



MCW

**JOURNAL
OF A
PANDEMIC**

2020



**MONTREAL COUNCIL
OF WOMEN**

**CONSEIL DES FEMMES
DE MONTRÉAL**

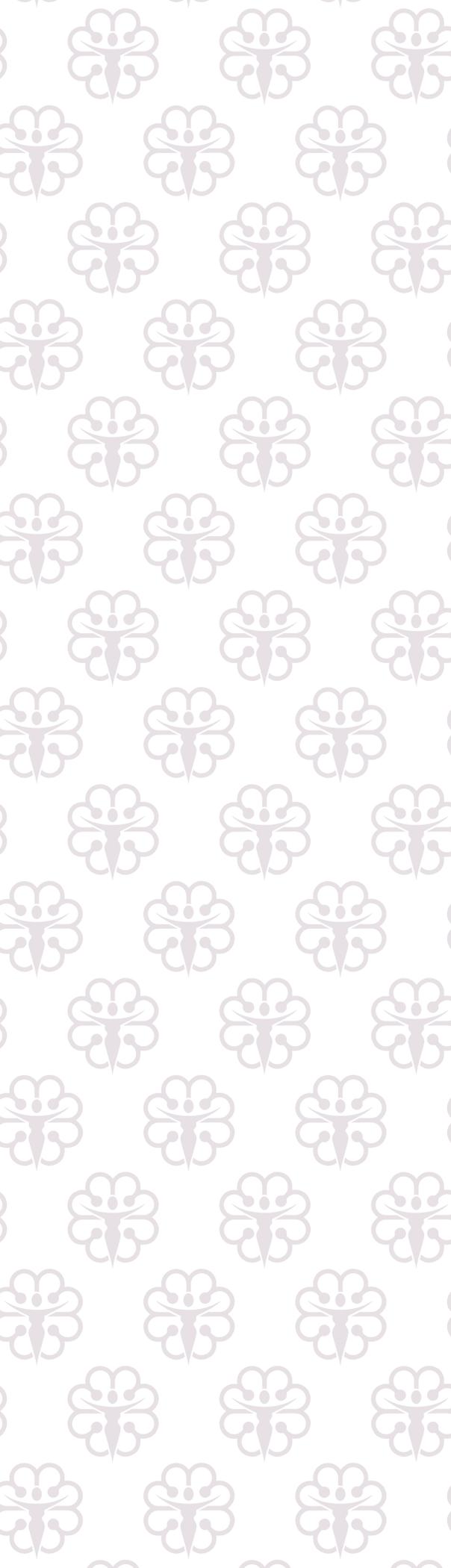


TABLE OF CONTENTS

05	Anita Aloisio
06	Marie Bourgeois
07-08	Druce Bryan
09-10	Lyna Boushel
11-12	Angelica Bourgeault
13	Cynthia Buckley
14	Doreen Chartier
15	Sandra Cohen-Rose
16-18	Sally Cooke
19	Patricia Couture
20-21	Dolly Dastoor
22-23	Bonnie Destounis
24-27	Rena Entus
28	Sandra Heijl
29	Constance Henry
30	Donna Jensen
31-32	Brandy Jungandi
33	Joan Macklin
34	Kathryn McMorro
35-36	Linda Monteiro
37	Alison Oxlade
38-39	Maria Peluso
40-41	Penny Rankin
42-45	Linda Serpone
46	Vivianne M. Silver
47-49	Renate Sutherland
50-52	Wanda Leah G. Trineer
53-54	Mair Verthuy
55.	Helen Wojcik



FOREWORD

I want to thank all MCW members who submitted a personal testimonial about the COVID-19 pandemic and what their lives became in dealing with their isolation. The “MCW Journal of a Pandemic 2020” is in itself a historical document in time. Years from now, in looking back, 2020 will signify how each woman celebrated their resilience and how they stepped into their personal power.

Reading the testimonials is monumental in shifting our perspectives on the situation of a global pandemic. The power of words allows us to view ourselves as survivors of Covid-19 and is much more empowering than seeing each other as victims. Reading about the experiences of members provides an opportunity, a small prism, to share stories about life in real time. It reaffirms the knowledge that none of us suffered in silence. We were indeed “apart but together.”

The critical truth is that the Journal reflects the creative means women used to overcome the challenges of Covid-19. Enjoy the testimonials of MCW women. Resourceful, healing, reflective, humorous, innovative – the diversity of what women’s experience is all about - a record of the care we feel about one another.

Maria Peluso

ANITA ALOISIO

I start with the end in mind
There are many parts
One has died
Void, disequilibrium, fills my tomorrow
Yearning the streets of Rome, yesterday
Lie awake with eyes shut today

I start with the end in mind
There are many parts
One has died
Smile, laugh, dance only in my tomorrow
Mother wasn't ill, yesterday
Squeeze my girls today

I start with the end in mind
There are many parts
One has died
Patience draws my tomorrow
Lights illuminated, yesterday
Spirit freed today

STRATEGIC CLEANUP FOR ZOOM CALLS



MARIE BOURGEOIS

With the advent of the pandemic, our lives revolve around technology. For me, it all started when the club president announced an executive meeting on Zoom. I do not have a cell phone and I do not have an iPad but my husband has a tablet so he took charge. Prior to the day of the meeting, he and my daughter had several trial runs to make sure everything worked well. The day of the meeting, nothing worked. He clicked, he swiped, he cursed, to no avail. The meeting started without me...eventually I was on, but with no image and no sound. We worked it out and everything was fine.

A few days later, we had a meeting on Webex to work on our prearrangement. If we are going to die from COVID-19, we might as well be prepared. I printed the instructions and my husband got to work. He clicked, he swiped, he cursed without success. Finally, we managed to get on. Did we want a funeral? If so, did we want special songs like Ave Maria or Amazing Grace? We thought that the kids would probably like Hallelujah better. Then we went through 11 pages of urns and we got to flowers, videos, pictures, and bookmarks. After all that Denis decided he wasn't going to die. It is too expensive.

The following week, there was a surprise birthday Zoom family meeting. After much ado we logged on. Sort of. We could not see the children and after what sounded like a happy birthday, we logged off.

Then, another online executive meeting. Don't remember how to log on and called my son-in-law for help. The meeting again started without me.

My daughter has suggested another family Zoom meeting. We're passing. Too stressed.

DRUCE BRYAN

How am I faring during this pandemic that is threatening us all? To be perfectly honest I have to confess that, while it is upsetting and worrying to have to live with all the necessary restrictions now in place, it hasn't really changed much in my life. I'm over 90, live in our house with my husband (12 days older) and both of us dealing with recent decreased mobility which rules out any sustained standing or walking. Our travelling days are at an end but we have wonderful memories of the many opportunities we had to see the world both as a couple and as a family.

So how are we doing? Remarkably well. When you own a house there is always stuff to be done, things to be fixed, deadlines to be met and if something proves to be too difficult we can enlist paid help to assist. One of my all-time pleasures since the COVID-19 outbreak is that I no longer do any ironing! To counter that, I seriously miss being able to putter around in the garden which was always a delight to me in the spring and summer months. Then there's the cooking – I like to cook and had always been fond of dinners and parties and the chance to use all the wonderful traditional china and crystal that we were given when we set up house, as well as the more informal outside dining during the summer. Back in the earlier years the rule was that you made everything from 'scratch' but as more and more precooked frozen products

became available I found myself using more and more of them – always with a slight idea that I was cheating. That idea soon wore off! I still cook but meals are simpler now.

My day during the last few months has certain fixed points – meals, coffee breaks, the Globe and Mail in the morning, the crossword and Sudoku, ordering the groceries from the local IGA, etc. When I get up in the morning (not as early as pre-pandemic), I usually have three or four things that I should do that day and when I get to bed in the evening I'm content if I've done at least two of them – there's



always tomorrow. Never having been one for long telephone calls I do keep in touch with two or three people each day either from my church family or friends and colleagues from the various organizations I belong to. It helps to keep in touch, do a bit of whining or give a bit of encouragement and that is often when I realize that, compared to some, I have nothing to complain about.

I fully embrace the various methods, like Skype and Zoom, which are available now for us to keep in touch and keep the wheels of business moving. I'm happy to say that I have tackled certain projects during the lockdown. First my wardrobe has gone through a long overdue weeding out and hopefully the clothes have found good homes to go to. Also the heavy paper accumulation of reports, minutes, emails, have been whittled down somewhat, though much more needs to be done in that area. It's unbelievable the stuff I've stored from the earlier days and although we were promised a paperless environment when computers took over I still seem to have downloaded a lot of material to file away.

As I read over what I've written thus far, I don't find it very dynamic and maybe that's where I am right now. Hanging in and trying to make the best of the situation that we are all experiencing.



LYNA BOUSHEL

Pandemic Diaries

My quarantine started earlier than most when I fractured my left ankle on February 6, which meant an ER visit and the beginning of COVID-19 protocols. For six weeks I only went out to follow-up appointments in empty reception areas as hospitals shut down to allow only emergency or essential visits. Needless to say, the use of a lot of hand sanitizer and face masks. Our doctors are finally doing visits by phone and video calls, a coming of age with technology. I've had three of those already for health checks.

This COVID-19 Pandemic served as a wakeup call to many of the need to re-evaluate priorities in life and in business. With everything being shut down for eight weeks or more put a lot into perspective. Ordering groceries online for pickup and neighbours offering to pick up fresh produce at our local PA have become routine now. Parents working online from home and students attending classes or instruction online upended the family-home dynamics. With seniors it was a different story. All outside activities came to a halt replaced by some new activities online and on Social Media if a senior could afford a computer, iPad or cell phone and afford internet service. Low-income families and seniors realized how lonely and isolating it could be to not have those amenities. This disease highlighted

many inequities. Good souls helped where they could by grocery shopping for those who couldn't. Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers.

Being part of the lucky group of seniors who moved their social connections and activities online or on the phone, we continued to keep in contact with family and friends. Once or twice –a-month cocktail hour with our regular group of friends became a pleasant 90 minutes of cheer to brighten our evening. It helped get us through the darker days of the CHSLD news. Our online interactions with family increased with new video conference provider Zoom and we man-



LYNA BOUSHEL | P09



aged to have a 4-household Video game of Trivial Pursuit over 2 evenings, using cards from 4 different series, and Mother (me) managed to remain undefeated until the next game. We enjoyed some conversation, libation and a few laughs. We celebrated 2 birthdays, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, Mother's Day and Father's Day with FaceTime and Zoom. I got to spend some great FaceTime moments with my grandson to perk him up when teething moods needed uplifting and to hear his raucous laughter when trying to show off. It's wonderful to watch our oldest daughter blossom as she awaits the arrival of her daughter for September 6th. Update: We are in Toronto to share the joy. We were hopeful when we saw the numbers going down. We managed to have a Zoom baby shower and Birthday celebration before our oldest daughter gave birth to a girl on September 10th and we welcomed Skylar into our fold. What a joyous moment and promise of beautiful things to come. We appear to be going into a second wave. Please wear a mask, wash your hands, keep a 6-meter distance and maintain a small family bubble.



ANGELICA BOURGEAULT

Full-time Clinical Research Assistant,
Part-time Circus & Gymnastics Coach
Spare-time Graphic Designer, Forensic Anthropologist by training

March 11 – WHO characterizes COVID-19 as a pandemic

For those who don't know me, I work for SPIN, the Scleroderma Patient-centred Intervention Network at the Lady Davis Institute of Medical Research - Jewish General Hospital. Scleroderma (systemic sclerosis) is a rheumatic disorder characterized by excessive production and accumulation of collagen which causes degenerative changes and scarring in the skin, joints, and internal organs. Its effects are about four times more common among women than men and most often develop the disease between ages 30 to 50.

