the other 200+ residents who don't or can't complain? Does the squeaky wheel ever have a chance to stop squeaking? I don't think so.

Today, I spoke to the Care Coordinator about the weekend incident I referred to earlier. Protecting residents from needless emotional abuse by staff members is every nurses' responsibility, particularly when there is a lack of leadership over this issue. Should I be reassured that will never happen again? The overriding issue is that the concerns within the walls fall silent against the constant assembly line of providing basic care without enough staff or funding. Providing more money and higher wages to staff should be coupled with an overall change in the model of care provided in residential care facilities. Presently the emphasis is on physical care. In much of BC, for example, people in factories as described above are entitled to one shower a week. How is that humane?

People needing care must have all their needs met. Respect for their social and emotional well-being is an important health determinant. It's time for every citizen to speak up for decency and respect, whether it's for seniors, the disabled, "Black Lives Matter", "Me Too", homosexuals, or the transgendered. Society must begin to shift towards a more inclusive caring place, caring for everyone and sustaining respectful conversations with those that don't share your values. I have committed to speaking up when I witness abuse on fellow residents at my home in the residential facility. Speak up and commit to changing your world. We can all try to change one thing, no matter how small.



SPEAK UP

ABRIDGED

River Glen

Abridged, deconstructed,
-- walls inching in closer by the day.

Tedious, I sit in the safety of my room,
in cleanliness -- clean enough to erase a person.

It is suspended animation- not my life.

Previously there were feelings
of old age redundancy that now pale in comparison.

Enterprises now are superficial, stripped down
to the timbers.

Small acts like buying food barely anchoring us to the
wider world.

One breath following another -- of course
we will live?

Pick up the pieces, re-engage able to meet the next
challenge.

I don't know that, peering out my window
at the empty street.

I don't know that, but I suppose it to be so.



photo by River Glen



photo by Nancy Strider



Stitchery photo by River Glen



photo by River Glen

ANTI-RACISM IN THE MIDDLE OF COVID-19

Ellen Woodsworth

How did I feel protesting racism in the streets of Vancouver in the main public square in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic? I was torn. There are many ways to protest, but I do think the massive protests in the streets have completely changed the discourse around race and racism. One local example is President Santa Ono's statement and plan of action for UBC which is so powerful and would never have happened without this momentum.

Most people wore masks, and many were young people, and we all tried to self distance. People felt the need to be in the streets to take a public stance. Thankfully, the massive responses are really having a huge global impact. The demonstration at the Jack Poole Plaza was double the size of the first one. There was no violence at either demonstration, and people self-distanced themselves. The rage, passion and thoughtfulness were palpable. We will not turn back.

How did I feel? I was afraid I might catch the virus and give it to my partner who is a doctor working with seniors. It was a terrifying time for a few days and hard on our relationship. Thankfully, she got the test and is clear. It would have been devastating if she had got the virus.

Do I think her life as an Asian woman might be spared some racist attacks because we rallied? Definitely yes. Even when we walk together now, she might be spared some racist attacks, verbal, spitting, physical etc. Or even questions about her background like "where are you from", "I really like sushi", or "I have a good friend who is Japanese", and on and on and on. No-one asks how they can fight for Japanese redress. In the Premier's speech, he talked about Chinese, South Asian, black and indigenous racism but nothing about Japanese redress, though they are working on it right now. Even so, Councillor Kirby-Yung's motion on Anti-Asian Racism going before Council today doesn't talk about Japanese experiences of racism.

We found out there were no health repercussions from the demonstrations. I think the



social and economic repercussions from public demonstrations for black, indigenous and people of colour are overwhelmingly positive. As white people, we must rise up in support and take public action against all forms of racism. We can make a difference. These are our brothers and sisters, lovers and friends. To dismantle the 'normal' and rebuild the new, we must be seen.

