

The Pandemic Diaries

5. Hope

13th May 2021 – 7th September 2021

THURSDAY 13th May 2021

Canadian deaths: 24,804 World-wide deaths: 3,353,074

It's now been a week since Dear Husband and I received our first (Pfizer) vaccination. Despite being warned of possible side effects from the jab, I can honestly report that neither of us have had any real effects, aside from a slightly sore arm, and even that only lasted a day or two. And maybe we felt a bit more tired than usual? But to be honest, that's difficult to quantify as we've been in a state of general lassitude for so long now, that it's difficult to tell what is normal Covid 'Blah' and what is tiredness resulting from the vaccine.

Actually this sense of lassitude and general blah has now been recognised as a Covid 'thing' – a product of the pandemic, as described so accurately by DH last month when he was talking about how we are hanging in limbo. The psychologists have coined a term for this state, and are calling it 'Languishing'. An old fashioned sounding word, languishing summons to mind visions of forlorn ladies pining in a tower, (a la Mary Queen of Scots) or a forgotten prisoner in a dank cell, or an exiled member of royalty banished to far flung shores. Languishing to me brings to mind hard-done-to heroes and heroines put aside from their regular lives, unable to live their existence and achieve their destiny. And as a result, going into physical and mental decline. So in that understanding of the word, actually I think the psychologists have got it bang on – that is exactly how we feel. The scientists go on to define languishing as 'not exactly full on depressed, but in that state *leading to* depression, where you are definitely not thriving'.

Not Thriving. I would say that describes many of us very well. I am not thriving. DH isn't thriving. We're coping ok – we look after ourselves and keep ourselves fed, exercised and occupied. But we're definitely not thriving. We are languishing.

And yet how can I possibly complain of languishing, here in my safe home on the island, when India is in such dire and tragic straits? News reports claim that the reported death numbers in India are actually in the order of 2 – 7% of the *real* number of Covid deaths there. So if they claim 4,000 deaths per day, the real number could be anywhere from 150,00 to 200,00 deaths *per day*. These numbers are of course totally unverifiable, but with an estimated population of 1.4 billion, (nearly 1 fifth of the world's population) many of whom live in crowded places without access to medical care, and the nasty Double Indian Variant rampaging amongst them, it is logical to think that these bigger numbers have to be right. They must have lost over 1 million people by now. Unable to burn them all, they are apparently simply throwing the corpses into the Ganges, and other rivers. So much loss.

Email voices:

J – Stratford on Avon, England

The family did all meet up and managed to have a meal together in a gazebo, because we are not allowed inside pubs until 17 May. It was wonderful. Since then, we've had Au for Easter, travelled to Edinburgh and St Andrews to collect J's stuff and spent a couple of days in Exmouth. Mum arrives on 17 May, followed by A, D and S on 21st, L and J on 3rd June for a couple of nights, before H pitches up on 10 June. I suppose you could say that Lockdown 3 is basically over (Yayyyyyy!)

B – Abbotsford

At least our Covid numbers are going slightly in the right direction and the UK is doing well. And certainly, when I think of other countries such as India, we have so much to be grateful for here right now. Yet so much prayer needed for so many people throughout the world.

MONDAY 17th May 2021

Canadian deaths: 24,960 World-wide deaths: 3,399,026

We've reached mid-May and there is an awareness of the upcoming summer tourist season being close; losing a whole season's worth of tourist income in 2020 was devastating for many countries around the world, and no-one involved in that industry wants to lose another year's worth of income. Families and communities in many countries and areas are hanging on by a thread economically and NEED the income brought by the tourism industry. In Europe, the Mediterranean lands such as Greece, Spain, Portugal and Croatia are racing to open things up and get tourist bookings in for the summer. Tavernas are stocked with fresh octopus, fish and ouzo, the restaurant tables are laid....will anyone be able to come?

Over on this side of the pond, there is a similar sense of time running out: the American cruise ship industry, keen to get back to business and which normally has Victoria as part of their itineraries en route to Alaska (so it qualifies as an international tour), has applied to the US Court for a release from that ruling for this year, as Canada has not yet given dates for when restrictions will be lifted. It looks as if that court permission will be granted, and so Victoria will miss out on the money brought in by the 300,000 or so visitors from the cruise ships for another year.



I don't write this with any sense of blame or criticism; until we know when the case numbers are going to fall to an acceptable level (and therein lies a debate in itself – what is an 'acceptable' number? The same as our annual flu deaths?), it's very difficult for any government to make that call to lift restrictions and open the borders again. Or indeed, even lift the restrictions on intra provincial travel!

Our vaccinations are going well and in BC they are now taking vaccination bookings for anyone above the age of 18. Considering that we, at 61 years old, were vaccinated just 2 weeks ago, it is incredible they've got down to this age cohort already. Fantastic! Our own youngsters, aged 30 - 33, have their first vaccination in 10 days time. Before the end of May and well ahead of the original predicted time. This is fantastic and should be encouraging. But, but, but.....there are not enough BC folks registered yet to allow us to reach herd immunity – the 70% minimum needed before restrictions can be lifted. So what happens if those people don't step forward?!! And what if one of the new variants (eg the India variant which has already arrived in Canada) takes hold?

The UK has been acting as a shining beacon to the rest of us so far: they have had great vaccine uptake, they now have days with zero Covid deaths (in a population of some 66 million), and some restrictions have already been lifted. The tentative date in the UK for removal of ALL in country restrictions is set for June 21st. WOW. (Just retaining some limits on travel, according to their Traffic Light system of approved countries to visit). It all sounds so positive and so encouraging for us, as a route to follow - we're almost there - and yet there is concern over the new India Variant; will it stop their planned full opening? Will the UK in the end just be an example of how Not to Count Your Chickens Before they're Hatched? Let's hope not!

WEDNESDAY 19th May 2021

Canadian deaths: 25,045 World-wide deaths: 3,426,397

I enjoy a long phone chat with one of my cousins back in the UK today, and get a glimpse of life there now the pandemic restrictions are lifted.....he describes everyone's joy and relief, the general feeling of happiness and positivity as many Brits are now roaring around the country, catching up on seeing friends or family, or simply enjoying being able to travel and see somewhere different after 18 months in one spot. (Much as my friend J describes in her email, or as I'm seeing on Facebook with photos of them all everywhere but home!). But he also describes some unwanted side effects...he describes it as "*Crazy! Everyone wants to do the same thing at one ...everyone wants a haircut, everyone wants to travel, everyone wants a pint in the pub!*". Hmmmm....that must spoil the very experiences you are longing for, but more importantly it surely isn't smart, with the virus still around, to all suddenly crowd into small spaces, like the pubs, where the virus can spread so easily. I wonder if the Brits are living dangerously, everyone rushing back into full socialisation like this? Time will tell.

And he describes another effect of the pandemic that no-one had foreseen; as all the businesses race to open up again and re-hire for all the job positions they now need, having had to lay people off during the pandemic, they are finding that they cannot find people with the right skill sets. It sounds crazy, but my cousin N describes thousands of folks looking for work, but thousands of posts going unfilled, as employers say they cannot find those with the right skills for the job. When they try and seek out the good people they previously employed and had to fire, they are discovering that many of those people, being good at their jobs and full of initiative, have since sorted themselves out with either a new job or with an alternative, such as setting up their own small business, and are no longer available.

The restrictions may be lifting over there, but the story is not over by a long chalk yet.

Back home in BC, a very awkward situation has cropped up that has DH and I thinking about our own position. One of our extended family members, and all of his own family, has decided NOT to get the vaccine. Canada has been doing so well with vaccine uptake (according to Macleans magazine, we are about to overtake the USA in % of the population vaccinated and have also almost caught up with the UK. Yay for Canada!!!), that it never occurred to us that someone in our own circle would be vaccine resistant. This isn't someone we would normally see on a regular basis, but who we'd bump into at major family events, such as weddings, funerals, Christmas get togethers, christenings or milestone birthdays. So what do we do? Do we simply not go to such events in future if they might be in attendance? Do we go but just try and stand the other side of the room from them? Yes, we'll be vaccinated, but even with the vaccination, there is still a 6% - 10% ish risk of catching the virus, and as we get older, we will be more susceptible to the ill effects if we do catch it. Or could we become inadvertent carriers?

Maybe if we make it clear that we don't intend to be anywhere they are, they will feel some sort of social pressure, and decide to have the shot after all?! Actually, I doubt that very much knowing them. His wife *has* had the shot but he says he and his own extended family won't be getting it. What an awful situation for her! What about their young children?? Is he happy to potentially expose *them* to the virus if he or their grandparents / aunts / uncles etc are all carrying it? I cannot imagine the awkward conversations that must be happening in their home, but what a difficult situation for everyone. We are all going to have to make a decision one way or the other..... do we accept the risk, and condone the behaviour, by simply ignoring the issue and seeing them socially, or do we take a stance and stay away? This issue is currently causing heartbreak in the family as those who don't

want to take the risk come to terms with the knowledge that that decision comes at the cost of not seeing loved ones, including grandchildren, caught on the fringes.

So what will we, personally, decide? Yes, we'll no doubt pass all kinds of people in the street who are also vaccine resistant – we have no way of knowing who they are - but do we consciously want to socialise over a period of time with a selfish, potentially virus carrying idiot like that? Sorry – I'm trying not be judgemental, but clearly I am, because their bad choices negatively affect so many others. If enough people refuse to get vaccinated, then restrictions won't be lifted, and we'll all have to suffer all the many awful effects of the pandemic for longer. More people will die from Covid or will suffer the long term health effects of the Long Haulers. More people will continue with mental ill health and loneliness and depression. Or economic hardship. Or education interrupted. Or surgeries postponed. Or any of the other many, many negative effects of the pandemic. How can the vaccine resisters accept that?! I genuinely don't understand them. And, much as I don't want to upset others caught up in this family maelstrom and who are suffering here, I don't think I feel comfortable socialising with them either.

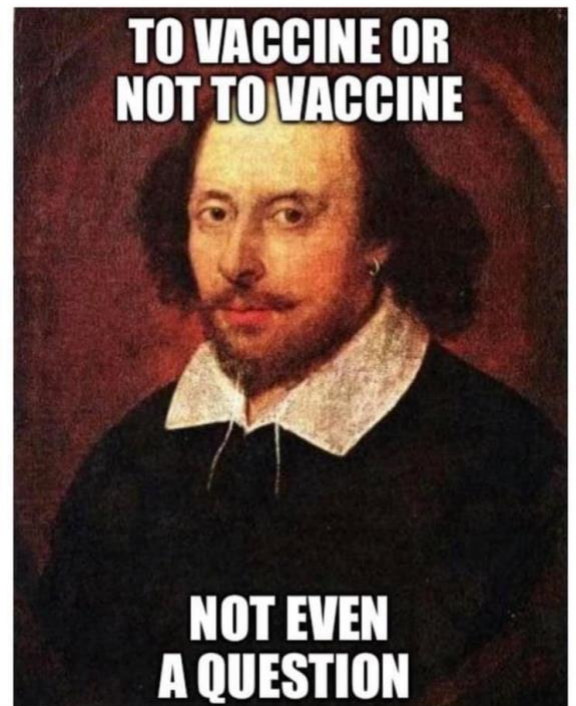
But we are not alone here, in BC there is still only 64% of our population who have registered for the vaccine. Not enough for herd immunity. And the same is true in the USA, where various states have come up with different 'bait' to lure vaccine resisters..... here's what some states are offering those who sign up to have the vaccine:

Ohio is offering no less than 5 college scholarships on a random draw basis from all those who get their vaccine.