As a clinical research assistant, working with patients with a rare, chronic autoimmune disease, my plate has been quite full since the onset of the crisis. Within the past few months we have developed a study protocol, sought and secured funding, created a COVID-19 cohort, developed a psychosocial fear measure, recruited

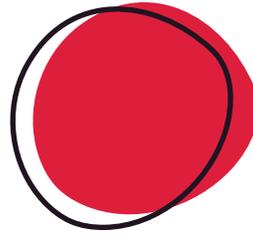
participants, moderators, and educators to develop an online videoconference-based curriculum and provide an educational mental health program to connect people with scleroderma, all around the world.

April 9 – The SPIN-COVID-19 Study & the SPIN-CHAT Program is launched.

As the coordinator of the SPIN-CHAT Program (COVID-19 Home-isolation Activities Together), I have been managing a team of international researchers, educators, and scleroderma group leaders, along with 172 participants into 11 groups of 7-9 participants, into 1.5-hour sessions, 3 times a week, for 4 weeks. It is a privilege to be involved in a curriculum, though tailored to the needs of scleroderma patients, that includes Healthy Information Management, Relaxation, Managing Worry, Exercising at Home, Staying Active and Engaged, and Visualization Techniques modules that attend to all in these trying times.

May 25 – The killing of George Floyd
The pandemic presents us with an interesting paradox: at a time of self-isolation and social distancing, we are forced to refocus on the things





that matter, rekindle with loved ones (even if virtually), be grateful for the things we often take for granted (a safe space, a healthy body), re-centre, and reflect on ourselves and the people around us. It is time for a spring cleaning: to take a stance, make a difference, question the system we blindly trust and give power and voices to the people. It cannot be said enough: to be silent is to be complicit. Always strive to educate yourself. Diversity is beautiful. #BlackLives-Matter

June - Pride Month / Scleroderma Awareness Month / Migraine Awareness Month

Let's celebrate love, diversity, unicity, and spread awareness!

On a final note, I must admit that working crazy hours from home on a 13-inch computer while trying to keep some sort of routine has been a struggle, but I have been incredibly fortunate to help make a difference in mental health research and to be surrounded by such amazingly inspiring people.

Wishing health and stamina to all!

CYNTHIA BUCKLEY

This Pandemic has been very difficult and challenging for everyone. During "normal" pre-pandemic times, we would meet in each other's homes every two weeks, get together for social events, parties and outings. Since March 13th, the pandemic has put an abrupt stop to our plans. Many of our members are at high risk for potential serious effects caused by COVID-19, as a result we have all taken this pandemic seriously and most of our members have remained home. We are very thankful that none of our members have contracted the virus. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our yearly celebration of our Founder. Which is one of the two opportunities for us all to see each other, since we are divided into 3 chapters. Furthermore, our Christmas celebrations may also be cancelled for 2020.



We have stayed in contact with each other through emails, telephone calls and video conferencing. Some had to learn how to work websites and apps such as Zoom or messenger video. This was a challenge at times, but with perseverance, help from each other and sharing of equipment (headphones and microphones) we were able to get it all working.

We are a sisterhood and this strong bond meant that we were always watching out for each other and helping one another as needed. We ran errands for each other to get groceries and pharmaceuticals. The isolation is difficult at times, as we are all very active and social women, keeping in touch often has been key. More recently some of our sisters have gotten together outside, in smaller groups, while still maintaining all the government directives of social distancing, washing hands often and wearing a mask when indoors.

Although these have been difficult times, our sisterhood has been strong. We have helped each other and will continue to do so, as we always do! Hoping that a safe vaccine is developed soon, so that we can all resume normal activities.

DOREEN CHARTIER

Covid-19 has definitely changed the world and will have an impact for a while yet. As our day-to-day life has changed so much and we struggle to find a “new normal,” we are learning a lot about ourselves and those around us. The adjustments and learning curve are not always easy but it is amazing how adaptable and resilient we can be when we have to.

The value of family and friends proves more important than ever. With in-person meetings not possible, everyone has had to learn to be a bit creative so that our get-togethers are still great —just a little different.

Learning new technology has been a bit of a forced education but definitely worth it. Now a pro at using Zoom and FaceTime I enjoy regularly scheduled virtual catch-ups. A weekly family chat that covers three time zones across Canada is a perk now thanks to Covid-19. And once a week a few friends and I all grab our wine glasses and we get together for a Whine & Wine chat online.

Going out for lunch or dinner is definitely missed and a tough thing to replace. However with a bit of planning, I have managed the next best thing with a friend. We often have dinner “together” with our iPads setup with a FaceTime chat on the table as we eat!

Beyond Zoom and FaceTime, technology can make such a difference in other ways too. The wide selection of movies and TV shows is almost endless with streaming. An added bonus is watching mass online as well. While it is not the same as attending church, there is some solace in a virtual mass.

It was only when really thinking this through that it became quite clear that no matter how hard this all seems, sometimes, there are still more positives than negatives. Perhaps that's just another lesson learned from these crazy times?



SANDRA COHEN-ROSE

Country Retreat from City Life during the COVID-19

During this unusual time, everything seems more intense. I see things I've never noticed before. Generally, I'm in the country, Austin, Eastern Townships, Quebec.

Away from the city, in the quiet of the country, I spend much of my time writing the sequel to my epic novel Was-kaganish, which I've been encouraged to complete by the generous comments and five-star reviews. The sequel, set in 2020 Montreal, in the year of the COVID-19, brings every day a new revelation, making it all-encompassing and exciting to write.

Much of my life is online, from shopping to a variety of streamed presentations and Zoom conferences.

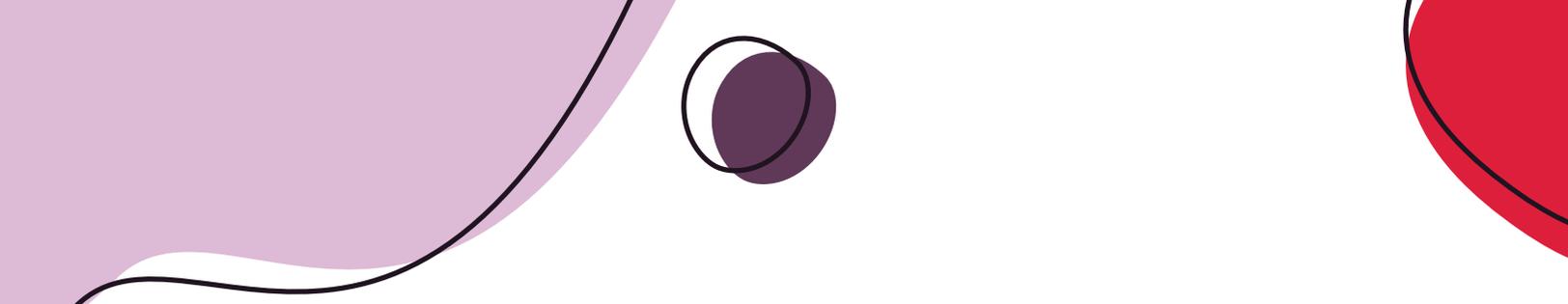
Where once I travelled the world to see and experience various places, now I see them online,

Besides our kitchen garden, there are wildflowers, and strawberries, blackberries and a wide selection of forest mushrooms to forage, sunny days and thunderous days, which I try to capture in photographs and share on Facebook.

When the occasional visitor comes by, I meet them outside on the deck. Venturing out to shop in the surrounding towns and villages, I'm careful. I was tested for COVID-19 – it's painful. With daily swimming and spending time with my family, reading, watching the rare TV series and movie – I've never before had the time for – the days are all too short.

I count my blessings and am grateful for every day.





SALLY COOKE

I had the raw energy that gripped me until I wanted to burst. I was on my way to Italy, to Tuscany, to see my house that is being built. To top it all off, my best and faithful friend of the furry variety was coming with me! Nala, I soon discovered, was the best of companions for any mode of transportation: planes, trains and automobiles! She looked as though she had been travelling her entire life, as she strode through the airport in Montreal kitted out in her flying jacket ready to face the world. She put smiles on faces, with her sexy high-stepped gait, her soulful eyes that connect, at a glance, to your core and all within a 9 lb frame of cuteness and 'hug-ability.'

The month was February, the beginning of reading week at the University, and it was an annual ritual for me to escape Montreal's weary winter, even if only for 10 days. I thought no more of the timing of the trip until it was too late. I like to think that I was blissfully unaware, rather than foolish. I fully admit that I had heard of Covid-19 before I left Canada, and even had the notion that "it would get worse before it would get better." I work in a hospital after all, and this

was of clear concern to those in management and to those of us providing clinical care. Did I have a sense that it would affect me personally? No. Did I lose sleep about it? No. Did I worry I might get stranded if I left the country? No. Without knowing it, I was poised to have my grand initiation into the world of a global pandemic, just like the one that had killed my great-grandfather, Lewis Rowland, in 1919.

On day three of my stay in Italy, I was wonderfully ensconced in Hotel Fontelunga, a stunningly beautiful boutique hotel an hour south of Florence. Reports started appearing that Covid cases were popping up in clusters all over the Milan region, where I had just spent a glorious weekend browsing antiques in a crowded outdoor market. They came as a wakeup call that trouble was coming knocking. I tried to push the news down, to deny it, to think that it was being blown out of all proportion, but I was forced to confront reality as I planned my onward trip to visit my mother in England, from where I had a ticket booked to fly back to Montreal on March 3rd.

I thought back to the previous day, when on leaving Milan and driving south to Tuscany we had been care-free and unaware of how life in Italy was about to change and take so many precious lives. Only later did I learn that a soccer match had been held near Milan just days before I arrived and that it had brought travellers from Spain together with Italian fans. That event, it is said, was the catalyst for the explosion of cases in the Lombardy region and what then tumbled, like water over a precipice, into the rest of Italy.

Even though the thought of quarantining in an Italian five-star hotel, run by friends, was my fantasy of a dream come true, I realized the pickle that I would be in if I didn't get out of Italy quickly. Researching the journey to England took endless hours that I would rather have spent soaking up sun poolside, smelling the sweet spring air, marvelling at the awakening greenery, exploring the country lanes with Nala and generally enjoying the 'old world' pace that seemed to transport me back to bygone days, when life was sweeter and simpler. Nala was my comforter-in-chief. With her five new found dog friends at the hotel she sent me constant vibes that she would be just fine if we had to stay for weeks, or months on end! Italian linens suited her just fine, as she made herself comfortable as my pillow companion every night. Italian gardens, in all their resplendent spring glory, were the perfect location for our meander-

ing walks. Above all, I think she sensed that I was with good people who cared for me and made me happy. What more perhaps could a dog wish for her mistress and what more could a mistress wish for her dog.

I gently explained to her that we had to leave this idyll, but we would return regularly and create a life for ourselves in our new home that was nearing completion. Although she tried hard to look as if she understood, I knew that I was really having a talk with myself, encouraging myself to leave and not give in to the urge to quarantine in such a heavenly place. Nala and I took the train from the wonderful nearby town of Arezzo, to Florence and then flew to Paris. Nala was the dream dog. Never a bark, a whimper, or a bathroom issue. In Paris, I had organized to meet a couple who I met on a ride-sharing website. They took me as far as Rouen. It was late at night when they dropped me by a roundabout in an industrial area. They were worried, and thought I was a little mad to think that I would be able to travel an hour north to catch the 5am ferry from Dieppe, to sail to England's south coast. I like to think it was the adventurous part of me that 'enjoyed' the challenge of trying to hitch a ride to Dieppe in the middle of the night on a holiday weekend. The hitching didn't work as traffic was virtually non-existent. So, I forked out for an expensive taxi ride to the coast, but felt reassured that we would catch the ferry.





Nala charmed a staff member aboard and he gave us a cabin for the crossing. Sleep came quickly upon us as we curled up together on the berth.

Arriving in England was a relief as we only now had to take a series of trains before arriving in Dorchester where my mother lives. On what would have been my father's 84th birthday I took Nala to his grave and showed 'daddy' my Italian antique finds. She sat on his headstone as proudly as I know she would have sat on his lap had they ever met.