My Funny COVID19 Moment(s)

Nancy Strider –July 5/2020

#1 - Mussel Beach Party

As soon as my favorite neighborhood restaurant re-opened for inside dining, I was there to support them. Just like old times, I ordered the mussels. My waitress soon returned and said something to the effect of “Mumble mumble mumble.” Her now-ubiquitous black cloth mask hid her mouth and muffled her words. I’m hard of hearing, so watching someone’s lips gives me important clues about what they are saying. I asked her to repeat. Ramping up the volume, she tried again. “Mumble! Mumble! Mumble!” I still didn’t get it, and she gave up talking. Instead, she stepped back, crouched a bit, and stomped her feet – left, then right. She raised her arms upwards and flexed them in a classic 'body builder' pose. Pointing at her right biceps, she dramatically flopped that arm back down, and shook her head vigorously from side to side, in the universal gesture for “No”. Immediately I guessed her pantomime. We gave each other 'air high-fives,' even though I had to ask for the menu again. The kitchen had run out of mussels!

#2 - ?

Hmmm ?? ... well hmhhh....

No other Funny COVID19 Moments spring to mind. Time to reconnect with my laughter, even when I’m doing it alone. If I’m going to keep my balance as this goes on and on (and on), I need to grow more belly-laughing muscles, and not just more belly.



Photo from Nancy Strider

Who's Afraid

Don Orr Martin

I'm terrified that members of my group of old friends will die from the coronavirus. I love them all so much. We are writers and artists and activists. And old, the population most at risk. Elders, with stories to tell and much more to create. Each of us is dealing with our own compromised health in different ways. Some are managing okay, others are teetering on the edge between tolerable days and insufferable days.

I'm most worried about Murray. He's only 62 and has had COPD, a debilitating lung condition, for over a decade. Murray is very proud of his independence and self-reliance. He lives alone, and he outright refuses home care. But he is terribly frustrated that his few friends and family do not appreciate what a disability it is to be unable to breathe normally. Even walking from his TV chair to the bathroom exhausts him. Doing laundry or dishes are, at best, once-a-month activities because housework saps every bit of his energy. He is normally obsessed with cleanliness. Now, crusted clothes and cookware lay in great piles in his tiny apartment. He puts food scraps and garbage in the freezer so they don't attract bugs—who knows when he will have the strength to take the trash out. It takes him days to recover from the effort of taking a shower. He tries to eat regularly, usually organic foods, but the act of eating increases the phlegm in his lungs, which can take all day to expel or dissipate, so he often has just one small meal. As a result, he is slowly wasting away. Most of his calories come from wine.

Murray is certain that if he is exposed to COVID he won't survive, and he's probably right (a common cold virus last winter put him in hospital for a week). So he has cut himself off from all direct human contact. He has his groceries delivered to a table in the hall outside his apartment door. He insists that delivery persons wear gloves and masks. He leaves payment on the table then, and after they are gone, he carefully disinfects each item before bringing it inside. He hasn't been outside his subsidized housing unit for months now.

There is no cure for COPD. Despite all this, he somehow manages. Murray has one of the best attitudes about life I have ever encountered. He revels in beauty and diversity. He loves to talk with all kinds of people, though he despises the intolerance and racism of religion and right-wing politics. He finds humour everywhere and often laughs himself into coughing fits.

Murray is a music and movie aficionado. He knows every song from every Broadway musical (original or revival), and he can tell you the career details of just about any actor. He is probably the most dedicated fan ever of both Elvis Costello and Barbra Streisand, which gives you an idea about his range of interests. He stays abreast of current affairs but loses himself each day in the rerun of a golden era film. He has a series of new cable TV shows he watches and, though he is poor, he always has the latest release of many a popular album. His favourite

movie is *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane*, and he falls asleep almost every night listening to the audio recording of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* which he views as America's best dark comedy. He can definitely be twisted.

Three or four evenings a week I phone Murray and we talk for an hour or more. We are old theatre buddies. He and I were in dozens of shows, together in a few, some of which were epic—*West Side Story*, *Mousetrap*, *Torch Song Trilogy*, *Macbeth*. We reminisce. We talk about shows in which we could possibly still play the old man parts, though in his case the part would require a wheelchair and an oxygen tank.

Many of our mutual friends are still acting and directing, but COVID-19 has put the kibosh on live performances. So some of our actor friends have taken to Zooming. One younger friend, who runs a small-town playhouse, has been staging weekly readings of Shakespeare, engaging his community of actors in unrehearsed, online theatre workshops. Murray suddenly had the realization that theatre performances on Zoom are an ideal medium for a chronically ill, home-bound, would-be actor. Neither he nor I is a big fan of Shakespeare, so we hatched a plot to host live readings of more contemporary plays.