Maine is offering its citizens the choice of a free hunting or fishing licence, or a free park pass, if they get their 1st shot by May 31st. In Alabama you get to drive 2 laps on a speedway, and in West Virginia a \$100 Savings Bond comes with every vaccination.

New Jersey has promised its citizens a free beer at a local brewery on production of their vaccination certificate, and Washington State has upped the ante by offering free beer AND a cheeseburger. The most unusual bribe surely comes in Louisiana, where those who have been vaccinated are given 1lb of boiled crawfish! But the most popular bribe so far? The Covid Vaccine lottery! Yes, those states which have set up a special lottery - Ohio, New York and Maryland - with all those getting a shot being given a free draw ticket (and with Ohio's Covid vaccine lottery having a prize of 1 million dollars, we're talking big money here), are the most successful at pulling in the resisters.

So, to sum up their stance.....I don't believe in the vaccine..... Bill Gates is trying to control me.....I will keep my independence at all costs and go on marches to defend it.....I will insist on my freedoms even if it means putting my family and loved ones at risk of death and serious illness.....but you say I get a free beer or a lottery ticket? Oh, alright then.



TUESDAY 25th May 2021

Canadian deaths: 25,314 World-wide deaths: 3,497,439

Today is the day we have so desperately been waiting for...the day that the first level of restrictions is lifted in BC. Huzzah!!!! The information is presented clearly for us in a table, where we can see the 4 stages of lifting of restrictions, projected dates for them, and the conditions that need to be met for them to occur. It all makes perfect sense and I am so happy to see it!!!!

STEP	Criteria	PHO Guidance	Personal Gatherings	Organized Gatherings	Travel	Sports & Activities	Businesses	Offices & Workplaces
1 MAY 25	C: stable H: stable D1: 60%	Masks mandatory, indoor public spaces Physical distancing If sick, stay home and get tested	Outdoor personal gatherings – up to 10 people Indoor visitors – up to 5 people or 1 household	Indoor seated organized gatherings – up to 10 people Outdoor seated organized gatherings – up to 50 people	Recreational travel within your zone Non-essential travel between zones restricted	Low-intensity indoor fitness classes Outdoor local team games and practices for all ages – no spectators	Indoor & outdoor dining – up to 6 people Liquor service - 10PM Existing WorkSafeBC Safety Plans remain in place	Start gradual return to workplaces and offices Existing Safety Plans remain in place
2 JUNE 15 (Earliest date)	C: declining H: declining D1: 65%	Masks mandatory, indoor public spaces Physical distancing If sick, stay home and get tested	Outdoor personal gatherings – up to 50 people Indoor visitors – up to 5 people or 1 household Playdates	Indoor seated organized gatherings – up to 50 people Sector consultations on next steps on indoor and outdoor gatherings	BC recreational travel BC Transit and BC Ferries – increased services as needed	High-intensity indoor fitness classes - reduced capacity Indoor team games for all ages – no spectators Spectators for outdoor sports – up to 50 people	Liquor service – midnight Banquet halls reopen – limited capacity, Safety Plans Sector consultations on next steps on easing of restrictions	Continue return to work Small in-person meetings
3 JULY 1 (Earliest date)	C: low H: declining D1: 70%	Masks – recommended Careful social contact If sick, stay home and get tested	Return to usual on indoor and outdoor personal gatherings Sleepovers	Increased capacity, indoor and outdoor gatherings – Safety Plan Fairs & festivals with Safety Plan	Canada recreational travel	All indoor fitness classes – increased capacity Limited spectators for indoor sports	Dining – no group limit Bingo halls, casinos and nightclubs – limited capacity Operate based on new Safety Plans	Seminars and bigger meetings Operate based on new Safety Plans
4 SEPT 7 (Earliest date)	C: low H: low D1: 70%+	Masks – personal choice Normal social contact If sick, stay home and get tested	Normal social contact	Increased capacity on large organized gatherings (i.e. concerts)	Canada recreational travel	Increased indoor and outdoor spectators Return of normal sport competitions – Safety Plans	Continue to operate based on new Safety Plans	Fully re-opened offices and workplaces

C: C-19 case counts H: C-19 hospitalizations D1: minimum % of people 18+ with dose 1

And what makes me especially happy? We can gather together, in our home, with our immediate family. We only have 2 daughters and 2 son-in-laws, - that falls in the 5 visitors category - the 6 of us can get together and see each other, indoors or out! YAY. That is the biggest excitement and I can't WAIT. With our birthdays coming up in a couple of weeks, the timing could not be better. And, IF the vaccination rate rises from the current 60% to 70% by July 1st, then we can see our extended family too; it's been 18 long months since I've seen my elder brother in West Vancouver. Way *too* long.

Secondly, we are now allowed to meet with friends at a restaurant, indoors or out. Masks will still have to be worn indoors, and distances maintained, but we can see them and socialise, and just be together and see their smiling faces for real. Fantastic. I'm sitting here typing on the computer but my head space is filled with "oh, who shall we see first?!!!!". Of course, I am aware that this reaction needs to be tempered somewhat, that we musn't rush out and wildly socialise with everyone and risk spreading the virus further, but the thought of seeing even a few of our friends is very happy making.

I see that we can't travel within the province yet - that is an action that depends on us reaching 65% of 1st vaccinations, but if that *does* happen, (and it should, as many of the youngsters – including our own, booked for tomorrow and next week, haven't been jabbed yet), we can start to move around again from June 15th. Another freedom I have been desperately missing and it means we'll be able to do our planned July trip to the Rockies and see more family and friends on the way home. Fingers crossed!! Woohoo - summer vacation here we come!!!!

THURSDAY 27th May 2021

Canadian deaths: 25,411 World-wide deaths: 3,524,490

We have two kitties whom we love very much. Actually, the truth is that they belong to daughter 2, who is the real cat lover, and these two dear furry boys are now elderly gentlemen; Jasper has reached the grand old age of 17, and Jimmy is at least 19 (we're unsure of his exact age as he was found abandoned and traumatised, and the shelter vet guessed at 'somewhere around 2 – 3 years old' when we adopted him). They are both personalities in their own way and have provided much joy, laughter and friendship over the years. But now Jasper is ill. We knew something was wrong yesterday when none of us saw him all day; the little guy has a strict routine that he follows religiously, and you know exactly when you're going to see him, or when he's going to come for a visit as part of the patrol of his territory. So when we don't see him, and when we later get the frantic message from daughter 2, saying he was missing, we know to worry.

After hours of everyone searching, I eventually find him; lying down, collapsed in a patch of long grass in a neighbour's yard. Barely able to lift his head, eyes dull, he is clearly extremely unwell and so different from the normal bounding energy levels that defy his age. Daughter 2 and her husband call our vet, who is booked solid for weeks. She suggests a vet hospital..... D2 calls the hospital, who cannot fit him in as they too are solidly booked. D2 tries no less than TEN different veterinary hospitals offering emergency services (I didn't know there were that many in the Victoria area) and they all say the same thing; they agree that the symptoms indicate that this is critical (his age, his complete lack of energy, and the fact that he can't eat – vomits it straight back up again); the veterinary staff are sympathetic and kind - they all stress that he needs urgent care, but sadly they cannot fit him in. Eventually, the Shaw Animal Hospital up in Central Saanich agrees to see him for an appointment in 2 days' time.



It turns out that we are not alone in this problem; apparently so many people have adopted pets for companionship during Covid, that the shelters are now empty, (wonderful news) but the vets cannot cope with the increased demand, especially considering all the restrictions and protocols around seeing people during the pandemic, which of course reduces the number of animal patients they *can* see.

Co-incidentally there is an article on this very subject in the Times Colonist today "*Pet owners turn to telehealth platforms amid vet backlogs*". It seems this is a Covid caused nationwide problem, and so organisations such as Vetster and Pawzy offering animal telehealth services are springing up to cope with the demand. But even they admit that with an animal, you really need to see them, especially with symptoms as worrying as his. So all we can do is to keep him as comfortable as possible, and wait.

Jasper in his Halloween outfit 6 months ago.

Knowing that he's not been able to eat now for over 24 hours, and that he has over 24 hours to go until he sees the vet, DH and I decide to do our weekly grocery shop now, so that we can get him some of that 'soup' cat food which is basically just gravy and which he loves, to see if we can get him

to eat. But the cat food shelves in Thrifty's are pretty much empty, (apart from some basic more solid cat food, which we know he won't be able to handle) – nothing like we're looking for is left at all, just empty shelves. And as we go round the store, we become aware that actually there are a LOT of items on our list that simply are not there in store....no soupy cat food and no Marmite of course, (that's been missing for months now), but no cake mix, or white chocolate (bad for you treats I was wanting to get D2 to help cheer her up), and not even any *potatoes*, of any variety are in store! No potatoes? When you run out of basics like that, you know there's a problem. We get what we can (thank goodness they have tea bags!!!) and I trot over to the pet store to get some liquidy cat treats, and grab the last bar of white chocolate in Pharmasave. (For the record, I think it's vile stuff, not real choccy at all, but D2 loves it and I'm glad to find a bar for her). The pandemic shortages are clearly still a thing. Shortage of supplies. Shortage of vet appointments. Shortage of all kinds of things. Poor Jasper – I hope he makes it through the night.

Email voices:

Wee Bro – Sao Paolo, Brazil

Gi managed to swing it for me to get the Pfizer vaccine on Tuesday. So, assuming I haven't swallowed the bug in the last ten days, I should be developing protection as I write. I say 'swing it' because technically you need to have underlying conditions to get a vaccine in my age group, but 'when in Rome...' I may actually have underlying conditions actually (one doctor says he suspects / I should test for type II diabetes, which wouldn't surprise me given family history and my recent behavior), but I felt I needed the vaccine to feel confident enough to go and get the tests. No money changed hands - Gi just has a friend who is a doctor (who works in the public system - not any old doctor will do). Many (wealthier) Brazilians are flying to Mexico and spending 10 days there before entering the USA to get vaccinated. I'm certainly happy not to have gone through that rigmarole. My age group - 55-59 - officially should start to get vaccinated from July 1, so it also feels good not to have to wait another 6 weeks. But Gi won't be eligible until the second half of August, so we may have to swing something for her too. Oh, the world we live in.

TUESDAY 1st June 2021

Canadian deaths: 25,566 World-wide deaths: 3,695,105

I am thrilled to say that Jasper is recovering! Yay!!!! The vet at the Shaw hospital in Central Saanich is efficient and kind, and has diagnosed a severe urinary tract and kidney infection, which is being treated with antibiotics twice a day, and they have also discovered that he has hyperthyroidism, which is why he's such a skinny little chap. Poor guy is down to less than 4lbs now, and desperately needs feeding up. But after 4 days and nights solid of sleeping curled up on D2's bed, apart from taking meds and the tiniest amount of liquid food, he is now strong enough to lift his head and today meowed at them for the first time. Hurrah for Jasper! He will be on thyroid meds twice a day for the rest of his life, but luckily he likes the treat pill pockets we hide them in, so all is good. We have turned a corner and are delighted that he will be with us for some more time yet. If it hadn't been for Covid, I think he'd have got an emergency appointment a lot sooner and avoided 36 hours or so of pain and misery, but at least he's still alive, and I am very thankful.

It's now been a week since the restrictions have been lifted slightly, and so today I cheerfully agree to something I've not done in 15 months now..... meet a friend for lunch at an outdoor restaurant patio! Yes, I know I could have done that earlier, and it's *indoor* dining that is now permitted, but to be honest, I just didn't feel safe or that it was the right thing to do. But if indoor dining is now allowed, then I am happy to eat outdoors, and happily trot off to meet B, an old work colleague, at The Beach House Restaurant.