After several days in England, it was time to return to Montreal and so Nala and I, replete with suitcases, were off again on a train to Heathrow airport. Being one of the last ones off the plane in Montreal, the pilot inevitably

caught up with us as we headed to customs and immigration. Our burly pilot, who just flew us safely across the ocean melted in her presence. He bent down, softened and greeted her little inquisitive face with such warmth and gentleness. She reciprocated and I couldn't help but think that had he known she was on board she would have been offered prime flying position on his lap for the entire journey. It is an enduring image that I hold dear. It always makes my heart sing when I remember this touching moment, in spite of the tragedy of Covid that was and is still unfolding around us. Be comforted by the small simple moments of life, I tell myself now. These sweet moments are all around us, if we just let ourselves see them and appreciate them.



PATRICIA COUTURE

Week 1

Spring cleaning done: check. Garage cleaned up: check. Basement “stuff” sorted and reorganized: check. Cars shined and vacuumed: check. Boredom is not part of the equation. Husband and I go on lovely walks.

Week 2

Books on the to-read list have been located. Netflix is our most recent friend. The table is overflowing with trays and pots of newly planted vegetable and annual seeds. Bridge is online. Zoom has been discovered. Google Hangout connects us with our adorable granddaughter. This is the life.

Week 3

The art of grocery shopping once every 2 ½ to 3 weeks has been totally mastered. Freshly baked bread anyone? Cookies? Cake? The walks are longer. There are some streets I had never seen before. As a bonus, with no driving or stores to shop in or restaurants to go to, the bank account is looking good (investments aside).

Week 4

Husband and I are sitting cross-legged on the bed, betting on where the robot vacuum will exit. There are long encouraging conversations with the slower-to-sprout veggies and flowers planted two weeks earlier. On one exciting day, there were two oversized pigeons trying to share the bird bath. A baby groundhog is munching on my Echinacea and impatiens – he is so cute! Confinement is becoming long – and yet, I am actually enjoying it.

Week 5

Yard and house look great. We have accepted that even talking firmly to some seeds will not cause them to germinate. The groundhog is less cute with each plant remnant we find. Face masks come in sheep, dinosaur, floral or check patterns. We are doing well. Wish I could hug the family.

“It will be alright.”

DOLLY DASTOOR

In January, we first started hearing of the COVID-19 and by March 19 the world came to a halt. This microscopic virus was causing havoc around the world. Life, as we knew, and lived had disappeared. Just yesterday, we were still occupied, free and confident. Then, society came to a sudden halt. Our life was turned upside down by constraints that were previously unknown, masks, keeping two-metre distance, staying indoors. We were traumatized, the anxiety of the unknown made us tense.

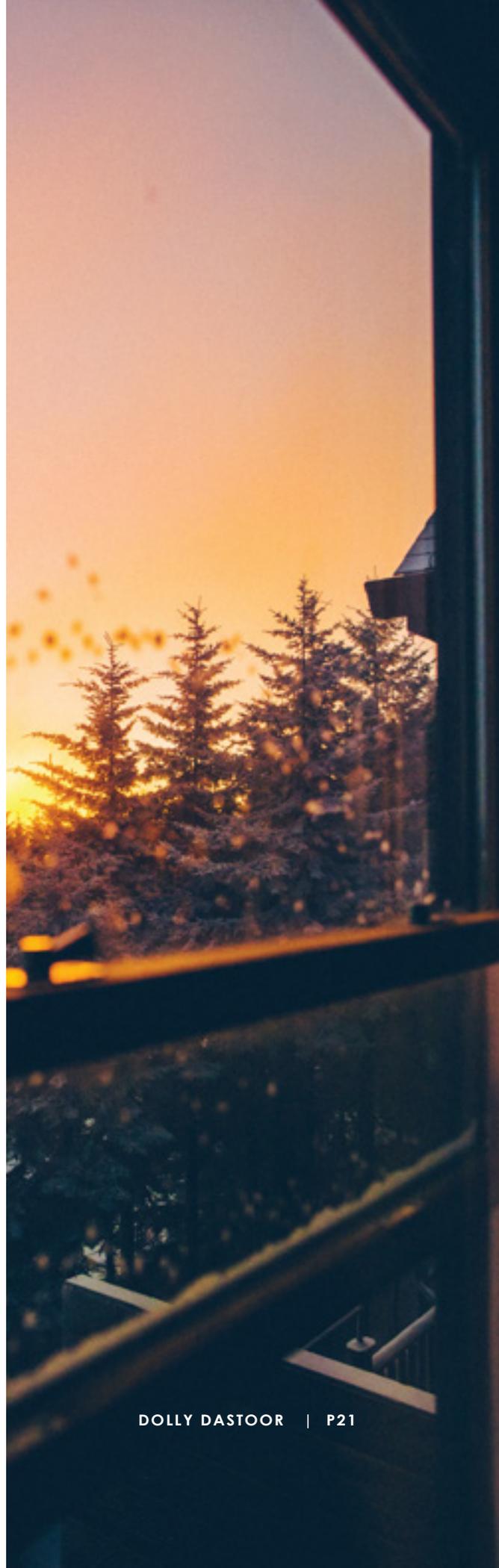
But the human spirit is very resilient, the panic mode, panic buying, we were all in - what will we do, how will we survive-- quietly calmed down and as days went by, I took a deep breath, settled down and my resilient spirit surfaced. I discovered Zoom! I started enjoying the new normal of working from home, which I had been doing anyways, since my retirement, so it really made no difference, I live alone so no chance of spending more

family time, my family is all over the world, learning new skills, at my age? Forget it! but with Zoom I was happy to visit museums and libraries virtually, around the world, for free, which I could not have been able to afford, visiting concert halls and hearing amazing artists and virtuosos, listen to world-famous opera singers at magnificent opera houses, viewed stage performances of famous plays, award-winning films, which I never had time for BC (before Covid). I had to keep an agenda to fit in all the free items on Zoom! but I did try to keep fit with Zumba classes every morning for the free 40 minutes on Zoom and, of course, there was the more academic stuff coming every week from McGill and Concordia Universities to keep us informed about the different aspects of the COVID-19. And there were endless committee meetings, AGMs of the various volunteer groups I belong to, including MCW to keep me busy and occupied.



Before the lock down began I had collected the back issues of National Geographic, the Economist and the AARP magazines which I had not read, thinking I would now have all the time to catch up. No chance, between Zoom, and planning what to cook, the day was gone. I have never been so busy. It will be difficult to get back to normal as I have realized I love this new normal!

I do sympathize with thousands who are mourning the loss of their loved ones; those who are grieving the loss of their jobs, even their businesses, I am very aware of the fault lines it has exposed in our health care system, in our system of caring for our elderly, the most vulnerable members of our society. But for me personally this pandemic has not caused a major disruption of my life except a small discomfort of COVID-19 hair, which makes me look like a cross between an ash blonde (aka white) and a fading brunette!! See you soon virtually



BONNIE DESTOUNIS

March

My life has changed drastically in the past three months. First of all, it appeared to me that the weeks were flying by very quickly. I couldn't even keep up on what day it was. Being a senior, I was told by my daughters that I was not allowed leave my home... During the first couple of weeks when I was continually reminded that I was a senior and should not go grocery shopping, my daughter accepted the task. Not being accustomed to staying home all week, not going out, not seeing family or friends, no restaurants! I decided that this is the time that I should do things in my home that I never have time for. On I went to do a master job in cleaning every corner, etc. This was a tiring experience and I cannot say a very interesting activity. I sort of gave it up.

April

Now I was fortunate to have the time to examine what was in my clothing cupboards. Well, I discovered lots of beautiful clothes which I have forgotten about as I had not worn them for at least a couple of years. Yet somehow, I still can't give these beautiful clothes away. This was a dilemma. Time for my daughters to get involved. They will help. And so, they did. They took over! They quickly packed up big garbage bags and put the garments in the bags and wrote Renaissance on them and placed them in the garage, then reported to me job was done. So, this mission was taken care of. Next activity: I like baking. Phone calls were made to my six grandchildren asking what kind of cookies, cake or dessert they would like to have...I became busy but soon I was overwhelmed and had to give that up as well.





May

Now I was beginning to need outside stimulus and thought about the various important events that most organizations hold in May or June. Students graduating from various educational programs were very disappointed not to attend or partake in graduation parties they looked forward to. As grandparents we were also disappointed not to attend our granddaughter's graduation from McGill University.

Fortunately, real action started with Zoom, which provided an avenue for a welcoming experience. It was nice to recognize friends and acquaintances. I also checked out a variety of webinars that the MUHC and McGill University put on. Attending the assorted webinars was most interesting. This has been a remarkable experience.

June

Summer is here! Some hot days some cold days and many rainy days. Now tired of seeing the same house street, etc. I needed a change in surroundings. Time to go to the cottage. As I am writing this, I am overlooking trees, grass, geese, birds, lakes and a beautiful sky. I feel liberated, no clutter and a beautiful natural environment. The local town is quiescent! Not many people around. I realize and appreciate how fortunate I am. My mind and soul are experiencing the lack of restrictions and the high energy of the natural environment. The past three months have been difficult but the time has provided positive changes. This experience has been mind-altering and genuinely wonderful! I miss going out for dinner and look forward to go to a restaurant! Please keep safe and healthy!

RENA ENTUS

My Story since March 13, 2020.... and COVID-19



Like everyone across the Global world I was aware of the pandemic. I followed the protocol, washed, and wore a mask. However I did go out to shop for my husband and me. I didn't go to many places; I only went to Costco, IGA and my local fruit store, all this against my children's better judgment.

Around 10:00 a.m. on April 1, as usual, I was sitting at our desk in the computer room when my husband stopped by the door. He stood looking at me, gave me a beautiful big smile to say good morning. Little did I know that this would be the last smile and the last words he would say to me.

He nodded, went to the front door to get the newspaper. I heard him pull out the kitchen chair. I continued working. Working? I am retired; but I have several full-time jobs.

All of a sudden there was a loud crash coming from the kitchen; (I was sure someone or something crashed through the ceiling from the fourth floor.) I called Eddy's name as I ran to the kitchen. The only one there was Eddy lying on the floor. Since I had no

response from him, I immediately picked up the phone and called 911. Even without a medical degree I could see it was a stroke.

After Eddy left I sent an email out to the immediate family. Our remaining five children live all over the world as do our grandchildren. I also emailed the children of one of our friends, one of whom works at the CHUM.

Eddy was taken to the CHUM Hospital out east; we were not allowed to visit. Eddy had a massive left brain stroke which left him without speech, without the ability to swallow, and without the ability to respond to the simplest of instructions.

During that week, our friend Moishe, the doctor, saw Eddy every day. He FaceTimed so that we could see Eddy too. It was a great comfort to see him. I am very fortunate to have a large circle of friends and a wonderful family to support me.

I knew that I would have to deal with the loss of my husband. I was prepared for that. I knew that I would not be alone and without support.

However, I also had some family members who wanted me to allow them to speak to the doctors on my behalf; I refused their request. I felt capable. They ignored me.

These same people kept urging me to put a feeding tube into Eddy. I refused their harassing suggestion. Needless to say, this was stress I didn't need.

After one week of consultation with doctors using FaceTime, we made the decision to let nature take its course. So, on April 8 Eddy was moved into palliative care. One family member only was allowed to be with him; I volunteered myself. My daughter was allowed to join me on his last two days, April 14 & 15.

On April 15, Eddy passed away in the presence of my daughter and me. The funeral on April 17 took place at the cemetery with only 10 people present; obviously very different from normal.

Usually after the cemetery the mourners go back home where they are comforted by family and close friends, are fed, and comforted by a steady stream of people. The purpose of Shiva is to remind the mourners that they are not alone and that they are surrounded by community.

Well, in the world of a pandemic I went home alone. I was actually happy to be alone for several reasons. I was happy to quarantine.