Murray decided for his first Zoom reading he would do *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, casting himself in the Uta Hagen/Elizabeth Taylor role of Martha. He sent out invitations on Facebook and found three other excellent actors to read the parts of George, Nick, and Honey, people he had worked with in the past but hadn't talked to in years. Within days, almost a hundred members had signed up to view the reading. Murray planned to stage the three-act play over three weeks in approximately one-hour chunks. He enlisted the help of a librarian friend (who is well-versed in Zoom technology) to stage manage and prep participants. He binge-watched tutorials about flattering lighting, screen views, and recording options. He draped a sheet behind his laptop desk to hide his disheveled apartment. He borrowed a wig from his sister.

Act I went quite well. The sound effects didn't really work, but the props and costumes added a nice touch. The actors were balanced and compelling. The next day Murray was exhausted. The demands of being simultaneously a director and a lead actor taxed his stamina. He had developed a throbbing pain in his lungs, like broken ribs he said. But he was feeling so alive. He didn't care about the pain or the flubs. He had challenging goals and an audience again. He had gotten past his isolation. People emailed, asking about parts in future productions, offering kudos on the success of the first reading, and 'liking' the posted recording. The pandemic, that could easily chew him up and spit him out, and still might, oddly helped him find purpose and connection.

COVID-19

Val Innes

COVID-19 entered my consciousness in March in Melaque, Jalisco, Mexico, a place where people and sun abound, and the streets, restaurants and beaches were crowded, but the news and my friends, both there and in Canada, were making it very clear I had to leave, to get back to Canada, as Trudeau said, while I still could. The next week was anxious; I wasn't the only one becoming desperate to get home, and the flights were being cancelled left and right. I got home, finally, ten days earlier than planned, at a cost of over \$2100 including the cost of two cancelled and unrefunded flights. Once home, I was in quarantine. It's hard enough to leave Melaque's sunshine, warmth and people for BC's end of March cold normally, but usually I have the warmth of my queer Quirk-e and friends community and my family to bring me through that in good form.

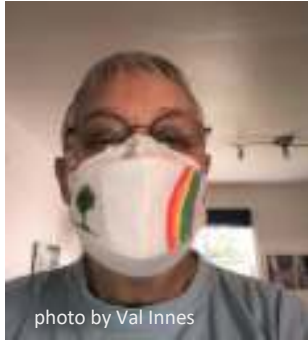
Not this time. Quirk-e was cancelled at that point; I wasn't allowed to go anywhere. Two or three days after I arrived, quarantine became law with stiff financial and prison consequences. Friends could drop groceries off at the door; they could FaceTime and phone, but they couldn't visit and they couldn't hug. Life became the COVID-19 news on TV, phone calls, very kind friends dropping off my dog, Chelsea, and groceries, then careful, short, masked and gloved walks with Chelsea.

Quarantine ended with self-isolation replacing it, and fear entered. I had so looked forward to the end of quarantine, to go to a grocery store finally! But I am very vulnerable to this pandemic, and quickly it was clear that shopping meant constant caution: masks, gloves, a spray bottle of rubbing alcohol used often, avoiding people 'like the plague' who weren't even trying to avoid me, washing hands before and after, sanitizing my car, unloading groceries carefully and washing, spraying or leaving them for a day or two before using them.

My home became my safe place; my place to rest to read, to play with Chelsea, to let my guard down -- and this may be my reality for a long time. No Ontario lake this summer, which is the third miss in 61 years. No Pride celebration in the streets. No dancing in the streets of Vancouver. No queer gatherings. No Quirk-e showcase -- in fact, no Quirk-e except by phone and then Zoom. My queer community is in Vancouver and Yarrow, and I am in White Rock. I have re-entered the straight world apart from phone, FaceTime and Zoom, my connection, like so many other people's, with family, friends and my queer community. And over time, that has proved to be enormously important: an ongoing sense of connection, community and friendship breaking up the isolation with the faces and voices of people I like, care about, or love.



I am privileged. I have a home in which to be safe. I have friends who care and the means to



contact them. I have food, water and all the basic necessities of life as well as some of the not-so-basic ones. I have outdoor space in which I can have physically distanced but real interaction with one or two people, and a car which provides me with a bubble of safety to visit others, also socially distanced, and walk my dog in safe outdoor places.