The sun is shining and the sea is sparkling. It is beautiful. People are cheerful and chattering all around us. Oh my - it feels, dare I say it, almost *normal*! And that feeling is increased as, once we are sitting at our table, although the wait staff keep their masks on, we are allowed to take our masks off and we sit chatting, as we used to do, pre-pandemic. And it feels so good. It's clear we are out of practice though; B talks a mile a minute, barely pausing for breath; she lives alone and I can feel the pent up words flowing out in happy release. I sit there in the sunshine, smiling contentedly to be here in this moment, the recipient of all those words from a friend. But I too am out of practice and it is only when my food is put in front of me that I realise I forgot to ask for a Gluten Free option, as I cannot eat wheat. I clear forgot that wait staff in restaurants don't automatically *know* that I need gluten free! I forgot that a normal part of the eating-out process is to ask about the food, and think about what you're doing! I stare at the food sitting temptingly in front of me, laugh, push it over for B to eat (which she does happily and declares it delicious), and I order something else. Turns out that The Beach House has hardly any GF options anyway, but I find something, and soon I am sitting like a normal person in a restaurant, with a plate of food in front of me, and all is good.

When I get home, Dear Husband listens to my account and I quickly realise that of course, he is jealous – an *outing to a restaurant*???. A luxury we've not enjoyed for 15 months....so I email another friend and suggest we all meet up for lunch on the patio at The Canoe Pub downtown. TWO lunches out in one week? That's not something we'd ever normally do, but hey, these are not normal times.

WEDNESDAY 2nd June 2021

Canadian deaths: 25,644 World-wide deaths: 3,716,940

The weather is unseasonably glorious; 27 and 28 degrees with hot sunshine, and everywhere looks so beautiful with all of the summer blooms coming out. A time for paddling at the beach or reading in the shade on the back deck, long drink at hand. An early appearance of summer that everyone is loving. But to be honest, being a temperate Northern creature, I sometimes find this a little *too hot*, and so suggest to DH that we go for a swim in Durrance Lake to cool off. The first swim of the season.

And it is absolutely fantastic. The bald eagles are soaring overhead, and the dragonflies skim the water by my ear. The water is a perfect temperature and smells fresh and beautiful as I swim. And there are *other people* at the lake. Real human beings, all ages, all colours, shapes and sizes, laughing and splashing and paddling their inflatable boats. And they smile and TALK TO ME, and we're all outdoors so there's not a mask anywhere, (though we still keep our distance of course) and oh boy, it feels so good. A glimpse of life post Covid and it feels WONDERFUL. There's a real sense in the air of it being a party, of everyone just happy to see each other and to be out together in the sunshine. I feel so uplifted and light hearted – it's difficult to describe really, but today, for the first time in a long, long time, it feels like we're almost there..... I can honestly say that I float home afterwards, just from the simple pleasure of a lake swim in the sunshine, and *interacting with other people*. I'm actually one of those people who is quite content with their own company, and can entertain myself no problem, but the pandemic has absolutely re-enforced that cliché...no man is an island...we need each other. We are social creatures, thriving when living in community, and today I have enjoyed a glimpse of that wider community again, and it feels so good.

Meanwhile, the conversation around the anti-vaxers continues: our extended family member is still refusing to get his vaccination, and the upset rumbles on. It's having a really negative impact on several relationships within the family, and I find it hard to understand how he is prepared to see this happen all around him. In a last ditch attempt to persuade him, a letter has been composed that has been authored by several folks in the family, with an emphasis on several bits of information most likely to reach him personally. One of which I didn't know myself:

He loves golf and faithfully watches the pro tournaments on TV. Coincidentally, yesterday a Spanish golfer missed out on winning 1.7 M during a PGA tournament in Ohio. He was way ahead of the others and was removed from the tournament because he tested positive for Covid. The golfer was not vaccinated.

Wow – that's someone who paid a big price (1.7 m!) for their refusal to get the vaccine!

And on the same subject, I am shocked to learn that one of the ladies in my craft group is also refusing to get the vaccine. In her case, it's paranoia (the 'they're trying to control me and poison my body' brigade), but I am absolutely staggered as she lives in the same house as our friend who lost her 50 year old son to Covid earlier this year. So not only is her fear stronger than the evidence of her own eyes, having witnessed a younger person die at first hand, but it is also extremely upsetting to her landlady and friend! Unbelievable. She is now moving out of the house and looking to rent alternative accommodation. All that, rather than have the vaccine. As for me, I spend some time angsty over this, and this week I tell the craft group that I am not prepared to be indoors with her, so will stay away if she is there. I'm sorry if this offends her, but really, what can you do? It's that or risk spreading the virus, and we've been told that with Covid, there are only 2 options....get the vaccine or get the disease. It's really not rocket science.

TUESDAY 8th June 2021

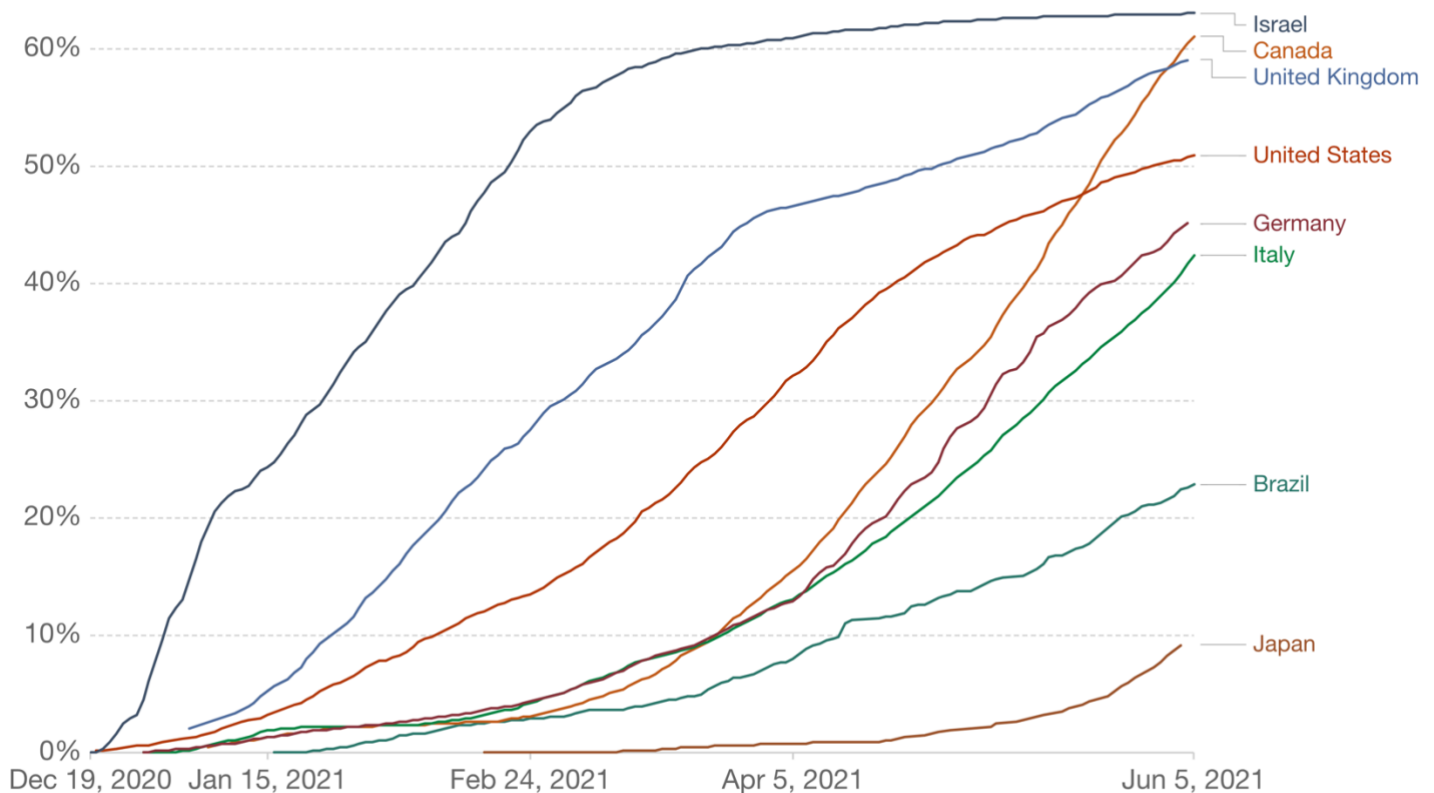
Canadian deaths: 25,786 World-wide deaths: 3,757,421

Today is another day to feel hopeful.....we hear that Canada has now reached 62.28% of the population who has received their first vaccination. We're chasing Israel for world top place for having had their 1st vaccination!!! WOW! We've sure come a long way since those days back in early March when we were trailing the world due to lack of vaccine supply, and were feeling so frustrated. Kudos to all those who have rolled out the programme, who have volunteered their time in administering the shots and who have moved us forward. This is fantastic and I feel very proud.

Share of people who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine

Share of the total population that received at least one vaccine dose. This may not equal the share that are fully vaccinated if the vaccine requires two doses.

Our World
in Data



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data

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Looking at the chart, what's encouraging for us in Canada is that our graph line is still pointed upwards. 😊

On a side note, I find it hard to imagine that they really want the Olympics to carry on as planned in Japan in just 8 weeks' time, when they've not yet reached a 10% 1st vaccination rate! It really doesn't seem as if community health is the first priority in that decision! And I'm surprised that Japan *isn't* better vaccinated; having traveled there – and absolutely loved it by the way – this surprises me; they're a wealthy, educated and efficient country, well up on science and technology, well organised, and with a very obedient, conforming population. I can only assume that someone in the leadership of that country slipped up big time when it came to ordering vaccines. Thank goodness for our Justin ordering lots from several different suppliers, just in case.