What I have left out of my story is that I really wasn't feeling well. I was feeling exhausted, tired and generally lousy. At first I attributed this to the fact that I had spent two weeks watching and preparing to lose my husband. But, to tell you the truth, I was concerned that it was something else. I was concerned I might be sick. That is why at the funeral standing on the cemetery every time one of my children attempted to come within seven feet of me I made a big fuss. (I wasn't about to break the physically distancing protocol.) Actually all did follow the protocol.

So for one week I sat Shiva at home, alone. I fed myself and survived the week.

On April 25, 2020, I found myself standing in the kitchen around 6 a.m. (That is not unusual.)

What was unusual was that I noticed something on the floor near the kitchen table. As I bent to touch it, I was dizzy and felt pain on my forehead close to my eyebrow. I touched my forehead and found my fingers were bloody. In the bathroom mirror, after I washed the blood off, I saw a big cut near my eyebrow. Before I went

back to the kitchen, I realized that what was on the floor was dried blood. I figured that I must have passed out, and banged my head on the kitchen table. I have no recollection of doing that. Nor do I recall standing up. Nor do I recall getting dressed or how I got to the kitchen.

After telling this saga to a few people, a doctor in the family suggested that I go to the hospital to be checked.

So, brilliant me.... I didn't want to infect anyone, so I did not call my daughter, or a friend, or even a cab; I drove myself. When I got to emergency, I was immediately given a tetanus shot, registered; I was put on a heart monitor, had a CT brain scan (I do have a brain... hard to believe based on what I had just done), chest X-ray, etc., etc. They did all the usual things for a woman of 81 who passed out and smashed her forehead. But, being pandemic time, they also did a Covid test. I was sure they found my brain during that test too.

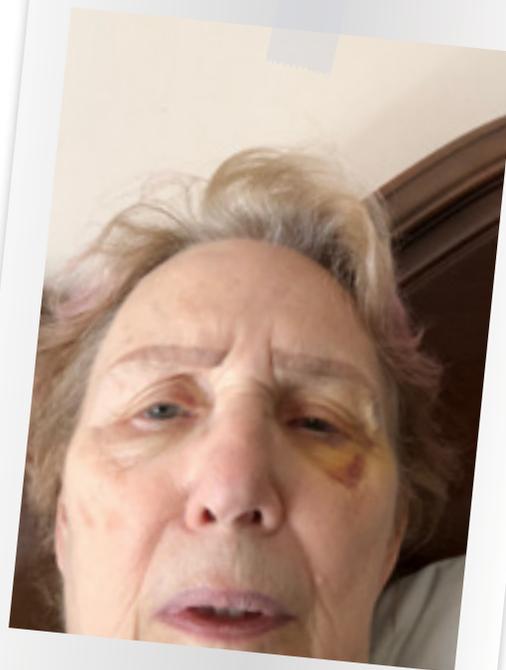
After four hours they could see that I could breathe on my own and that there was no reason to keep me in the hospital. So, I got dressed and drove myself home.

Oh, I forgot to mention that by this time I had called my Montreal daughter to tell her where I was and to let the rest of the family know. Needless

to say, they were livid with me. (They were right. I should never have driven alone either going to or coming home from the hospital.)

The next day I received the call to say I tested positive for COVID-19. I stayed at home in bed all by myself. (I did not want anyone to stay with me.) People were more valuable to me on the outside. They brought me food and drink.

For a whole month I quarantined, ate 3 meals and a snack each day. (Not a lot; but I ate.) I forced myself to drink. I had to survive.



A Selfie, May 1 2020

My children and grandchildren set up a telephone chain to call every hour on the hour to see that I was alive. They sent me an oximeter, to monitor my oxygen level; they sent me special lights to treat my chest area (the lungs); they sent me special vitamin C, and special pills to help my lungs work better.

I was taking those pills and Tylenol for the fever. I stayed in bed for 3 weeks, lethargic, looking like I lost the fight. I was grateful to be alive. I was happy to be alone and not have to talk to anyone. In fact I did not answer the phone except to assure my children on FaceTime that I was alive and coping.

When the COVID-19 test bus came into my area I went for a second test, and tested positive again. Was I contagious? I doubt it, as did the nurse. But I had to go back into quarantine for another two weeks.

Thank G-d I have been training my whole life to be strong and deal with whatever comes my way.

Do I have any lingering side effects? Well, I hope that the hair I lost grows back. If not, so be it. I hope that my lung capacity reaches the level it was before Covid. Is there damage to my heart or any other organ? Your guess is as good as mine.

Today, September 3, I became a participant in a COVID-19 study by donating several vials of blood.

At least now I can say I am good for something!

I am a very lucky woman. I am very thankful.

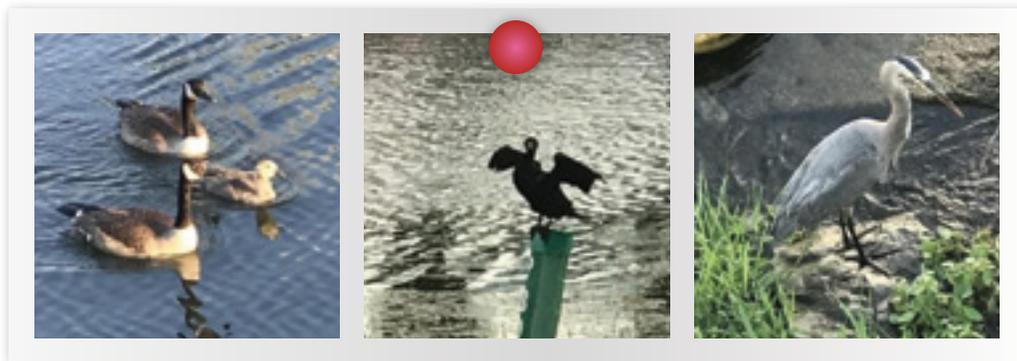


SANDRA HEIJL

Nature close to home

In March, before the term social distancing was in common use, my husband and I started daily walks along the Lachine Canal early in the morning, normally between the Wellington Bridge and the Cote-Saint-Paul locks. Shortly after sunrise, there were not many people using the bicycle/walking paths along the canal, and we enjoyed the silence that made the sounds of nature stand out. We found these peaceful walks had a soothing effect, while providing some health benefits of exercise.

Most of the canal was still covered with ice except for a few spots near the Saint-Gabriel locks, where ducks and seagulls could swim. Without much traffic and before construction noise would detract from nature, we started to pay more attention to the birds and other wildlife along the canal. Some birds appeared regularly, such as a great blue heron and a lone cormorant. The heron was patiently waiting for breakfast, often at the same prime location near the locks, and a cormorant demonstrated great speed flying low over the water, swimming and diving or sitting on a buoy, resting and drying its wings.



With the arrival of spring, other birds got our attention. Two snow geese made their temporary home along the canal, recuperating from a wing injury. A pair of Canada geese, first seen on the ice, were spotted with a single gosling. Over time, we saw this trio regularly, the baby goose growing up to the point where its parents encouraged it to take off from the water and fly in July. An abundance of red-winged blackbirds were busy raising their young. Occasionally, we would see a groundhog munching with great gusto on fresh young greens. Baby squirrels chasing each other in and around the trees made us laugh at their antics.

The pandemic caused many constraints in our daily lives. Like every dark cloud has a silver lining, we found our walks helped greatly to find peace in these unfamiliar and challenging times. It was a pleasant surprise to enjoy many aspects of nature close to home.

CONSTANCE HENRY

This pandemic has created a barrage of feelings in me. First I had recently put my mother in an assisted living facility after dealing with her for five years with dementia. As an essential worker, the fear of travelling on public transport to get to work was hard. From the start I covered my face with a bandana while travelling on public transport. If the bus was too full, I would wait for another. My supervisor gave me a hard time for coming to work late. I had to ask if I could arrive 15 minutes later. Some staff stayed home because they have children, or take care of elderly loved ones or are scared. This made my fear level rise.

Some colleagues returned to work after a couple of weeks, scared because they were told if they did not they could lose their job. We were given 3% of loyalty compensation for three weeks to continue work for the company. Keep in mind that most workers are women and new immigrants. Since I have lived longer in Canada, co-workers came to me for information. I referred them to Femme Du Monde, Côte-des-Neiges for support when I didn't know the answers.

The fact that I could not visit my mother took a toll on me and on her. My mom calls me many times in the day, an unusual thing for her to do. I couldn't tell if she was scared as she is a woman who doesn't express her feelings, but her calling me a lot led me to believe that she was very scared and lonely since she couldn't see her only daughter. Not seeing my mother and fear for her health put my anxiety level on overload.



Let me tell you, the news on TV did not help either, especially when I saw a white policeman kneeling on a Black man's neck, killing him. As a Black woman, I had a mixture of feelings. Fear for my family, anger because 'why is this

happening again?' Anxiety because there is a pandemic out there that can make me sick and is socially distancing me from family and friends.

This pandemic has isolated me somewhat except for going to work and getting safely home. How can I cope with this? Yes, I cannot be physically there, but I use virtual means to connect at times with my friends and family, even seeing my mother on FaceTime.

DONNA JENSEN

From the start of the pandemic shutdown, I spent many weeks eating too much chocolate and watching too many YouTube videos trying to pass the time. I was safe and healthy, but experienced bouts of lethargy – I often didn't get dressed and had trouble focusing. I tried starting a quilt to keep my hands busy, went on a few power walks, but also read a wonderful book called "Where The Crawdads Sing" by Delia Owens. It captivated my imagination and took me out of my own head for a while. Beautifully written, it's a story of a young girl growing up alone in the marshlands of North Carolina, a girl who eventually finds strength through the natural world around her. Interwoven throughout is a mystery that will keep you guessing to the end. It was a wonderful distraction in these anxiety-ridden days. I think I'll read it again!





BRANDY JUGANDI

Many of us, myself included, have had to take a deep breath and accept 'making do' with a new life under lockdown: Personally, I have stopped making efforts to wear anything other than a pyjama pants to work and I love that my office wear has been reduced to a few blouses, earrings, and a hair clip. Hygiene, now reduced to optics, has become a genuine act of self-care.

On the other hand, the window into private lives through the learning curve of virtual meeting places has been as reassuring as it has been exhausting: We are all making do. Holding on and holding it together, we are finding our way in this new reality. In social isolation, we are by no means alone.

Some of us though, seem to have just won the lottery...

Many years ago, I wondered what my then young doggo did all day. So, I set up my laptop to record her while I was at the office. When I reviewed the footage later that evening, I saw, to my boredom, that she pretty much just slept all day with a two-minute barking stint when the mail carrier slipped the post through the mail slot

of the front door. Convinced I was missing nothing, I closed the recording in my laptop and the years went by: I went to work, Ginger stayed home and slept.

Going into lockdown, it became quickly evident in the daily excitement Ginger had when I would look at her and say, "You and me today, all day babe," that Ginger's dreams were coming true. I now know that what that little bean dreams of all day, is just being with me in literally whatever specific room I happen to be in! –"Going to the bathroom? Wonderful, let me come with you! Making another coffee, are we? Let's watch the kettle boil together." And what she delights in doing is a combination of sitting up looking at me, lying down looking at me, or sleeping with some part of her touching some part of me. The latter of these options is often timed with the wane of my energy in a Zoom meeting, and her appearance briefly on camera while she settles into a comfortable spot is always a welcome moment of distraction for anyone still paying attention in the game show view of virtual meetings and remote viewing.



Near the end of a workday like it were part of her schedule, Ginger becomes what I at-first thought was jealousy but now understand as more of a timely awareness of the sound and speed of my fingers along the keyboard. Slowly, carefully, she inches her head toward the clicking of my fingers on the keys waiting for a moment to slip her head between the two as if assigning me the new task of gentle head petting and ear scratching. "Your day is done," she would seem to say. And she knows. I know she's right. I'm done. I close my laptop and our evening of eats, treats, belly rubs, and sitting in the evening breeze begins.

These days have changed me, as they have all of us. Ginger may have won the lottery back in mid-March when my work was relegated to being done from home, but what she has taught me since then is that the win was ours. And looking back to the way it was before, I think to myself, I never want to get used to the separation ever again.