I am privileged; I am aware of that daily. But I am also aware I can die, horribly, from this disease as a 73 year old with MS and a history of bronchitis and pneumonia, so I am careful in a way that I have never had to be careful, and anxious in a way I have never been anxious. I'm aware that most of the BC COVID dead are seniors. I guard a six foot bubble around me constantly when I'm out. I treasure my careful walks with friends, but each time I return home in the safe bubble of my car and enter the safe bubble of my house and garden, I am relieved. What a way to live!

But it *is* a way to live. I look at the numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths reducing and flattening, as we follow Dr Bonnie Henry's daily reminders to be calm, be kind and be safe, and by and large we're doing that in most of Canada and certainly in BC. Not so to the south, where the USA is now the worst hit by COVID-19 in the world because, unlike in Canada, their government has defaulted, and the disease has spiralled out of control with over 70,000 new cases daily currently. Our Canadian border has been closed for over two months; I'm grateful for that and for being Canadian. I hope it stays closed until it's safe for it to open.

What I want from this time of COVID-19, it is becoming clearer and clearer to me, is for it, with its cost in lives, disease and fear, to bring about real change, so whatever 'new normal' we have will value people and the environment over money, people over consumption, and most of all value the people who keep us going instead of the rich and the corporations: let it bring in a kinder, better, fairer, more gender-equal, less racist world, and COVID-19 will have been worth it. There are a lot of people working for that, marching for it, lobbying for it. The Black Lives Matter and Indigenous protests are global and huge, and they are creating change. The MeToo Movement is challenging male entitlement and supremacy across the globe. COVID-19 and the lockdown it has caused have interrupted the status quo and shown us that it can be done if there's the political will. And if that's not enough, climate change will force change or stop us in our tracks.

At 7pm, in Vancouver, for months now, people have been out joining the music, the singing, the pots and pans banging, trumpets, bugles, car horns and police sirens, thanking the front line workers, health, caregivers, caretakers, grocery clerks, cashiers and stockers, in the hospitals, in the essential service stores, and in the farms and grocery stores making sure we have food -- thanking those who keep us safe and alive in a time of plague and always. What I want is for this gratitude and awareness to persist and build a better world. We need it.

LIST OF RESOURCES YOU MIGHT FIND USEFUL OR INTERESTING

- **8-1-1 is a free-of-charge provincial health information and advice phone line** available in British Columbia. The **8-1-1** phone line is operated by HealthLink BC, which is part of the Ministry of Health. You can speak to a health service navigator, who can help you find health information and services; or connect you directly with a registered nurse, a registered dietitian, a qualified exercise professional, or a pharmacist
- **211 <https://www.bc211.ca/> bc211 is a Vancouver-based nonprofit organization that specializes in providing information and referral** regarding community, government and social services in BC. We also operate the Red Book Online searchable directory of resources.
- **Gordon Neighbourhood House 604-683-2554**
- **411 Senior Centre 604-684-8171**
- **Britannia Senior Centre 604-718-5811 or 604-618-8722**
- **Qmunity 604-684-5307 or <https://qmunity.ca/>**
- **Your local Urgent Care Centre: the City Centre one is 604-416-1811**
- **DIGNITY: Statement on the impact of COVID-19 on the LGBTQI2S community**
<http://www.dignityinitiative.ca/wp-content/uploads/Dignity-Network-Canada-Briefing-COVID-19-EN-FR.pdf>
- **[Share your views with the BC government](#)** in the COVID-19 - B.C. Restart and Recovery Survey. This survey is open until July 21st and allows you to let the province know what is important to you for the recovery

AND REMEMBER . . .



Wear a mask



Keep washing those paws



Keep carefully distanced from other people



Act as if your life depended on it.

. . . Frances Herb (last line slightly amended -- we **are** the grannies!)

**BE CALM,
BE KIND,
AND
BE SAFE**

Dr Bonnie Henry

Social distancing, wearing a mask, and washing your hands are less of a nuisance than dying.

Black and Indigenous communities as well as the elderly are at much higher risk of serious consequences from COVID-19. Don't be the reason that our communities get sicker.