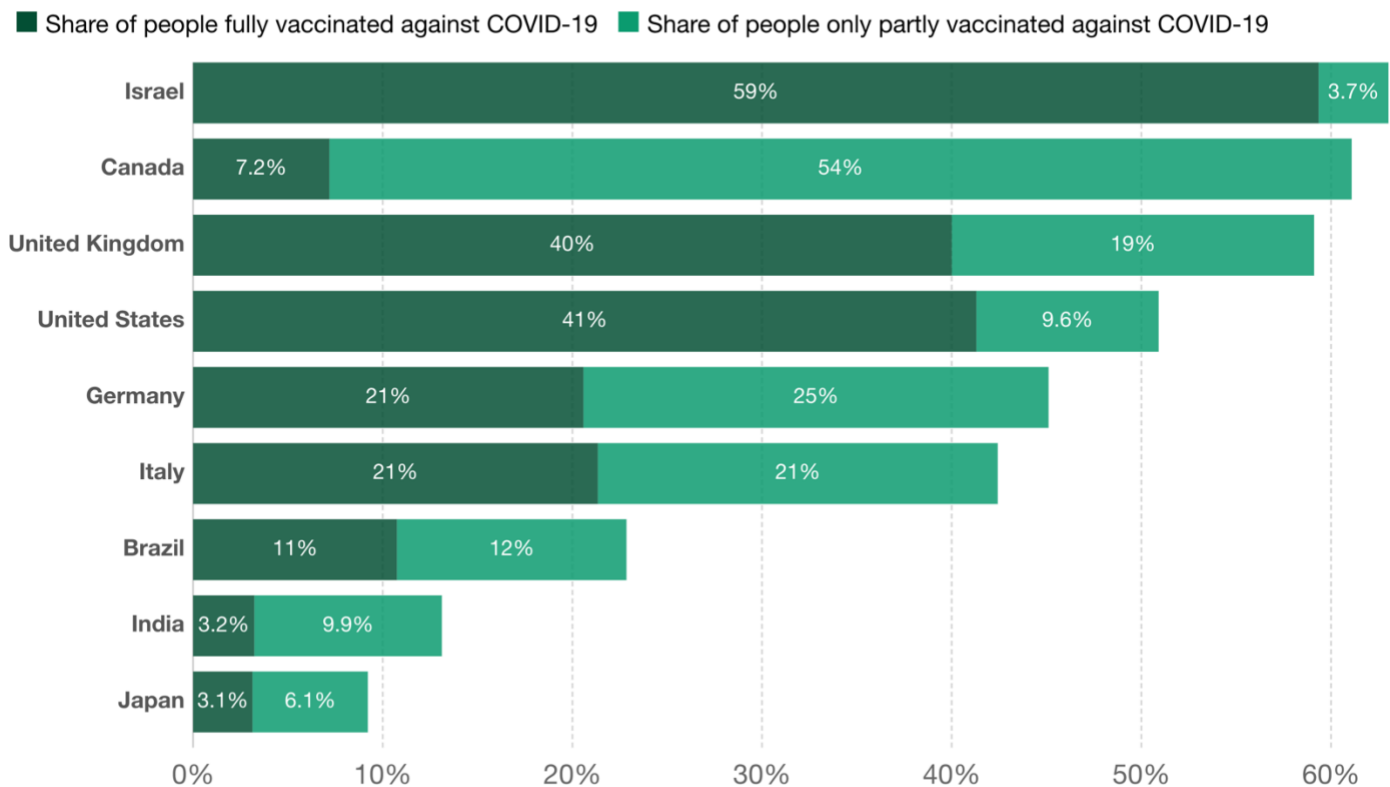
On a personal level, I also feel very happy that in BC we are now over the 70% that was required by Dr Henry as a condition of opening up travel again (65% for travel within the province and 70% for travel within Canada). Yippeee – it looks as if our planned trip to the Rockies for the end of July will be able to go ahead!!! As long as those numbers stay down, it's looking like we're good to go. Yay. A vacation and some adventure! Unimaginable luxury.

We are doing so well, *but* we still have a lot of work to do if you look at the rate of the 2nd vaccine. Compared to the rest of the world, we are trailing well behind in that category. We may almost have caught up with Israel on 1st doses, but we have a long way to go to catch them with 2nd doses – our 7% compared to their 59%!

Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19, Jun 5, 2021

Our World
in Data

This data is only available for countries which report the breakdown of doses administered by first and second doses.



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data

CC BY

Still, we are catching up fast, and with several of our family and friends already 'double jabbed', and many others booked, I'm sure it won't be long before those percentages are also soon shooting upwards. DH and I haven't yet heard when we'll be able to book our own 2nd vaccine dose, but judging on those around us, I don't think it's more than a week or so away. It's all very encouraging.

All very encouraging if you never plan to leave Canada that is. We are shocked to hear on the news last night that while Canada may be catching up and doing so well, 88% of the world population has not had their 1st vaccine yet. 88%. That is sobering indeed. Either we all get out of this together or we don't get out of it. There is still a long way to go.

THURSDAY 24th June 2021

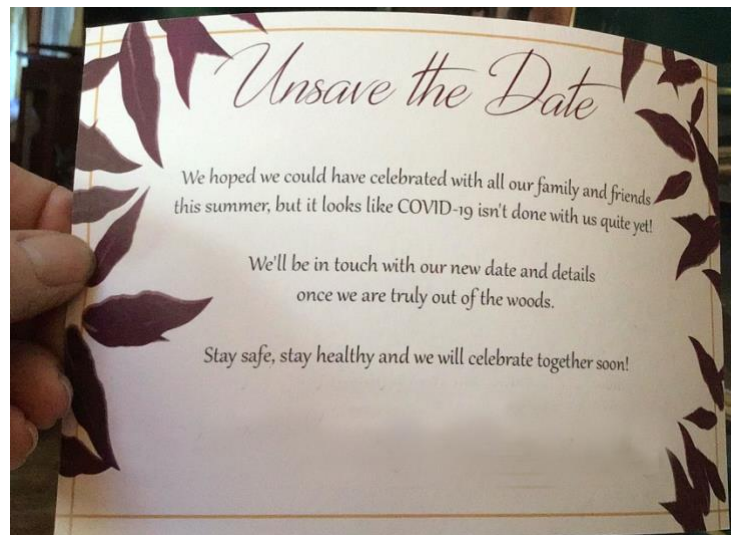
Canadian deaths: 26,191 World-wide deaths: 3,915,453

The answer to that problem (at the end of the last post) is quickly answered: At the G7 summit, Joe Biden announces that the USA will donate 100 million vaccine doses to the poorest countries. Other countries quickly step up to the plate (including Canada, which pledges more per capita than any other country) and soon almost 2 billion vaccine doses have been pledged to help the poorest countries. All made and distributed within 2 years. To vaccinate the rest of the world is clearly going to take a while, but this 2 billion is a fantastic start.

It's over 2 weeks since I last did a journal update, (the longest I've ever gone since I really got going on writing it some 16 months ago) and I guess that tells its own story. As the restrictions begin to ease, life is coming back and it feels fabulous. Most days, I'm too busy to write. Unheard of until recently! We've been shopping in the mall. We met friends for dinner at a restaurant (outdoors on the patio). Our weekly craft group is now meeting regularly again – at first outdoors, then on a rainy day it was indoors with masks, and this week it was indoors with no masks, now that we're allowed to have 6 people indoors (the unvaccinated lady having left the group).

And we celebrate our birthdays (DH and I being just a few days apart), and when I say 'celebrate', we do it properly. No, not wildly with a party or anything, but both of our girls, with their partners, plus dog, meet us for a long walk on the beach, followed by Afternoon Tea here at home. True to our roots, I lay out the floral tablecloth and the fancy china; there are mini quiches and GF crackers with cream cheese and salmon, a delicious bottle of bubbly as well as tea, and of course a big gooey cream cake. It is all delightful, but the food has nothing to do with that; the joy all lies in the fact that we *can* go for a walk together and we *can* share afternoon tea together. We sit and chatter about nothing in particular, and just enjoy being together again. The best birthday present ever.

We have reached this point just in time to celebrate our birthdays (lucky us!). There is a feeling of relief and happiness in the air instead of the invisible Covid molecules being in the air, and masks are fast disappearing in all outdoor settings, but we're not quite at the Covid finish line yet. Large gatherings are still not allowed and so we receive this from a friend's daughter:



They have had to postpone their wedding again, having thought the pandemic might be over by now. It's all lasted longer than any of us originally guessed.

And of course travel restrictions are still in place, although there are signs of change there too. The USA is putting pressure on Canada to open up the border, but Trudeau has extended the closure until July 21st, much to the Americans' pique. Canada is doing well on getting our 2nd dose % up, right across the country, and I believe we're now almost at 30% nationwide, but Trudeau wants it higher – nearer 70% I think – before the border is opened, and I think he's right. We're almost there, let's just wait that bit longer and get it right.

But meanwhile, because we've reached over 70% for 1st doses and doing well on the 2nd, Dr Henry has now removed the restrictions on travel *within BC*. It feels hopeful, and encouraging. The campsites are full, rental accommodations across BC are fully booked, everyone is bursting out of their cocoon and personally, we're glad we took a chance and booked some Air BnB's for our Rockies / Kootenays road trip in advance – it's impossible to find ANY vacation accommodation in BC now! Yes, we're all having to stay in province, but we WILL be able to vacation, and anyway, we already live in the best and most beautiful place in the world 😊

MONDAY 28th June 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,238 World-wide deaths: 3,949,317

Just when we think that life might be returning to 'normal', there's another twist in our tale which proves that none of us ever know what's coming round the corner, and this time the danger presents itself in the form of a record breaking heat wave.

Since Friday, the temperatures have been steadily increasing each day 34 degrees, 36 degrees, 38 degrees and today, 40 + degrees. I don't think I ever expected to see our car thermometer show the reading in this photo! It is unbearable, and of course, dangerous. Apparently 40% of Victoria residents have air-conditioning (lucky them). The other 60% of us have to make do somehow.



Instead of Covid patients, the emergency wards in the hospitals are now full of folks suffering from heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Cooling centres have been set up downtown, and they have said that no-one will be turned away, no matter how many people there are, despite the Covid regulations. With over 200 sudden deaths ascribed this weekend to the heat, in Vancouver alone, the risk to life is judged to be greater from the heat, than from catching Covid. (By the end of this week, some 600 people will have died from effects of this heat event).

And if it's 40+ here by the coast, it is of course worse in the interior. I dread to imagine how my friend B is coping in Abbotsford where it is apparently 45 degrees, and where she has a daughter who is 8 months pregnant, a son who has just had surgery, and very young grandchildren to help look after. Lytton has regained its title of The Hottest Place in Canada (temporarily beaten out by somewhere in Saskatchewan) by officially reaching the unimaginable heights of 49.6 degrees. We may be moving out of the Covid crisis, but the Climate Crisis looms large, and potentially way more destructive. Everyone is of course predicting another very bad fire season, especially with the dry spring and summer we've had (only a 1/3rd of our normal spring rainfall) and indeed, the first BC forest fires are announced tonight, up near Kamloops. It feels like we are lurching from one crisis to another.

So how are DH and I personally coping? Well, we sadly don't have any form of air conditioning, so we do it old school: opening the windows at night, and closing them in the day. We drink endless cups of tea and glasses of water. We spend more time indoors than we usually do, sitting directly in front of a fan and accepting that we're not going to 'achieve' anything over this time - just sitting or lying and keeping cool enough to keep functioning is achievement enough. We also set up an old paddling pool under the patio umbrella, fill it with cold water, and every now and then go and immerse ourselves to try and get the core temperature down. I wish someone had been there to take a photo of DH, D2, her husband and myself all huddled into the paddling pool together, desperately trying to cool off! It must have looked a bizarre sight to see 4 grown adults squished in a few inches of water together 😊

And of course, our car has air con, so DH and I enjoy a couple of trips to Durrance Lake to cool off with a swim, which is utterly fantastic. There are hundreds of people there of course, but the atmosphere is positive – everyone sharing the sheer joy of being able to cool down. There are families who have created mini islands with several inflatables rafted together, with umbrellas and

coolers. There are some splendid inflatables on display – giant swans and dragons, flamingos and unicorns. And there are dogs swimming, or on paddle boards with their owners. Normally dogs aren't allowed off leash at Durrance in the summer, but today, no one cares about rules and regulations, whether pet related or Covid related. After all, dogs need to keep cool too. (Sadly we hear in the news of many dogs who have died or who have burned their paws on the hot pavement). There is not a mask to be seen, and everyone is focussed on keeping cool, which is of course the more pressing need. You do what you have to, to stay safe and healthy, right? I just enjoy slowly swimming around the lake, watching the swifts skim the surface as they pick up bugs, the dragonflies hovering around me, and enjoying the feeling of the cool water.

Of course, several hours later, back at home, with it being around 40 degrees outside, and in the low to mid 30's inside, we are soon unbearably hot again, and this time I have what we think is a counter-intuitive idea – we'll go to the mall. I would never normally dream of going to the mall on a sunny day when I could be outdoors enjoying myself, but it occurs to me that malls are air conditioned, so thinking this is a genius and totally original thought, we set off to Mayfair. Genius maybe, original decidedly NOT. The underground parking lot is full, with not a single space free. There are lines of cars circling, looking for someone to leave and a space to free up. There is more anxiety here than at the lake, and the waiting cars honk at each other, fighting over any spaces. We are lucky, and happen to pass by a car leaving at the right time, so slot in quickly and are soon up in the cool of the mall. And it is cool. Within 10 minutes or so, we still feel tired, but almost normal.