JOAN MACKLIN

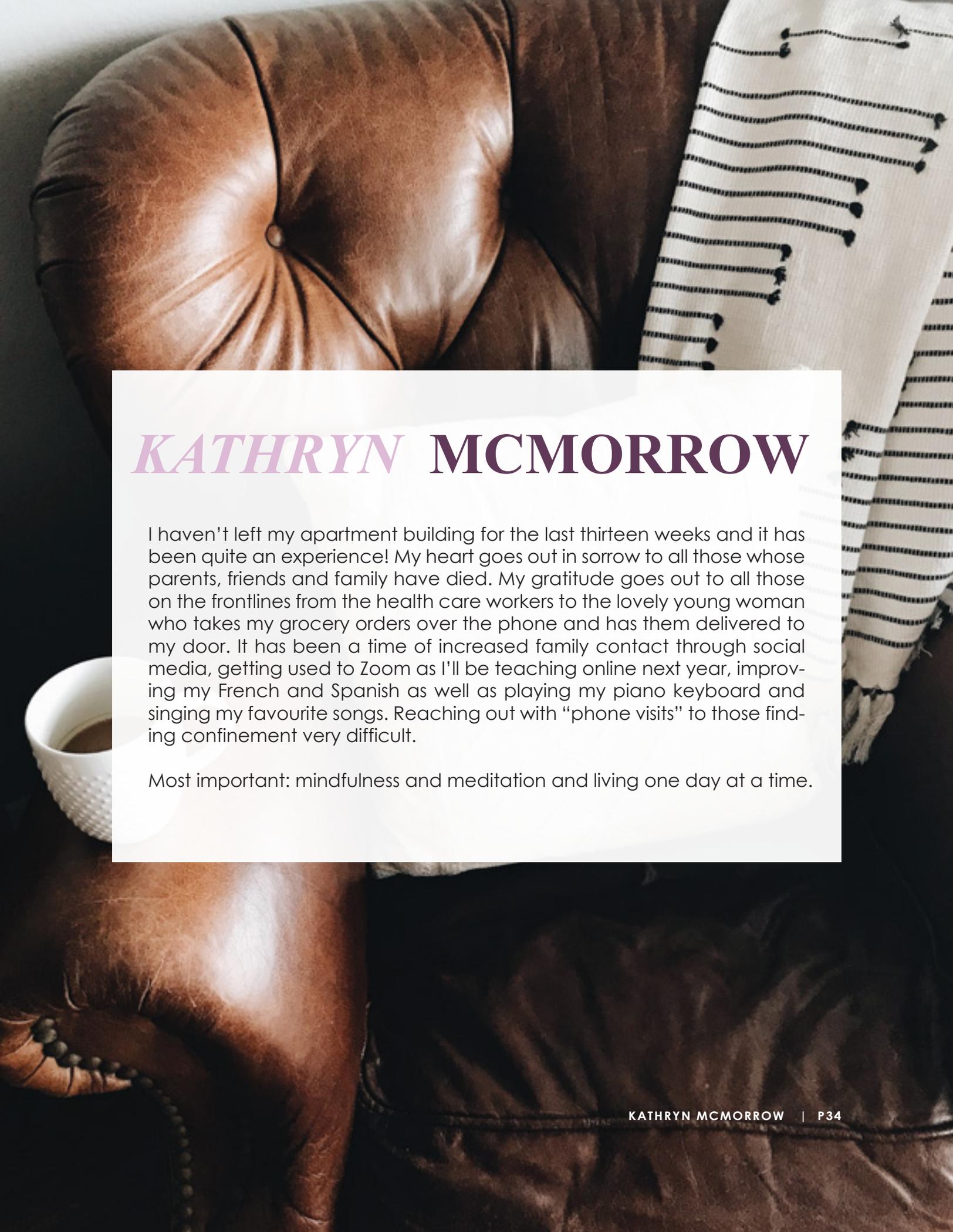
If there is one thing the pandemic has confirmed for me is that I am not a homebody. The confinement has proven to be extremely difficult as I keep thinking that I am getting on in age and unable to live a full life. Never would I have thought this possible in 100 years, but here we are.

At the risk of sounding vain, I seem to remember that long hair suited me in my twenties. This certainly isn't the case today, that's for sure!

As each day turns into a week and then into months, it is unbelievable to me that something as simple as getting one's hair cut is impossible, doing one's groceries is a mission and picking up my medication has turned into having it delivered. Sadly, while I visited or was visited by my daughter and granddaughter two to three times a week, the only time I saw the latter was when she delivered food at the door. As for the little one, I only saw her again on her birthday when we were allowed to celebrate outside; when she came to kiss and hug me, I had to stop her. The disappointed look on her face broke my heart.

On a more positive tone, I have kept busy with my work relating to the Montreal Council of Women, have been reading much more, especially various documents on health and I certainly have much time to stay in touch with family members and friends.





KATHRYN MCMORROW

I haven't left my apartment building for the last thirteen weeks and it has been quite an experience! My heart goes out in sorrow to all those whose parents, friends and family have died. My gratitude goes out to all those on the frontlines from the health care workers to the lovely young woman who takes my grocery orders over the phone and has them delivered to my door. It has been a time of increased family contact through social media, getting used to Zoom as I'll be teaching online next year, improving my French and Spanish as well as playing my piano keyboard and singing my favourite songs. Reaching out with "phone visits" to those finding confinement very difficult.

Most important: mindfulness and meditation and living one day at a time.

LINDA MONTEIRO

December 2020

I write this testimonial a day before our journal is unveiled at our holiday Zoom meeting. I have been waiting for the right moment to write about my pandemic experience, wanting to have gained some perspective or confidence that I have understood the life lessons COVID has thrown at me. That moment is now, and not just by deadline, but because now is as good a time as any and thanks to COVID, most of us have realized, now is all that we have. So here goes, a stroll with my thoughts.

I have always been someone who prefers the company of others. Throughout my life, I've been a social butterfly, busy working a few jobs, going to school in the evenings and looking forward to my next big trip. I would routinely find myself exhausted with extracting as much I could from life. At 30, I had gone back to school part-time to become a teacher and recently graduated in 2018. The following year was a year where the dust settled, I was no long chasing a career, working two jobs and going to school. Now I could just be, work at my dream job and fill the other areas of my life with... a giant void topped with desperate dread.

When COVID hit, it actually worked out for me, I was at a very difficult

primary school where I would separate 1st graders from fist fights before 8 a.m. on a daily basis. Not the best when you are dealing with unpleasant feelings of emptiness and just want life to be kind to you. As the months ensued, I was one of the lucky ones to have a job, a salary, my health but I only felt despair. Depression is not linear, it comes and goes. This was my second time with it. 'Hadn't I sent you away? Hadn't I figured you out?' I really struggled accepting I was that 'emotional woman'. I didn't want to be sensitive, scared, insecure, lost and depressed. I wanted to be fun, vibrant, confident, only then could I be worthy. I couldn't stomach myself so how could anyone else? As a single woman, my fear of being alone forever was the demon that tucked me in every night during confinement.

Looking back, I can't provide a sequence of transcendental ah-ha moment to wrap the year up with bow. It is a constant ebb and flow and I am lucky to feel every motion of the ocean, every teardrop of emotion. The pandemic has raised many mental health issues because for many it has robbed us of certainty, security and illusion, forcing us to face our mortal selves. I have learned that I may have a predisposition to anxiety, therefore I cannot abandon that side



of myself. We are work in progress. Some of us are construction sites, having to rebuild strong foundations while letting go of the façade. The façade is especially tricky for women, exacerbated by a society that uses filters on selfies. We spend a lot of energy appearing a certain way even when inside, the house is a mess. I am learning to embrace all the parts of myself, my mood, my fears, so that I can welcome the good parts too. I am learning to be kind and patient. I am learning to be my own kind of woman.

Aside from the inside job I have, teaching this year has been especially challenging. I teach English at two primary schools. I have been asking colleagues about their experience to benchmark my own. "Do you also go to bed at 8:00 p.m.? Have your students lost all self-control, courtesy and social skills? Are you exhausted too?" Months of isolation at-home, with busy parents, extended screen

time and fewer social activities have really changed our youth. The job is very demanding and I am learning to give value to what I do, celebrate small victories while keeping some of my energy to myself. I hope our society will soon make big changes to the way we value health care and education and that government will stop seeing it as an expense. I think COVID has brought a lot of what is important to light on personal scales and large societal ones. More tough conversations are being had, changes are being made and we are moving towards a better direction. In every grey cloud, there is a silver lining.

I am happy to have shared my story with the MCW and I commend the organization for the wonderful activism and social outreach it has done this year. Thank you ladies for your candidness, guidance and kindness. With love.

ALISON OXLADE

Everybody's circumstances are so different. For me, Covid happened at a time when we had recently arrived in Montreal from England - a time of great transition for me, leaving our home, extended family and friends to be with our daughters and grandchildren here in Montreal. So when Covid happened there was a huge mix of feelings, relief that we were here with our immediate family but anxiety and sadness about our family and friends in the UK.

We had to move out of our rented apartment and had to buy a property under a lot of pressure in the middle of Covid. We made a very quick decision to buy something and in fact it has turned out very well. One of our daughters lives on the next street with three of our grandchildren so we can see a lot of them.

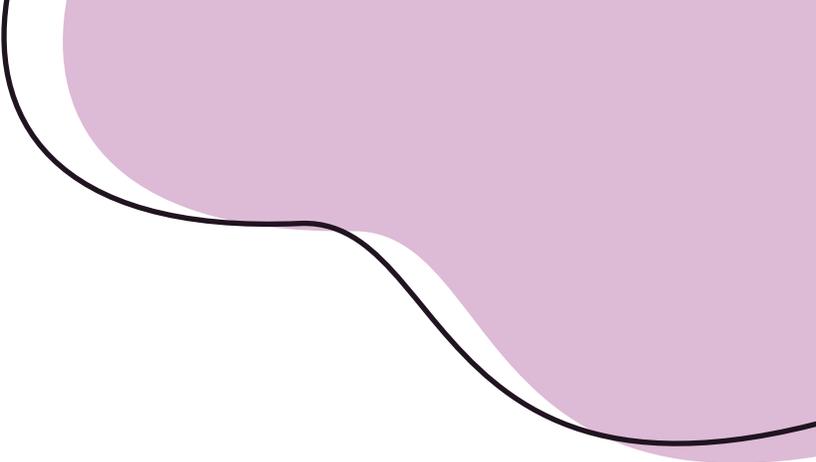


During the time that we were moving our son-in-law's mother, who was in a care home in Montreal with advanced dementia, became acutely ill with Covid-19. She was in ICU, critically ill but, of course, not able to have contact with the family. She recovered but it was, of course, a terrible time for everyone. She is still waiting to go into a care facility with an appropriate level of care.

One of the issues that I think we all struggle with is that we all have different tolerance levels for anxiety around Covid and that sometimes leads to conflict in the family about what people view as safe or acceptable. But what I do see is that we all seem to realize that if we have a conflict. We need to resolve it quickly and let it go. This isn't a time to be harbouring grudges.

Ending on a positive note- I think because I'm not travelling and am staying in my locality I'm walking more and seeing the small daily changes in nature. In the spring the ice gradually going and the buds slowly growing and now seeing the beautiful colours of the trees.

So we don't know what lies ahead but I think we are all more resilient than we realize and we will get through this.



MARIA PELUSO

My pandemic life has been a little manic. I am sad about family health issues I continue to live with, fatality rates in many countries, especially in the developing world. Other days I get annoyed, angry about our conservative leaders who are critical about the deficits all countries will inherit rather than directing concern towards the health of citizens. There have been traumatic events that have occurred. Mass killings, Canadian helicopter crashes off the shores of Greece, floods, the neglect of seniors in both private and public residences, the number of infected people working on our food supply chain, the abuse and neglect of ethnic, indigenous and visible minorities. Sadly, there are no shortages of issues that the pandemic has not exposed. Not surprisingly, as an activist, I continue to be involved in addressing concerns the pandemic has revealed – particu-

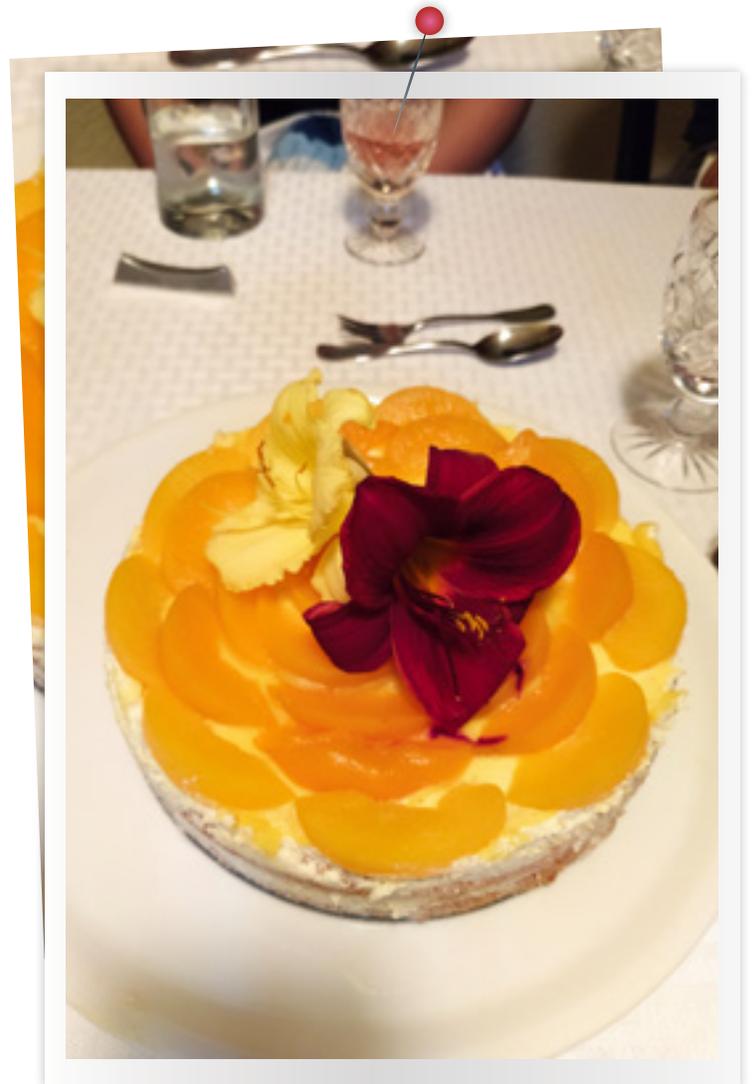
larly the lacunas at the municipal and provincial levels. Conservative male leaders seemingly worldwide have polarized the pandemic as political rather than on health and safety.

In between moments of despair, I have taken advantage of my isolation by speaking to my family daily. My family is spread across the country, and it has been super to connect often with family and friends. I enjoy most of all, speaking to my grandchildren. I tend, as therapy, to my garden or spend time cooking up a storm in the kitchen and honing my bread-making skills. I have gained weight! My sleeping patterns are all over the map, either wanting to remain in bed some days or getting up with interrupted sleep all through the night. Netflix, Amazon Prime and Crave provide ample opportunities to entertain through film. Since



mid-March, I send daily comic videos about the pandemic to my list of friends. I am by no means bored and busier than ever. Once a month, I am a volunteer with a food bank in the Cote-des-Neiges area. I enjoy listening to our Prime Minister, who has instilled a sense of confidence. Compared to most countries, Canada has fared well during the pandemic. I have signed dozens of petitions and produced a myriad of resolutions. I have turned into a research junkie about the pandemic.

Most of all, the pandemic has provided opportunities for me to improve our world, to contribute to improving the lives of others, especially those of women. I am inspired by our essential workers who put their lives on the line so that the rest of us remain safe in isolation. I am thankful for these brave souls who serve all of us. My Zoom meetings have been frequent but worthy of communicating with collective efforts to deal with issues raised during the pandemic. For me, the glass is always half-full.



PENNY RANKIN

Having been invited to submit a testimonial some weeks ago, I have to admit that I have struggled to respond. In part, this was and is due to an overriding lethargy that has plagued me-though not completely paralyzed me. I, like others, stood in shock as catastrophes crashed into the shores of what we so nostalgically refer to as the “good old days when things were normal.” But “normal” I fear, had been creeping away unseen by the majority of us for months if not years- a fact that science, environmental and otherwise has been pointing to for decades...Not only blind, but also deaf it seems, it is my hope that as we edge ourselves away from the precipice that we will not be so collectively dumb (in the other sense of the word) as we have been.

Generally speaking, on a personal level, our lives changed overnight. Terms and procedures associated with looming danger-the closing of borders, travel alerts and grim headlines diverted then fixed our attention onto the spectacle of our lives unravelling in real time. Strangely, I found this to offer both a welcome release and yet simultaneously a daunting and definitely an altogether unwelcome reality. The “release” came in the form of having a fail-safe “excuse” not to have to do the things I really do not enjoy doing...The daunting new reality was a more complex experience as the gravity sank in. I was

struck, by the range of emotions I experienced as I went about seemingly familiar tasks: How strange it was to enter a supermarket and feel disoriented if not threatened by what was and has been a task I have carried out all my adult life. There- I admitted it, suddenly buying bananas, testing the ripeness of a melon became questionable acts...cartons, packaging and even receipt slips were (and continue to be) subject to 70% solutions of alcohol...car door handles and steering wheels wiped down, time and time again...madness mixed with caution that intensified when my 95-year-old mother was diagnosed with COVID.

Etymologically speaking, a testimonial is defined as a “sworn statement of witness” with capital “T” truth understood to be at its heart. If testimonies are about truth...then the telling needs to be honest....and honesty, as a rule, tends to open the door to one’s own vulnerability. Here goes.

The truth is that for weeks on end I listened with an intensity that literally felt as though there was an electric current running through me 24/7. It is almost impossible to characterize those days as being anything other than a rollercoaster...it is a term that speaks to the strange highs (celebrating not being transferred off the island) as well as the easily imagined lows of gasps, faint appeals and muffled cries. My role as an advocate,



decision-maker and spiritual guide as well as a communicator was held together by family, friends and prayer. Mum survived against all odds-and we have concluded that she did so for a reason. As to what that reason is- I believe it unfolds in the heart of those who hear her story, sometimes consciously and for others not. That's OK. Parallel to the above was the full-fledged breakdown of someone also very dear to me...The reality is that the weight of the pandemic has dramatically impacted those with mental health illnesses and conditions. That story is too raw to share-but

what isn't raw is the truth that few if any of us can honestly say that we too have not suffered or noted at some level the weight of these times on our psyches. I deeply believe that there is a universal truth in linking honesty to our vulnerability - and if there is one thing this pandemic underscores is the fact that we are all vulnerable.

It seems to me that as time goes by, that this pandemic is exposing an extraordinary range of truths: some good, some bad and more than a few downright ugly. It has exposed our undeniable skill at skirting, rewiring/rewriting what needs to be and should be addressed. Our oft unparalleled avoidance strategies have helped catapult us into this seemingly surreal- yet painfully real situation. We can't tackle each and every hardship or inequity exposed by this unseen enemy...we can take on issues, march, protest and lobby - but our path will be a lot easier I believe when we tackle the enemy within that blinds us to the truth that as long as we identify others as other than us than the work that truly needs to be done - will forever be undone. I have hope- and it is that hope that through the thick and thin of the months ahead that I will seek to nurture...making progress on the good days...and being forgiving of myself and others those days when it all seems too much...Resilience, creativity and thoughtfulness along with knowledge, skills and shared talents will see us through. Take care my friends-my ramblings have turned into a letter- and I end with wishing us all well. xo



LINDA SERPONE

Covid19-2020 - A Deadly Italian Spring

It was to be our grand escape from Canadian winter. A two-month house renting experiment in Pisa that, if successful, could lead to annual winter escapes in other towns in Italy. We have a history with Italy: a married daughter living in Rome and therefore annual Easter visits to Rome and Tuscany; university sabbatical years in Bologna and Ferrara; 50 years of conferences up and down the boot; and a multitude of friends and cousins on my husband's side still living there. And not to be discounted, Spring arrives in Italy at the end of January! On February 1st we arrived in Pisa excited to see our rental house. The weather was mild and lightly rainy as we taxied from the airport to our house in a residential neighbourhood, a ten-minute walk from the city centre. Already there were hints of spring, as some trees and flowers had started to bloom. What we did not know then, was that on that same day, in Rome, two Chinese tourists had fallen ill and eventually tested positive for COVID-19. Ignorant of the storm building elsewhere, we enjoyed February exploring the area and museums, fresh local foods and balmy weather. Spring progressed and every day more trees and flowers burst into bloom. Every day we took long walks and documented the beauty of new blossoms and ancient architecture and were grateful. Tales from home of blustery cold winds and snow only

confirmed to us our good fortune. On February 19, we took a train to Rome to reunite with our daughter and her husband for a five-day extended weekend. Together, we enjoyed Rome and a drive up along the coast into southern Tuscany to visit some beautiful towns and ancient churches and, of course, to sample the wines and food of the local agritourism. Our little Roman escapade at an end, we returned to Pisa by train and life went on as usual.

On February 21, a virus cluster was detected in Lombardy in the north of Italy and within weeks the situation became critical there. On Feb 23 small northern towns hit by the outbreak were placed under quarantine. We were not overly concerned as there was no outbreak in our area or in the rest of Italy. For the next weeks we watched it all unroll on the evening news. It spread east to Veneto and south to Emilio Romagna but still we felt safe. I think we all hoped it would be controlled and contained, never believing that in the wealthy north, with their great medical resources and hospitals, that it would eventually overwhelm the system. Outbreaks and casualties increased at an incredible rate.

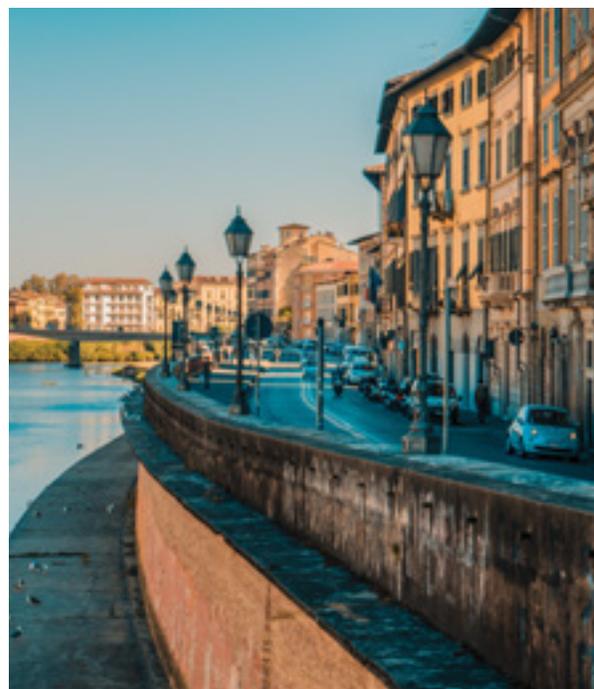
February 29th my sister-in-law called to cancel her birthday visit to Italy, Portugal and England not wanting to

take a chance of contracting Covid19 in Italy and then bringing it to her friends in England. Her big trip would have to be postponed to another year! Around this time, we contacted the Embassy in Rome and registered as Canadians abroad – just in case. We still felt safe but were glad we had brought supplies of hand gels and wipes with us from Canada as the stores were selling out. Still there were no cases in our area, but tourism was getting thinner which was a plus for us. However, we started taking precautions.

On March 8th, the Italian Prime Minister G. Conte expanded the quarantine to all of Lombardy and other northern provinces and the following day on March 9th to all of Italy, placing more than 60 million people in quarantine. On March 11th, all restaurants and bars were closed. On March 22nd, all factories and nonessential production was halted in an effort to stop the spread of the virus.