Like the lake, all rules have gone out the window and there are hundreds of people there, just hanging out to stay cool – a way higher density of people than Covid regulations permit. (But everyone is of course wearing their masks as it's indoors). Every seat in the walkways is taken, and there are what look like students sitting on the floor, leaning against walls or corners, quietly reading their books. Young kids entertain themselves with games consoles as they sit, some old folks just sit and stare, whilst others chat or watch the big TV that has been set up. And the stores are of course doing a roaring business; with summer sales on there are many folks carrying bags of shopping, and there are line ups at the check outs.

DH and I wander around: he buys a shirt in the sale, we browse the bookstore, and then we sit in the food court enjoying a long, fruit smoothie, like we did when our kids were young. We're grateful for this time out of the heat, when our bodies can feel comfortable. The food court itself has been well adapted for Covid; they have set up a veritable maze of plastic dividers, and you enter into it at one point (having put on hand sanitiser first) and are pointed to a table, at which point you can take your mask off to eat and drink. We sit and enjoy our cool drink, and the cool air, enjoying this moment, before girding our loins to dash back through the hot parking lot to the air conditioned car, and the hot house beyond. We're in for a long uncomfortable night.

THURSDAY 1st July 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,295 World-wide deaths: 3,971,192

HAPPY CANADA DAY! Our 2nd of the pandemic.

But it's a different feeling to the one last year. On the one hand, it's a very quiet day with official celebrations cancelled out of respect for the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, mourning the recent horrific discoveries of so many unmarked graves on ex residential school sites. How can anyone celebrate the nation's day, when people are grieving, and we are all coming to terms with the shocking facts surrounding the founding of our country. It seems totally right and proper to respect the situation and to keep it quiet this year.

On the other hand, there is also a quiet optimism in the air as the Covid situation continues to improve and there are tangible changes to our freedoms. We may not be celebrating Canada Day, but we ARE celebrating the fact that today is the day when Dr Henry takes us all to level 3 of the easing of restrictions. What does that mean in practical terms? It means we can gather together indoors in small groups. It means we can meet up at restaurants with no limit to table size, indoors or out. It means we can travel anywhere we want within Canada without restrictions / quarantining / taking Covid tests. (It also means of course that the rest of Canada can come to BC, and that is the other side of the coin!!). And it means that the wearing of masks is no longer mandatory, but is advised, especially for those who have not had their 2nd vaccine dose yet. They have been able to move us to this level because of the continuing fall in the Covid case rates, hospital admissions and death numbers, and the continuing rise in the numbers of people vaccinated.

BC's Restart

Step 3: Starting July 1

 Recreational travel in Canada	 Wear a mask indoors until fully vaccinated	 Dining - no group limits, regular liquor service	 Sports and exercise - return to normal
 Indoor organized gatherings - 50 people or 50% capacity, whichever greater	 Outdoor organized gatherings - 5,000 people or 50% capacity, whichever greater	 Personal gatherings - return to normal	 Fairs and festivals - return to normal

BC'S RESTART

Nationwide, almost 80% of the population have had their 1st dose now, and almost 36% have had their 2nd dose. We're getting there! And if all continues on the same trajectory, the final level of restrictions will be removed on September 7th, and we truly will be, officially anyway, 'back to normal'.

And with these restrictions lifting, it means we can socialise at home again ☺ So we happily invite our neighbours around for a drink to celebrate a Canada that is working to redress wrongs, and the lifting of the Covid restrictions. But sadly, when the time comes, only she arrives, as her partner has been called into work at the last moment. He is a nurse, and she tells us that the staffing levels at the Jubilee hospital are currently at a critical state. The hospital is at 110% patient capacity, but at 47% staffing levels, and it is a hidden crisis. "If people in Victoria knew what was going on" she tells us "they would be horrified". Now I know, I am indeed horrified. She explains that they are permanently understaffed anyway, to save money, but that after almost 18 months of dealing with the pandemic, the staff are totally burned out and many have left, or just simply cannot keep going. "He didn't want to go in" she explains, "he's already done 2 nights overtime working straight through, but they're just so desperate he didn't think he could not go in and help". What an awful situation. They urgently need to recruit and train more nurses. But despite the fact that he can't join us, the 5 of us enjoy a lovely evening out on the deck, and we sit drinking and chatting until almost midnight, catching up on a year's worth of news. There's a lot to talk about!

And we're going to have more catch ups this weekend ☺ As we are now allowed to travel, and as H and G in Delta had their 2nd vaccine shot 3 weeks ago, they have decided to come and stay with us for the weekend! Our first visitors in over 18 months! We're so excited, and happily spend much of today cleaning out the den and pulling out the fold out bed and getting everything ready. A weekend of friends staying? Fantastic! We all decide in advance that we don't need to plan outings or entertainments – just hanging out together and being together in person after so long apart will be joy enough. And perhaps we'll do a picnic at the beach, or something equally low key anyway. Huzzah for the end of Covid!

Email voices:

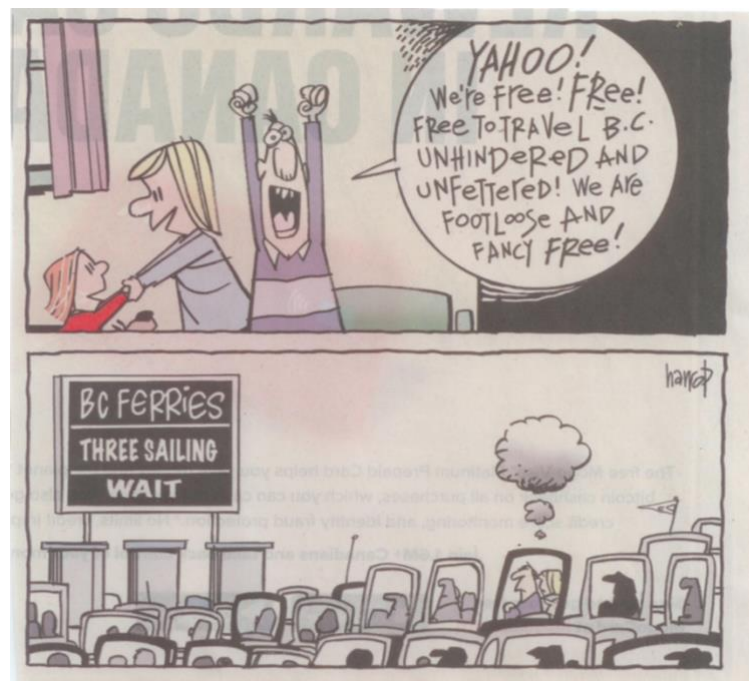
T – West Vancouver

With the weather giving us a break,

It's a good morning! Matt is doing better. Answered prayer! God is good. His heart rate is now normal. He's much less nauseous. Still on liquid diet but able to eat it. He sounds much better. 🎉 We aren't allowed to visit - the hospital has covid on two floors so no visitors allowed. Matt doesn't have it

L (her 92 year old friend whom she has been supporting throughout Covid) and I celebrated with grocery shopping. First time for me in a grocery store since 14th March 2020!!! It was a curious experience! We set out early yesterday and managed to fill two carts with all sort of staples and goodies. It felt good to leave her apartment feeling she was well stocked for a bit.

On the way back from shopping, we noticed the Upper Levels had long line-ups and when I left her to travel home on Marine Drive it was the same – I



learned later that it was due to overload at the Horseshoe Bay Ferry terminal – crossing waits of up to 5 sailings reported later on TV news, with some not having any hope of boarding until 8pm+ – a few days ago I cut this cartoon out of the morning paper - prophetic.

B – Abbotsford


Yay - lifting some restrictions today but hope it's not too soon and that it's gradual so that we can reverse the process quickly if necessary. It will take a while for me to let down my Covid guard.

C – Edmonton, (on Facebook)

As a result of the pandemic:

- My best friend's funeral was cancelled.*
- I have an almost-two-year-old niece that I've never met.*
- I didn't celebrate my 40th birthday.*
- My trips to Iceland and Turkey (for scientific conferences) were both cancelled.*
- A third of my grad schooling has been done from home.*

I'm sure you all have lists of your own. As our provinces and countries re-open, take it easy on yourselves and others. There is going to be an adjustment period and some people are going to need to grieve.

If you want a huge hug and a shoulder to cry on, if you just want to sit next to someone and drink in silence, if you want to go jump in mud puddles and get dirty, if you want to burn your mask, if you want to dance like nobody's watching with somebody watching, if you want to go flail in the woods or scramble around on seaweed-covered rocks, if you need anything else to help you through what may be a very difficult time, I'm here for you. 

FRIDAY 9th July 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,419 World-wide deaths: 4,035,083

Today is a big day – it is the day we get our 2nd dose of the vaccination. That magical 2nd dose that will confer travel status on us. And, more importantly, we are part of the % of folks who, being fully vaccinated, can help reduce the spread of Covid. The more of us that get ‘done’, the more chance we have of getting Covid 19 under control. It feels a very positive step to take and we set off happily.

Everything is as well organised as before, the only difference being that there are considerably more people, and the line-ups are quite long. The doctor who vaccinates us tells us they are getting



through 1,900 people a day now, which is fantastic. The citizens of Victoria are rattling through and getting it done; I feel very proud of our town. The doctor who jabs us is friendly, efficient and

courteous, and again, I’m barely even aware of the needle going in. It’s Pfizer again and I’m glad to have been given 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine; public opinion feels that having 2 doses of the



same mRNA vaccine does seem the most effective and have least side effects. Afterwards, we wait the required 15 minutes in the seating area, and it all feels very calm and relaxed; everyone seems at ease with what they’re doing and the whole process.

The doctor warned us that the side effects of the 2nd dose are often worse than that experienced for first doses, (and that does seem to be borne out by comments I’ve seen on Facebook about this), but we are fortunate, and over the next few days experience nothing more than a sore arm (DH) and slight tiredness / headache (me). Both of us feel fine by Sunday and are just grateful to be fully vaccinated and protected, so that even if we are one of the 6% who still catch the virus, despite having had the vaccination, we know it will be milder and we are highly unlikely to end up in hospital. That feels great and is a big comfort.

So what are the other practical implications of being double jabbed and fully protected? There is still some confusion about how we should all interact with each other – do you behave differently with those who are also fully vaccinated, from those who have chosen not to be vaccinated? Obviously, the answer is yes, and luckily there is a handy dandy chart showing us the various permutations: It sets out in simple colour blocks the various scenarios of how to behave in different locales with people of different vaccination statuses. It makes me smile to see that outdoors we can take our masks off and behave normally again, as we can indoors with others who are doubly vaccinated. It’s just those who have not been vaccinated that we need to worry about.

Vaccinated Against COVID-19? What does it mean to me?



By getting vaccinated, you benefit from the protection you get against COVID-19 and the easing of restrictive measures in your community.



You still need to follow local public health advice in public settings (e.g. workplaces, public transit). Their advice considers community risk levels.



A majority of people in Canada have now had their first shot and many will soon be fully vaccinated. This advice is based on the current state and will be updated as vaccination rates continue to increase and cases decrease.



If you are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes, masking and physical distancing provide additional layers of protection that further reduce your risk in all settings. Your risk is always lower when outside.