On March 17th, Prime Minister Trudeau urged all Canadians abroad to come home. Only four airports would remain open in Canada in the large populated centres of Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver. Around this time Air Canada cancelled our direct flight home from Rome to Montreal. After contacting Air Canada in Rome, we were booked on a flight Rome-Munich-Montreal, but this was subse-

quently cancelled. We were then booked on a flight Rome-Paris-Montreal, but this too was eventually cancelled when France closed the Charles de Gaulle Airport to connecting flights. Frankly, at this point I did not want to return to Canada for several reasons. News reports of masses of people congregating at airports in North America without masks were frightening. I still felt safer in Pisa. Safety measures were in place here and people were adhering to Italian government orders so as not to pay heavy fines and the police were checking! We lived in a quiet residential area with no crowds. The shops were cleaned regularly, and masks and hand washing were required on entry with only a few customers



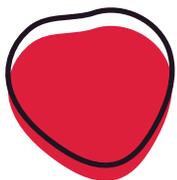


allowed entry at a time. One took a number and waited outside. I would walk around to get some Fitbit steps until my number was called – usually a 40-minute wait/walk at the local large supermarket. Hardly any wait time at all at our neighbourhood bakery and Enoteca (wine store). Wine is a life necessity in Italy and a balm during a stressful time! Thankfully, there was still no cluster of contagion in Pisa province. However, controls strengthened to avoid outbreaks. Walks became limited to our neighbourhood and I only went to the supermarket once a week. We started to rely on our corner bakery for refills of milk, breads, cheeses and other grocery items. I cooked all our meals now as there were no open coffee shops and restaurants. The change I missed the most was the closing of the University Sport complex two blocks from our house with its scenic outdoor track around the multi-sport facility at the foot of the Pisan Hills.

A little nervous and sad we left Pisa at the end of March as our lease was coming to an end. We headed to Rome for Easter and to be in place to catch our fourth tentative flight home to Montreal on April 14th. During lockdown, to move around Italy or even within your neighbourhood, you needed to carry official papers on your person! And the government changed the required forms almost daily. The end of our lease and our

need to fly home was hopefully sufficient reason to travel to satisfy Italian law. During the lockdown in Pisa, I never went for a walk or to the store without my printed form stating my address and purpose of travel – to go for a walk or shop for groceries. For the trip by train to Rome we had to print out a new form (thanks to our gracious landlord downstairs) at 11pm the night before our early morning train as it had changed again that day! Happily, for us, the police at Pisa Centrale and Rome Termini Train Stations were thorough and polite and travel was a breeze. There were literally two other people in our first-class coach due to restraints on travel! We arrived in Rome to an empty and silent Termini Station and eerily empty downtown streets. We were met by an impeccable private taxi driver and car (sanitized before and after each client) and headed to our daughter's house in the EUR neighbourhood, relieved and happy to embrace family again.

Once in Rome we printed out new documents and adhered to all the same rules: wearing masks in stores and in proximity to others on the streets and limiting our walks to our own neighbourhood. We were fortunate that the neighbourhood was bordering on an Abbey with lovely wooded walks and chapels and our apartment balconies were filled with colourful blooms. Sharing meals and



conversation with loved ones was an almost giddy experience! We initiated a daily cocktail hour to lift spirits as we sat and discussed rapidly evolving world events. Restricted movements meant my daughter and I cooked up a baking storm and enjoyed long walks in the silent Abbey gardens. A more subdued Easter came and went with Papal services watched by millions only on television. Three days before we left, we had a real scare when my son-in-law thought he had a fever and felt some vague symptoms. He confined himself to his room for two days while we all avoided thinking of the possibilities. Finally, the third day he came out and declared all was well and we all breathed a sigh of relief!

With a heavy heart and not knowing when we would be together again, we said our goodbyes to family and flew home just a few days before our original departure date on an almost empty flight Rome-Munich-Montreal. I think it may have been one of the last flights! By now airports were empty and the airline staff was well equipped to protect themselves and passengers. I was extremely glad we had waited to leave.

We arrived home to a Canada that was at least three weeks behind Italy in the pandemic timeline and settled in for another quarantine! It was April 14 and Spring was not quite here but

just around the corner. We had snow flurries at least twice and I mourned the loss of the beautiful Italian spring in full bloom. I also grieved the loss of all those Italians who had lost their lives to this virus and dreaded reliving the traumatic experience in Canada. We had in fact returned to what was to become the Canadian Covid19 epicentre, Montreal, and we could only hope that important lessons had been learned and we would survive the storm. Our Covid19 story is not finished and we do not know how it will end or when it will end. It has been a great adjustment, but we are learning to adapt to a new reality. We are making our indoor and outdoor spaces work for us. We are connecting to family, friends and work with programs like Zoom. We have a lot of time to think, to read, and to get to know ourselves and reflect on our place in this epic moment in modern history.



VIVIANNE M. SILVER

My mourning walk

Today, as most days when the sun is shining, I'm out for my mental and physical health walk. Armed with rubber gloves and a required mask, I chart the route that will take me past the community garden on Kellert where I've been a member for the past four years.

Sadly, because of Covid-19 restrictions, it is tightly shut. Our volunteer Coordinator, Mandie who's been in touch with the members since early March, has informed us that the combination of the lock for the entry gate was changed. New rules will soon be in place and strictly enforced. We are now waiting for the Cote St. Luc Council meeting's recommendation as to when it will open.

Walking past the Community Aquatics Centre, I lament the loss of my weekly Aqua fitness and Zumba classes. Here, on the doors of the deserted building, there is no sign to indicate potential opening. My steps take me further along to the end of the road to the CSL Tennis Club. Yet another special outdoor sports activity place where I've been a member for forty-five years. The steel barricade forbids all entry and holds no information as to whether it will open this season.

On the way back to my condo, I stop behind the Eleanor London Library –a wonderful former source of my reading books, concerts, and enriching lectures. Here, my membership goes back fifty-five years to its very early inception in the upstairs of the CSL shopping centre.

In a moment of sad reflection of all things past, my eyes are drawn to magnificent forsythia bushes; they relish the sight of red tulips and blue hyacinths. They then linger on the surrounding trees whose nascent spring buds hold the promise of more beauty.

The joyful song of robins and cardinals add to the reminder of nature's healing message. Rather than to mourn all that cannot be, we must remain hopeful for better days to come.



RENATE SUTHERLAND

Coping with Covid

March – May 2020

These are certainly unprecedented and challenging times that we are all experiencing. I am grateful that our family and friends with whom we are in touch regularly, are in good health and all are looking forward to the start of normalcy in our lives. Though that may take some time yet.....! The early

cancellation of our trip to Italy's "Spring in Tuscany" in April and of our annual trip to the Stratford Festival in September 2020 were all indicators that these were not normal times.....

Being at home and living in isolation is not at all boring but presents a lifestyle that is more balanced, less hectic and



provides more time for reflection and renewal. Not for one minute, do I miss running here, there and everywhere to attend the Board meetings and program events of the numerous organizations, with which I have been involved since my retirement twenty-one years ago. As a retired educator, it has been life-long learning, community service/ advocacy and exploring health and wellness issues, which have, and continue to provide the positive energy that sustains me and makes my life meaningful and

enjoyable.

Unfortunately, it was also during the early days of this pandemic that three former colleagues, who had been in long-term care facilities, passed away because of COVID-19 complications.

Given the "stay-at-home isolation," I now have more time for yoga exercises, meditation and daily walks along Lac St. Louis, and, when "in the mood," cleaning out kitchen cupboards and various room closets. Though these latter activities have

never been my priorities. Together with watching the daily updates of the COVID-19 pandemic on TV and the CBC radio, I also enjoy PBS programming, especially their daily evening's PBS News Hour and the Sunday Masterpiece programs, Netflix (occasionally) and leisurely reading the Gazette and Globe & Mail with my morning coffee. I do admit, I am a bit of a "news junky" and am always fascinated how the current news on health, long-term care facilities, education and the economy, etc. and all the reactions to it, are reported, interpreted, manipulated by the media and the politicians.

Moreover, the isolation we are all facing, does not seem to stop my work and participation in the not-for profit organizations with which I am involved in presently. Most days I continue to be "inundated" with emails and Zoom meetings. Adjusting to Zoom meetings is indeed a new learning experience! There are many a time when I am "Zoomed out"!



I am also the contact person for a 102-year-old family friend who lives independently in a Seniors' Residence (luckily no COVID-19 outbreak to date), and the support person to my 95-year-old Alzheimer aunt, who is being cared for at her home. All that, and together with connecting with family and friends in the rest of the country and in Germany, leaves me at times with little downtime but with the knowledge that there will be better days ahead.

June and July 2020

Now that spring and summer have arrived, our garden became priority and I thoroughly enjoyed spending many hours pursuing my gardening hobby, maintaining a small vegetable patch but mostly re-creating four rather large flower beds with perennial plants and annual flowers. I love puttering around in the garden and find it very therapeutic and relaxing.

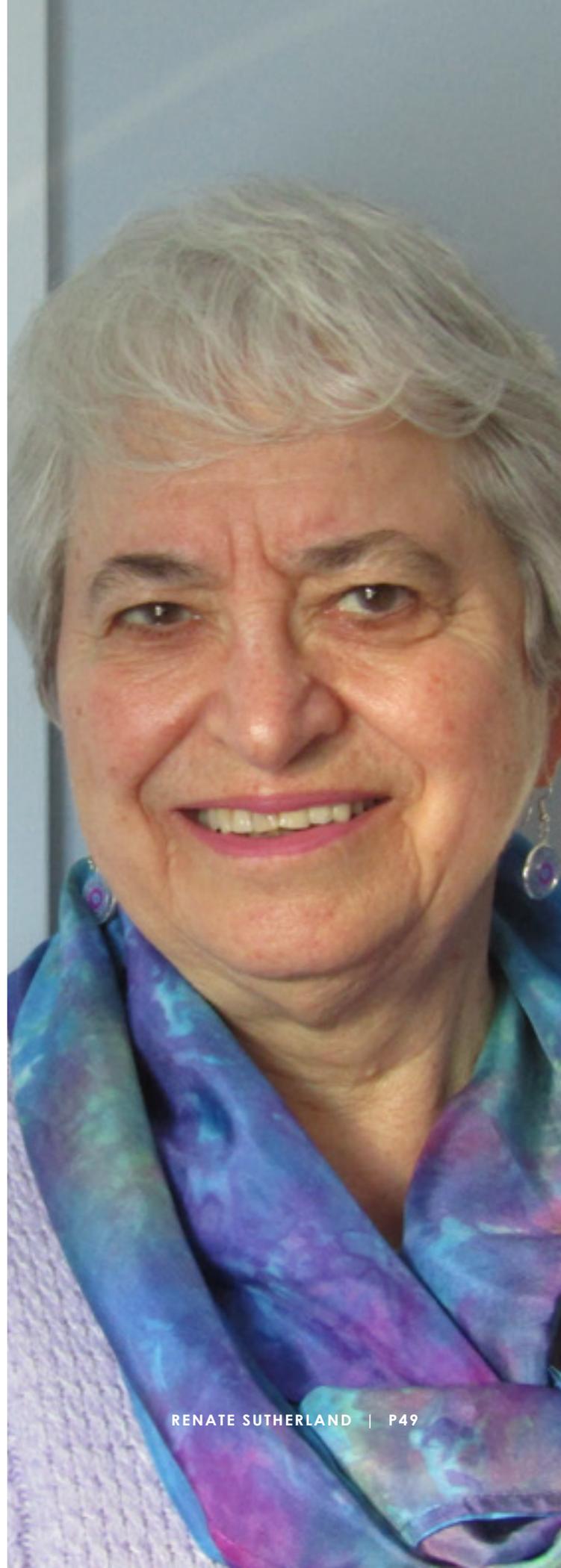
Now that social distancing, hand-washing and wearing a facial mask in public places have become an important component of our daily routine and probably, the "new normal" for some time to come, I find that I can live with that. I am back doing my own errands and going shopping (our son looked after that in the early days of the COVID-19) and have found that just going before the store closes, is just a very convenient time, because there are only a few people around.