SETTING OR ACTIVITY <small>(Always follow local guidelines for gatherings and public health measures)</small>	YOU ARE NOT VACCINATED OR PARTIALLY VACCINATED	YOU ARE FULLY VACCINATED <small>(i.e. you have received the full series of a vaccine authorized in Canada at least 14 days ago)</small>
Outdoors with a small group of fully vaccinated individuals  e.g. small family BBQ, camping with friends/family, swimming at the lake, sharing a hug	No mask or physical distancing is necessary if everyone is comfortable with that	No mask or physical distancing is necessary
Indoors with a small group of fully vaccinated individuals  e.g. dinner with a small group of friends, watching a sporting event on TV, sharing a hug	Consider removing your mask and being physically close to the fully vaccinated individuals if everyone is comfortable with that, AND nobody is at risk of more severe disease or outcomes	No mask or physical distancing is necessary
Outdoors with people from multiple households who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, or their vaccination status is unknown  e.g. playing a close contact sport, gathering with a group of friends, child's outdoor birthday party, outdoor wedding	For now, consider wearing a mask if physical distancing cannot be maintained, especially if you or others are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes	No mask or physical distancing is necessary
Indoors with people from multiple households who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated, or their vaccination status is unknown  e.g. private celebrations or ceremonies, indoor birthday party, places of worship, fitness facility	Wear a mask and maintain physical distancing Follow the measures put in place by the owner/organizer to reduce the risk of COVID-19 Keep windows and doors open, if possible	Follow the measures put in place by the owner/organizer to reduce the risk of COVID-19 If you are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes, consider wearing a mask and maintain physical distancing Keep windows and doors open, if possible
Indoors or outdoors in a large crowd where people are closely gathering  e.g. crowded concert, organized sporting event, house party	Wear a mask Follow the measures put in place by the owner/organizer to reduce the risk of COVID-19 Maintain physical distancing wherever possible Consider only attending events where there are safety plans in place that follow local public health advice	If you are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes, consider wearing a mask and maintain physical distancing. Even if you are not at risk, you may still consider wearing a mask at an indoor crowded setting Follow the measures put in place by the owner/organizer to reduce the risk of COVID-19

*Always follow good practices like washing your hands, covering your coughs and sneezes and improving ventilation. You should not be in close contact with others if you have symptoms that could be COVID-19, even if vaccinated.

Email voices

B – Beaconsfield, England

The football result against Ukraine really cheered people up, however it probably added to the spread of COVID with all the hugging and celebrating that went on! We now have Sajid Javid and Boris planning to end most lock down measures on the basis that vaccines have reduced the numbers with COVID who end up in hospital. So now we are being told we need to learn to live with COVID as we do with flu, and about the need for personal responsibility. Sadly I fear that a significant minority will neither get vaccinated nor be sensible, so I do expect another surge. It seems that the government and their advisers expect a surge but think it better to have this in the summer rather than the autumn/winter when we traditionally have problems with viral illnesses and people spend more time indoors. Personally I continue to be cautious and will be wearing a mask in crowded public places and shops when I am brave enough to venture into these. It is hard to remember what it was like to have so much more freedom pre COVID.

J – Stratford on Avon, England

We have had a hectic start to the summer with family and friends staying in the house, back to back (calendar-wise, I mean - they're not all packed in, deliberately ignoring each other). A and I will probably be on our knees by the end of the summer but, I have to say, it is a real joy to be able to see people again, to have them stay and encourage us to discover the wonderful countryside and tourist sites around here.

K – Santa Rosa, California

We've been off camping in our tent trailer and then followed that up by celebrating Independence Day. Had friends over for a BBQ on July 4th and went to listen to a Beatles cover band called the Sun Kings yesterday. Things have been open here since June 15th and we usually don't have to bother with masks (even in stores). There is a very high vaccination rate in our county and in California, in general so we're relaxing a little.

SATURDAY 17th July 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,492 World-wide deaths: 4,098,347

Came across this conversation on Facebook today.....M is a friend of ours living in London, England.

M: *Pinged! Bugger!*

D: *Turn off your Bluetooth!*

M: *Thanks D, it was NHS Track and Trace who got me, not the cellphone app.*

N: *I've just deleted it - I just don't think it is accurate enough*

L: *Oh no - I'm currently on my 8th day out of 9 of self-isolation because a bubble at school had to close & I can't wait to be free again! X*

J: *That's annoying. Hope you haven't got it.*

M: *thanks J and no. I am doing a lateral flow test daily and all negative.*

B: *Never mind, it's freedom day Monday ... But seriously, hope you haven't got it but from what I have seen many thousands of people are being pinged and not developing Covid. I know some have but I would love to see figures so we can make our personal judgement, as we are being told to do*

M: *agreed. I am doing daily lateral flow tests. All negative. As you say, with all the talk of individual discretion, it is ridiculous that so many perfectly healthy people are being placed under house arrest*

N: *Just you and 500000 others! What a pain!*

D: *Can you really trust the ping? There are so many ways for it to go wrong.*

G: *Did the "ping" come via the NHS app or a text message ? An acquaintance received an SMS telling him to isolate for 48 hrs 🙄 Hope you remain negative & time passes rapidly.*

M: *no, not from the cellphone app, but as a result of spending time with somebody last week, who has since gone down with Covid. Thankfully they are double jabbed, as am I and their symptoms are mild. When they reported their status, they named me as a contact to NHS Track and Trace. It means that I got contacted by T+T and now cannot go out to play until next Wednesday. Six days to go! Ho hum.*

S: *Ah - that's not what most of us think 'ping' means. (Most people are using 'Ping' to mean an app self-isolation alert, rather than a proper T+T contact by a real human.) There's a legal difference between the two. The app-based alerts are not legally binding, but the test + trace manual alerts trigger legally enforced self-isolation.*

M: *I suppose that it really depends on what the word "pedantic" actually, exactly means 😊*

S: *Or 'accurate' 😊*

At first this conversation simply strikes me as amusing and an interesting insight into something that has happened to one of our friends. But then, reading the newspapers, I realise that in fact this conversation is absolutely at the heart of some current problems in the UK; something that over there, they are referring to (with typical British love of wordplay) as a **PINGDEMIC!!**

It appears that in an effort to control the rising Delta Variant case numbers (which are soaring at worryingly record levels in the UK right now), the government has instituted a system whereby people have been requested to download a phone app which 'pings' if you come within range of a Covid infected person, for more than 15 minutes. Once you have been 'pinged' you are then required to self-isolate for 7 days to avoid the risk of passing it on to anyone else. The trouble is, that so many workers are being 'pinged' that vast numbers of the population are now at home self-isolating, and the country is grinding to a halt, causing huge problems for employers as well. It appears the underground tube system in London isn't running properly, deliveries of foodstuffs aren't happening, and the problem is especially severe of course in hospitals and health centres where all of the nursing staff are at home having been 'pinged'. Even half of the government cabinet are at home self-isolating having been 'pinged' for being near the health minister, Sajid Javid, who has been diagnosed positive with Covid (even after 2 vaccination doses). It sounds total craziness, and I can understand why D in the conversation above, suggested just turning off the Bluetooth on the phone to avoid the problem altogether! It's interesting that it is currently optional, and only being contacted by Track and Trace officials means mandatory self-isolation.

Apparently Canada tried to institute a similar phone app, some months ago, but it never really took off as different provinces had developed different apps, with much ensuing confusion, and not many people downloaded it anyway. Reading this, perhaps it's just as well that our attempt at such a warning system failed..... We've avoided a 'pingdemic'!

On a different note, I was dropping some items off at someone's house today, when I came across this on their front porch.....

What a thoughtful thing to do. I am really impressed by this simple and practical gesture, which conveys in a real way gratitude for the work done by essential workers during the pandemic. I suspect that if I were a delivery person, this note, and gift of a drink and a snack would really cheer up the day and make me feel cared about. Brilliant.



FRIDAY 23rd July 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,526 World-wide deaths: 4,156,198

I've just received an email telling me the sad news that my dear Aunt Celia has died. I loved her so very much. She was the last surviving relative of that generation in our family, and we were very close. She taught me to knit and to craft and so much else, including how to stay positive even when things are difficult and times are hard, a skill that has come in useful during the past 18 months. I worked with her over the years in the lambing pens on the family farm, and saw her raise the orphan lambs with love and joy, no matter the personal cost to herself (eg getting up in the night at all hours to feed them). She would skip in the fields with the lambs gambolling around her - a memory that still makes me smile. Never allowed to marry by a repressive father who insisted she stay and work on the family farm, she transferred the love she would have given to her own children to me and the other cousins. (My mum was no 9 of the 10 siblings, and the youngest 4 were deemed 'unnecessary' and allowed to leave and marry). We were the lucky ones to benefit from her love. And now I can't go to her funeral and say good-bye because of damned Covid.

Even though I've now had both doses of the vaccine, I would still need to do testing within 72 hours of flying, with no guarantee of the results coming back in time, (and at a cost of \$300 per test) and I would still need to quarantine on arrival in the UK for longer than the time between now and the funeral (Canada still not being on the UK's 'green' list). And of course with the case numbers rising in the UK, there would be problems getting home again too. It doesn't feel like a battle I have the energy to take on or would be likely to win, so like so many others around the world during this pandemic, I will have to grieve at home, and via Zoom calls. Not being able to mark the big events in our lives is surely one of the hardest things about the pandemic. It's a sad day today.



Email voices:

N – Edmonton

Good grief. It's not over.

I'll admit I got a bit cocky once getting vaccinated, but the recent uptick is enough to knock some sense back into me. I personally know two vaccinated people who caught COVID, though fortunately their symptoms were mild (Yay vaccines work, even if they don't totally prevent infection).

Plus, Alberta's vaccination rates have plateaued somewhere around 75% with at least one dose. Only 60% have 2. So yeah, I'm still wearing a mask. Will continue carrying my hand sanitizer. And will prefer outdoor get-togethers and patios. Hopefully the kiddos can get vaccinated before school starts in September.

FRIDAY 30th July 2021

Canadian deaths: ? World-wide deaths: ? (Out of internet range as I write this).

We've been on our Rockies road trip for almost a week now, and despite the awful wildfire smoke as we drive through the interior, have been so fortunate to have some clear days while here in the Rockies. Jasper is amazing! We hike up Mt Edith Cavell and it is so beautiful, with the views and the wildflowers, that I want to burst into song. We hike on the lovely Valley of the Five Lakes Trail and in lake no 4, I dive in and swim right around the lake in clear, fresh, beautiful water. We enjoy visiting Maligne Canyon, and celebrate our anniversary with a boat trip to Spirit Island on Maligne Lake. It is all fabulous and everywhere we go, it is as if the pandemic is a thing of the past. It's bizarre – it feels as if not only have we travelled in space (from the Island to the Rockies) but we have travelled in time (from a pandemic to a non-pandemic). I realise that this is happening all over Canada at this time, as restrictions are being eased across the country, but the effect is surprising in its suddenness.

An example.....just a few days ago, when we booked on-line, the boat company running the tours on Maligne Lake had posted that the wearing of masks was mandatory throughout the 90 minute trip. But when we turn up for the trip, we are all informed that the wearing of masks is now optional, but encouraged. The 35 passengers who have signed up (ie the full boat load) all shuffle a bit awkwardly and, maskless, walk towards the boat, some muttering about 'not having a mask with them'. The crew offer free masks to anyone who will wear them. Everyone looks the other way. Not one person in the boat (apart from the 2 crew members) is wearing a mask. Including us of course.

And it is the same everywhere we go; in restaurants, stores, out and about, hardly a mask is to be seen. Everyone has clearly had enough and has determined that they are DONE with the pandemic. DH and I rationalise that when we set off on the trip, we were 2 weeks after our 2nd vaccination, so we are as protected as we can be. There is nothing more than any of us can do to protect ourselves, beyond getting the 2 doses and avoiding indoor crowded places, and non-vaccinated people, as much as we can, (but then, we do that anyway), so if we don't come out of restrictions now, then when? We can't all stay wearing masks and following restrictions forever – society has, at some point, to revert to normal. We hope that everyone will choose to have their vaccinations, but with some 65% of Canadians now being double vaccinated, we are on the way. Most of the new cases of the virus, and all of the hospitalised ones, are people who have *not* had the vaccine, so hopefully more people will be encouraged to do the right thing, and we feel the time has now probably come to ditch our masks and joyfully resume 'normal' life, with sensible precautions.



We're now at the Crossing Resort on the Icefields Parkway, and sadly the smoke from the forest fires to the south and west of us has rolled in. We make the best of it, and enjoy close up activities, such as enjoying the many stunning waterfalls and canyons in the area. The resort itself is sadly very short staffed, and has closed the a la carte dining in their restaurant – it's a set buffet only. One member of staff angrily tells me: "It's all because of Covid! The government is paying people to stay home and not to work – I don't know how we're going to manage until we close for the season in October!". The masks may be coming off, but clearly the effects of Covid are still rumbling on and affecting us all in various ways.

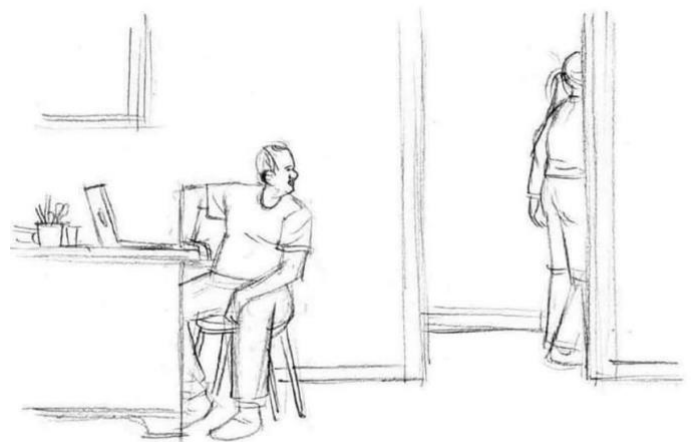
TUESDAY 24th August 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,835 World-wide deaths: 4,460,942

The title of this section of the journal is called *Hope*. When I started writing it, it felt as if we were indeed moving into a time of hope; the time when the effects of us all being vaccinated would be felt, when restrictions would be lifting, and we would all be freer to live our 'normal' lives again. The government promised that every Canadian who wanted a vaccine, would have received it by September, and, true to their word, this is the case. People are no longer coming forward for vaccinations, and the officials plan to close down the vaccination centres in Sidney and Esquimalt soon, with just the Victoria downtown location remaining. We are now at around 73% double vaccinated, which is fantastic and is a higher % than we were originally told we would need (70%). But, as it turns out, it's not enough.

The case numbers, instead of going down, are rapidly rising again – in some cases doubling each day. Yes, it is true that 93% of those catching Covid are unvaccinated, and yes it is true that nearly all of those (98%?) ending up in hospital are unvaccinated, but that still affects the rest of us. Those of us who are double vaccinated may be safe from the worst effects of the disease, but we are still able to transmit it to the more vulnerable (although apparently the double vaccinated shed way less virus than the unvaccinated, so it does for sure help in this regard). And the other problem, is that while the virus is allowed to merrily rampage amongst the unvaccinated, it is allowed to mutate and build up resistance, and before we know it, we end up with a new and more deadly variant on our hands. Right now, it's the Delta variant (originally found in India) that is the problem strain, but we're lately hearing of a new variant, from South Africa, said to be more deadly. The virus can sneakily mutate endlessly, to avoid the effects of the vaccine. Unless enough of us are vaccinated to stop it spreading and mutating, we may never get out of this.

But how to persuade the unvaccinated that they NEED to get their jab for the good of us all? How to persuade someone who is frightened of being made sick by this new vaccine, or of having a bad reaction to it? Or who mistrusts science and what the official health experts tell them, because they'd rather believe something they read on the internet? Or who is frightened that they are having a secret microchip inserted into them that will track their every move? Or who aren't frightened or paranoid at all, but who simply don't want someone else telling them to do it,; "no-one tells me what to do! Live Free or Die". Tempting as it is to say, "oh just go and die then and get out of our way", it isn't that simple, and no-one wants our hospitals overwhelmed again – they're struggling enough as it is.



"Honey, come look! I've found some information all the world's top scientists and doctors missed."

So somehow, those resisting the vaccine have to be persuaded, and this seems to be THE issue we are all talking about and dealing with..... How to persuade the resisters and anti-vaxxers?

Some companies have come straight out and simply said 'You can't work here if you're not vaccinated'. The Federal government led the way on this one, saying that all federal employees, and all military personnel must be vaccinated. Predictably the unions jumped up and down to protest individual rights, but the government and other employers have responded by pointing out that they legally have a duty of care to all of their employees, who have the right to be safe and protected at

work. If those employees have to come into contact with a deadly virus, then they are not safe, so by enforcing the vaccination rule, companies are abiding by the law. It's an interesting one, with no precedent, and will be fascinating to see how it plays out, but some employees of private companies are now going to *their* employers and demanding that they institute such a ruling in their workplace too. Peer pressure coming to bear. Talking of peer pressure, can you imagine what it would be like to be the only person in an office who was not vaccinated? You'd be made to feel like a pariah – it would be very difficult. I originally thought that such peer pressure might be enough to persuade many of the anti-vaxxers, but it appears not, thus the companies resorting to such measures.

And today – halleluiah – BC Premier John Horgan, endorsed by Dr Bonnie Henry, announce that they are introducing vaccine passports to the province, something they originally said they would not do, but which they now feel they *have* to do in an attempt to get more people vaccinated and the virus under control. So from 18th September, anyone wanting to enter a bar, a restaurant, a club, a gym, a ticketed sporting event, a wedding or any other congregate indoor setting, must show proof of a single vaccination before being allowed in, and double vaccination by October 23rd. Hopefully this will be enough to persuade more folks to get their vaccines. After a few weeks of feeling like we're going backwards, and feeling depressed about it to be honest, this gives me some hope that they are resorting to what they need to do to get this sorted. Thank goodness. Let's hope it works.

Jared Qwustenuxun Williams from Facebook

I can't help myself,

Warning, vaccination misinformation rant in coming. If you are tired of the vaxx vs. anti vaxx fight then move along, because I can't take it anymore.

I am actually quite shocked by the amount of people who are very vocally anti-vaccination and anti-mask. I know nurses who at the start of all this were dead set against masks. I've seen my uneducated friends talking like they've got PHDs in virology. I've seen elders and youth crying because they got vaccinated against their families wishes. This misinformation has to stop, it's literally going to kill us.

In my home first nations community of Quw'utsun we had over 250 cases and 6 deaths due to Covid in the past year. While we distributed over 3,000 vaccines without incident. Yet I still see people calling Covid a hoax..

I can't stress this enough. The government isn't at fault here, nature and overcrowding are. The government didn't make your vaccination, science did. If you don't have an education in science then please stop spreading misinformation.

This anti medical science movement looks like the people who denied climate change was human caused. Pull your head outta the clouds and do something for the betterment of others instead of slinging the latest YouTube video or screen shot.

No other time in history has information been so accessible. Still we are flooded by people who know nothing about a subject, yet claim to tell us the "truth". It's akin to a person who can't read standing inside the great library of Alexandria and screaming that all the books are wrong. All the books say the same thing, so why is anyone listening to the person that can't read?

If you don't like this post, that sucks, but I ain't gonna apologize. Go get your vaccinations.

I am vaccinated and damn proud of it.

Shishulus - Stubborn

Qul - Bad

Q'ay - Die

Sq'aq'i - Dead

Q'aq'i- Sick

S-lhulh-xeen - sickness, many people with a sickness

FRIDAY 27th August 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,881 World-wide deaths: 4,495,107

Surprisingly, having just announced the imminent vaccine passport, the BC provincial government has also now just announced that they are immediately re-introducing obligatory mask wearing in all indoor settings. Which is kind of worrying, as if the vaccine is supposedly protecting us, and only doubly vaccinated people will be allowed in these indoor settings, then why do we need to all mask up *as well??* Surely, the implication of that, is that the vaccine isn't working as they hoped it would?! They later reassure us that this is just a temporary measure, until the vaccine passports are under way. Well, that sounds logical, but I've stopped trusting any prognosis for the future, and it seems the only reliable information is what is happening TODAY, right now. As this all drags on and on, it becomes ever clearer that *nothing* is predictable, you can't plan for anything, and that each announcement comes across as a hopeful suggestion, to be modified when the time comes.

There is some good news to report, in that since John Horgan announced the upcoming vaccine passport, there has been a sudden dramatic increase in the numbers of people – especially in the under 40 age group – who have now signed up to get their first jab. The policy seems to be working! Perhaps it will be enough to slide the %'s up to where they need to be? Time will tell.

But on the other side of the world, there is worrying information coming out.....Israel was the leader in getting their population vaccinated early, (last February /March) and getting the virus under control, but now, despite that, their Covid numbers are rising again. They had hoped to open the country up to tourism this summer, but it never happened, and they are currently re-introducing restrictions to try and combat the new surge in Covid case numbers. Testing has been done, and what has become clear is that the life of the vaccine seems to only be somewhere between 6 and 9 months. Maybe that's normal for the flu type vaccine? Typically, our annual flu vaccine is distributed sometime in the fall, to cover us over the winter months, and perhaps it too wears off by the summer months, when it matters less anyway? Whatever, there seems to be general agreement building across the world, that boosters will be needed. Israel is setting up to do this, as is the USA. Canada has started talking about it for the most at risk – seniors and those with underlying health conditions, despite many saying it is immoral to provide boosters in first world countries whilst others in the third world have yet to receive their first shot. But of course you're going to carry on protecting your own citizens.

Personally, DH and I have always felt that Covid will end up being treated as an ongoing health threat, with annual boosters, in much the same way we treat the flu virus now, each booster being re-jigged each year to combat the variant du jour. So this isn't a move we're surprised by. And we hope they get on with it soon.....we want our lives back.



TUESDAY 31st August 2021

Canadian deaths: 26,923 World-wide deaths: 4,531,645

The weather at the end of summer may be cooling, but the battle of opinion between the vaccinated majority and the anti-vaxxer minority continues to heat up, with offensives launched from both sides, and sniping coming from every direction. There are strongly expressed letters written in the Times Colonist, such as this one, short and to the point:

A special thanks to the unvaccinated

Just want to thank the unvaccinated for taking us all back six months to the height of the pandemic we had just fought our way out of. M H, Victoria

People are posting notices and graffiti everywhere, such as this sign we saw in a car window.

There are protests in the street and on bridges, with flags being waved, horns honked and people yelling.

And there is of course the passive aggression of personal interaction, for instance those shoppers wearing masks in stores, fiercely glaring at those not wearing masks. And on the other side of the coin, we personally talk today with a food delivery employee who is stressed by some other customers who greet him at the door, not wearing a mask, and deliberately breathe closely into his face. All he's doing is trying to deliver their food for goodness sake, yet they choose to act out their protest on this poor individual in a threatening way!



Most businesses are saying that they are happy to check customers' vaccine passports before letting people into their premises, as mandated by the provincial government. But a couple are saying they will refuse to check vaccine passports, to which the police have replied that they in turn are obliged to enforce the law, and will close down any business that refuses to comply. There are of course more letters in the letters page, such as this one:

It seems a few restaurant and club business owners will be refusing to enforce the vaccine passport mandate due shortly. My position will be quite clear: Should I not be asked to show a vaccine passport on entering such premises, I will decline to patronize the place. Why should I sit across a table where unvaccinated people congregate? Anti-vaxxers will go to such places simply because they can get in. If these business owners wish to pander to the minority of anti-vaxxers who seem not to care who they infect, then that is their choice.