Very slowly people are returning to our local shopping centre and when they do, they wear their masks, keep their distance and comply with the hand sanitizers' procedures. Visits to my hairdresser and dentist have worked out just fine and I was very impressed with the health and distance precautions they had in place to welcome me back.

For the near future, we are not planning any restaurant outings or using public transportation but we look forward to welcoming a small group of family and friends to a BBQ on the patio. Going on a trip to the Maritimes to visit our son and family in Halifax is not yet an option either.

I continue to be grateful for family, friends, good health and the ability to serve the larger community.

All in all, this COVID-19 crisis continues to challenge us all and there is no doubt that it will bring new perspectives and creative ways of doing things. Mask wearing has become ordinary, something we just need to do as members of a society. Assuming our daily activities in this "new normal" will take patience, perseverance, ingenuity and "stepping out of our box" and hopefully, a better awareness and understanding of what it means to be human and live more harmoniously within the world's natural creation.



WANDA LEAH G. TRINEER

Friday, March 13, 2020, is a date that will forever be etched in my memory. It was the last day that life resembled what we will probably call the “old normal.” For me, it was the last time I was able to visit my father at St Margaret’s Home in Westmount. My husband and I had visited him after work that evening and when we left, we wished him a good night and said, “See you tomorrow.” Of course, we never did! On the 14th, the government banned all visitors to long-term care facilities. I didn’t worry about the care that he was receiving as we had been more than pleased with the level of care and understanding of the staff on the 4th floor since he had moved there last November. Even over the next few weeks, they would reach out to us with updates about how he was doing or take my calls when I would call to enquire. Speaking to him on the telephone was not an option as his hearing was too far gone; even face-to-face conversations were difficult at times.

On Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020, about 2:15 in the morning, I received a telephone call to say that they had just gone in to check on him and found that he had passed away in his sleep. The nurse said that they had looked in on him about two hours earlier and he had been his usual “resistant self.” My father was not always the easiest man to get along with so I

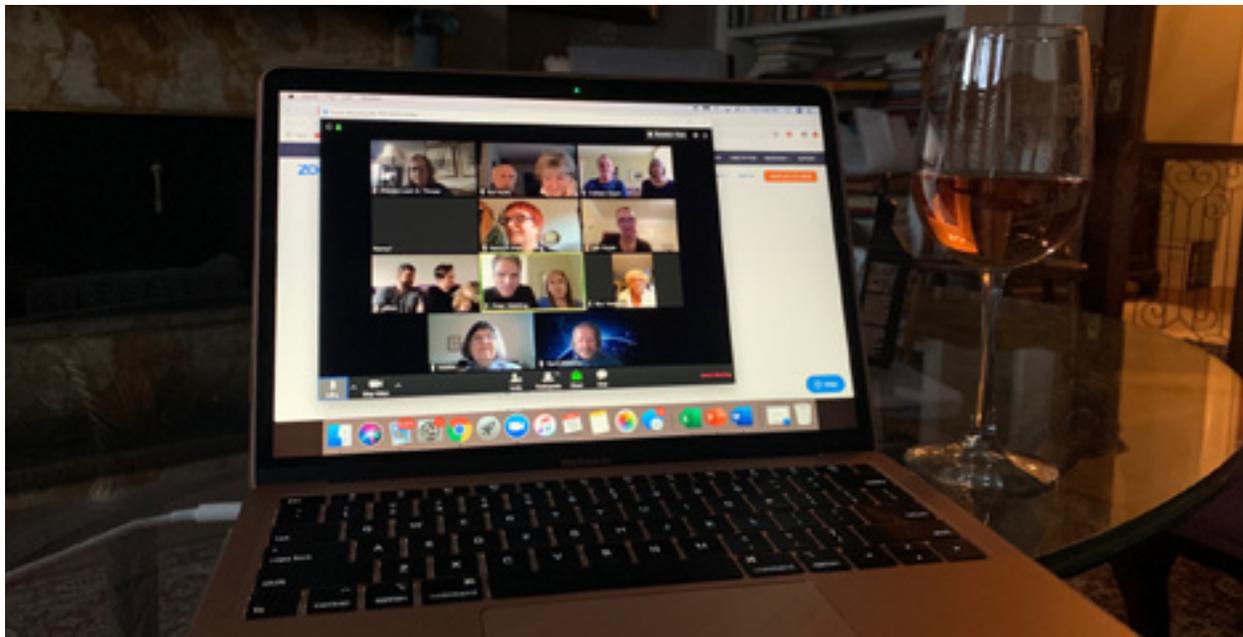
couldn’t help but smile when she said that the last time she spoke to him, he was just his normal self. Since the family tradition of a church funeral was not going to happen for some time, he had to be cremated; thank goodness, he had never expressed an opinion one way or the other about cremation. We learned that a small funeral from the funeral parlour chapel was allowed since he had not passed away from COVID but a family funeral and burial from Grace Church in Arundel, Quebec was going to have to wait until after churches were allowed to open. At the time of his death, travel across county lines prevented us from even getting to our home in Arundel, let alone to the cemetery where a private burial with fewer than ten people would have been allowed. We had hoped that having a proper funeral and burial on June 25th, which would have been his 95th birthday, might have been possible but that too must now be postponed to some other date in the future.

I retired from McGill University over five and a half years ago and a week later was asked to go work for a friend who was a Financial Advisor; a part-time position and “just for a while” to help out. Part-time had become full-time except for managing to play golf once a week in the summer. During the latter part of February, I was

approached by another Investment Advisor who offered me a position where I could work three days a week, year-round. Needless to say, on March 23, 2020, I started a new job, in the midst of COVID-19!

The Friday before I was to start work, an envelope of general office supplies and a new laptop was delivered to my home in anticipation of starting my new job... from home. The first couple of days were spent just trying

to get logged on to a myriad of new computer software, most of which I had never heard of before, let alone knew how to use. Then there were my new colleagues, only one of whom I knew and none of which I would get to see. Introductions to colleagues and clients have been made over Microsoft Teams, telephone, and email with the promise to meet face-to-face when all of this is over. When will I actually get to go to my new office in Place Ville Marie? There



is only speculation on that subject, maybe in the fall, maybe in twelve to eighteen months, no one knows! I, for one, am looking forward to the day as I have decided that working from home, while an occasional luxury, is by no means my preferred method of work. I am hoping that the prediction of a hot summer is overly exaggerated as I live in a 113-year-old home with no air-conditioning and an AGA

in the kitchen.

Two weeks ago we were supposed to celebrate my daughter's convocation from McGill University. She graduated with a B.Ed. (Phys Ed) and a minor in Music Education but university convocations are just one more of life's events that are not allowed to happen because of COVID-19. This past week McGill put together a series





of “virtual” convocations, by faculty, and has said that they intend to combine the classes of '20 and '21 at the convocation of 2021. We celebrated the graduation quietly at home with balloons, cake, and a special take-out meal from one of our favourite local restaurants.

I have always been a strong supporter of local shops and restaurants but never as much as now. Picking up pre-ordered household necessities from the back door of Hogg Hardware, having new slippers for my husband delivered to the door by “Tony” himself, and ordering take-out from our local, independently owned restaurants and coffee shops two or three times a week is an important part of doing what we can to help each other get through this. I smile each time I pick up a meal and I’m told, “Thanks for letting me feed your family tonight.” At the time of writing, we have just learned that Tony’s Shoes will be closing after 83 years and three generations of serving the community. People came from near

and far to shop at Tony’s; we wish Tony and Kathryn much happiness in their retirement but they will be sorely missed.

I am an active volunteer with a number of local not-for-profit organizations and all have moved their monthly meetings and AGMs to platforms such as Zoom. How many of us had ever heard of Zoom before March 13, let alone used it? Even my weekly church service has moved to Zoom! If you want to share a glass of wine before dinner with family and friends, near or far, it has become the means by which to do so. Thankfully, the government is now allowing us to get together in small to medium-sized groups to be able to socialize once again, always remembering to maintain good sanitation and social distancing. My hope is that when we read accounts of our lives during COVID-19 at some time in the future that it will all seem like a distant dream but I am sure that there will be remnants of this time that will become part of our future new normal.

MAÏR VERTHUY

March 13 came and we were all confronted by a pandemic. That's when you realize how important prefixes can be: endemic; epidemic; pandemic, and start frantically consulting dictionaries! So, this one wasn't just native, nor was it confined to the Western world; no, this one was a real whopper and covered, or so I read, the universe. Wow! I did briefly try to discover what prefix might apply when we start sharing our viruses with outer space but my efforts were unsuccessful and I abandoned them to start thinking about two other words: up and down, both capable of being adverbs, prepositions, and adjectives, etc. Life is really very confusing!

'Up' of course, is, I think, more open to multiple meanings than its opposite: 'down.' At that very point, a good

friend sent me a text about the word 'up' and it has, apparently more meanings or uses than any other two-letter word in the English language. Incredibly funny. 'Down,' although slightly longer and also offering many different meanings and words, is also more modest, so, in that case, reading the dictionary took me slightly less time. In both cases, nevertheless, one had to wonder, at least I did, how all the expressions that included 'up' and 'down' came to exist.

I did start making another list, but decided that it wouldn't help me survive a pandemic! The government had already decided that, to that end, I should stay indoors either forever or, in a more optimistic moment, until this virus disappeared, possibly because it was worn out, like us poor





human beings, or because one or more of us clever human beings had successfully developed a vaccine.

So, I concentrated briefly on the expressions: 'locked up' and 'locked down.' They were certainly in partial agreement. Both presumed long-term confinement in a closed space: a very unattractive prospect! Did this government really expect to be re-elected afterwards? But a wave of tolerance overtook me: "They are doing their best," I said to myself, a remark reminiscent of earlier classroom teachers! And they were, of course. It was great to see they didn't have much choice either! Just like us.

'Up' and 'Down' did, however, offer a slight difference, as I learned. Did you know that the first word meant simply that someone else had the key to the door, whereas the second word means that you have the key in your own grasp? It sounds so much better. We were all locked down and not up, so we were free theoretically to choose whether we stayed in or not. Of course, with Covid-19 waiting on the doorstep, theory and reality meant two different things. So I decided that I was going to settle down with my two cats and watch my favourite French and British comedies: "As Time Goes By" and "Munch." What a relief. What a release. Nothing like a comedy to survive a pandemic!

Away with dictionaries!

HELEN WOJCIK

You asked us to tell you what we are doing during these surreal times, so I'll try to detail what my life has been like. I would have included a selfie, except the lens on my phone is all clouded over with flour and you wouldn't see much anyway. By last count, I have peeled what seems like fifty pounds of potatoes, caramelized loads of onions and run out of cheese making approximately 400 pierogi, or so it seems. I have also baked, pureed, sautéed and roasted until my pantry is empty and my freezer full. It's too bad there are only two of us to partake of all this. Ah well, Christmas is coming.

Our car is standing shiny clean in the garage (inside and out), my books are sorted by author, theme, title, etc. and my cupboards have half the clothes in them. Even my files are in order.

I have called or texted every human being I know and am pleased to report that all are doing fine.

I'm trying not to drink more than one (maybe two) martinis per week, as I do not want our son, who is purchasing our groceries, to think that his mother is a lush.

My poor kids keep calling. I think they believe I'm bored and need some stimulation. We have talked on FaceTime, and actually that was good because it was the only time I have put on lipstick since March 12th.

Other than that, things are more or less normal!

MCW

JOURNAL OF A PANDEMIC

2020



MONTREAL COUNCIL
OF WOMEN

CONSEIL DES FEMMES
DE MONTRÉAL

Producer: Maria Peluso
Editor: Linda Monteiro
Graphic Designer: Lilliane Andres-Teixeira