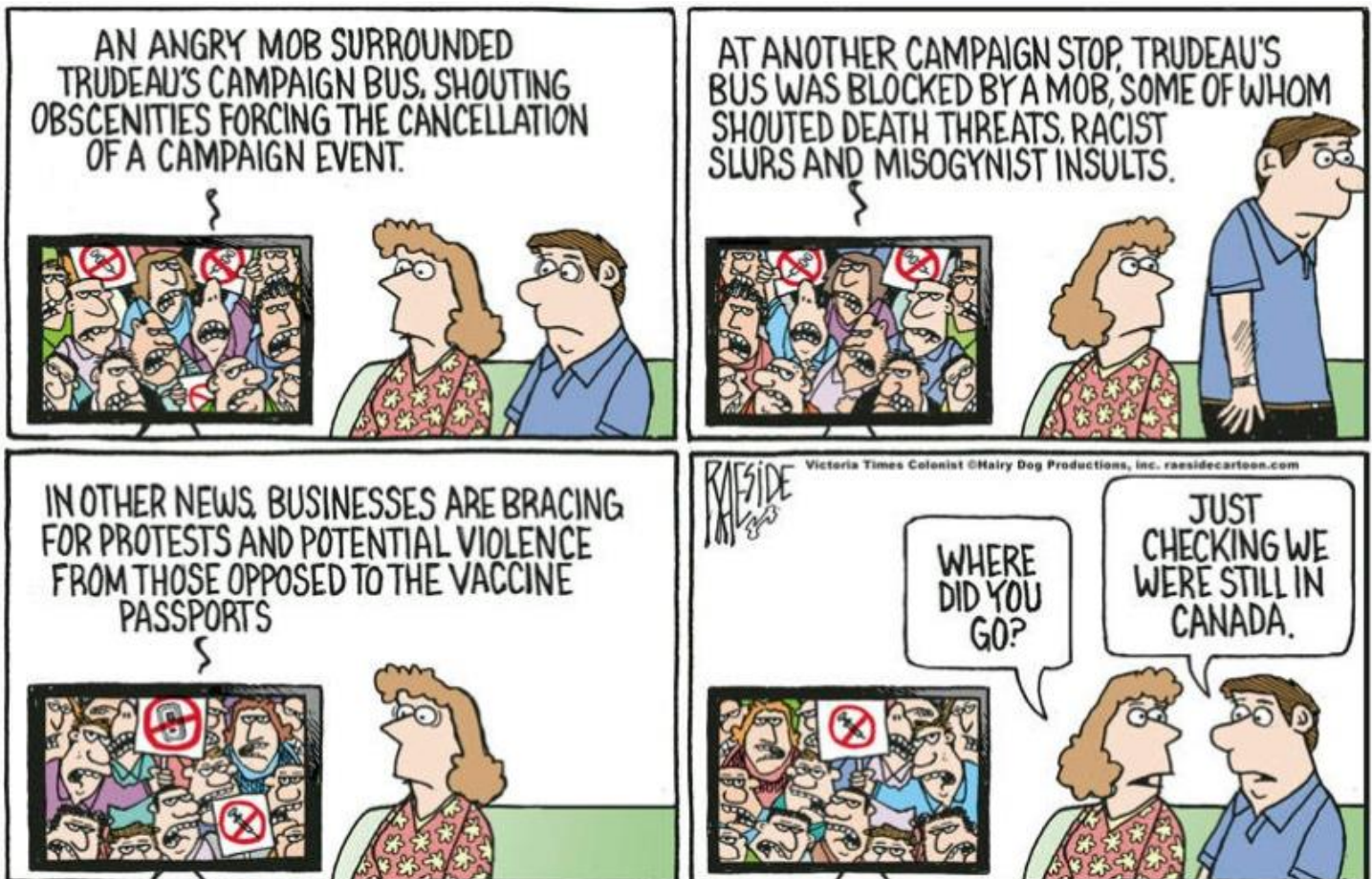
These businesses might have to face losing the custom of the majority who support our province's health-care measures.

The customer is always right. It won't take long before any rebel businesses shape up and enforce the passport if they are boycotted by the majority.

N H, Parksville

Most of those who support the health mandates, seem happy to express their support by complying with the regulations and by letter writing. Unfortunately, the minority who oppose the restrictions are more vociferous and aggressive, and in one extreme instance yesterday, a man who was refused service in a McDonald's restaurant in Port Alberni because he was not wearing a mask, just stood and urinated on the food counter in front of everyone, in protest. The poor employee who was just doing their job and had to deal with that!

Even our prime minister Justin Trudeau is having to deal with aggression at several stops on the campaign trail (I forgot to mention that in the midst of all of the chaos of this summer, with the pandemic continuing out of control, health staff exhausted and leaving, forest fires causing devastation throughout several provinces, and the traumatic airlifts of Canadian nationals and supporters from Afghanistan, Trudeau has decided to call a snap election). The protests at his rallies are so angry and out of control, that at one location, Bolton, Ontario, he cancels the rally altogether and leaves. And what are they all protesting about? Is it Liberal policies and decisions over the past 6 years? Is it the way he has led the economy? Nope. It's all anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers. And of course they blame him. There are nasty placards depicting Trudeau in a noose, with swear words and vituperative insults aimed at him. It is all way over the top and something that we have never, to my knowledge, experienced before during an election. Even candidates from the other parties come out in his defence against such public expressions of anger!



Frankly, all of this bad feeling, aggression, and insistence on the rights of self over the good of the whole, is rather unsettling. It's not good seeing this going on all around you. They feel like an angry, bullying mob, and we all know where *that* can end.

So, to end today's journal on a more light hearted note, here is today's mind boggling story highlighting the, erm, 'intelligence' of the anti-vaxxers who are apparently deluging animal feedstores, asking to buy Ivermectin to treat or prevent Covid. So, what is this wonder drug that people are keen to put into their body as an alternative to the vaccine? What is it that they trust more than the treatment researched and recommended by countless scientists around the world? Why, it's a horse de-wormer! Not only does it not prevent, cure or treat Covid, but it actually poisons humans. An American fire fighter died of taking Ivermectin yesterday. Unbelievable. When the anti-vaxxers would rather put their faith in a horse de-wormer than a scientifically developed and tested human vaccine, you know we're in trouble. Even the CDC (Centre for Disease Control) in America expressed their frustration on Twitter: "*You're not a horse. You're not a cow. Really y'all.....*"

Email voices:

D1 - Victoria

I think at this point it is very possible that we're still going to be dealing with Covid by winter of this year. Ever since it started, this pandemic has been a never-ending cycle of "wow, I never would have thought it would drag on this long!". Apparently C's parents have decided not to have a funeral service at all now as it's dragged on so long, but some of his friends are planning some sort of celebration-of-life "camp-out" in February instead. We had a good laugh about the idea of camping in February with "all our combined ex's", - our old friend group by now resembles that of a soap opera somewhere in its tenth season or so, with the myriad tangled relationship histories.

B – Abbotsford, BC

M is on two sessions of home PT dialysis par jour now and it seems to be helping. By the end of September, he should have started the night machine dialysis cyclor so that would be more convenient and might give him more energy also. We've been told that even if someone is able to donate a kidney to him, it wouldn't be this year, partly due to the expectations that with Covid numbers rising, this fall will see another cancellation of elective surgeries and all surgeries will be pushed back. We remain hopeful that maybe in the new year, there will be the possibility of a transplant for him, with maybe a pancreas transplant the following year if all goes well.

FRIDAY 3rd September 2021

Canadian deaths: 27,006 World-wide deaths: 4,566,215

As the case numbers rise, along with the intensity of feeling on both sides of the vaccination argument, the finger of blame has officially been pointed..... Dr Bonnie Henry comes out and clearly says it: "This is a pandemic of the unvaccinated".

The majority absolutely agree with her. But unfortunately the vociferous minority continue to rant and rage, and unbelievably even hold a protest blocking the entrances to our hospitals. How does it possibly help your cause to attack the very people who you rely on to cure you and nurse you when you get ill? Or when you prevent others in the community from getting the health care they desperately need in a medical emergency? There are tales in the news of people being yelled at in the street, and hassled to 'take off your masks!'. One nurse outside the hospital in Nanaimo is physically attacked.



The letters in the letters page of the Times Colonist today are more heated:

Stop the nonsense over vaccinations

One's liberty ends where someone else's starts.

Right now, 10-15 per cent of the population is holding hostage 85 per cent of the population where we could live more freely and have more liberty. Furthermore, our economy could be humming again.

Enough of this nonsense. Authorities should use the notwithstanding clause as provided in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

P T, Langford

When it is stupid, let's call it that

I am sick and tired of the notion that all opinions have validity and must be considered in a considerate way. As a society, we abhor racism, and have no qualms about calling it out at the mere whiff of its existence. Yet we quietly indulge stupid people who spout ridiculous arguments about why the steps being taken to stamp out a worldwide pandemic are stupid.

Stop it! When the morons gather and prevent patients from entering hospitals it is time to be blunt in calling out stupidity for what it is — STUPID!

R M, Saanich

Don't block hospitals for any reason

It seems that these protesters are so maniacal about their own rights that they are willing to discount the rights of others. If this is "now," then how much worse is it going to get? Unfortunately, I see something very ugly on the horizon.

L H, Saanich

Anger, delusions driving the protests

I had the utter disgust to listen to interviews with some of those who protested at various medical facilities. Their irrational actions were selfish, self-serving and vulgar, especially in their attacks on health-care workers who have sacrificed so much to attend to those sick and dying from COVID-19. Those interviewed praised themselves as freedom fighters, saving us all from tyranny. Let me be clear:

You are not protecting my freedom, you are stealing it. I freely choose, yes choose, to be vaccinated because I wanted to protect my life and others' lives by helping all of us, including you, to achieve the 85-95 per cent vaccination target necessary to control the spread of COVID and new variants that have more killing power. Only when the advance of COVID is halted will I, and we, be able to have freedom of movement and association.

Your deluded notions of freedom fighters are acting to prevent my freedom and prevent my movement to see my aging parents, my children and to go anywhere I want at any time I choose. Your actions to not get vaccinated and wear masks are putting the rest of us in a prison and trampling on our rights by exposing us to sickness and perhaps death.

The people now in hospital with COVID are the unvaccinated. Hypocritically, they are calling on those same health-care workers that they abused during their protests to risk their lives to care for them. And bless their good hearts and souls, the health-care workers will.

I would fully support your freedom to choose an unvaccinated and unmasked path that dramatically increases your risk of COVID sickness and death, if it did not steal my and other's freedom to health and life.

I heard you talk about a conspiracy. The conspirators are you. You ignore facts and science and you ignore other people's rights and freedoms. It's time to go home and put away your anger and delusions.

J L, Victoria

There are many, many more letters in the same vein. People are clearly very angry. Only this time, it's not just the readers who wade in...this time the editor of the Times Colonist himself, Bruce Obee, adds his voice, in an editorial. It is pretty unusual for an editor to stand so clearly on one side of an argument like this, but these are exceptional times. It's quite long, but I've included most of it as he is clearly speaking with passion, representing what a lot of people think. Here's what he says:

Protest is a right. Thuggish behaviour is not. It is not acceptable to hurl abuse at and attempt to intimidate essential workers who have been overworked and overstressed for a year and a half. These people have put their own health, physical and mental, at risk as they scramble to save lives. Yet every day, they show up for another shift. We support them. The vast majority of people support them. We need to drown out the ignorant mob of those opposed to public health measures.

And what about Dr. Bonnie Henry, the province's top doctor? She's leading the fight against COVID-19, a fight without precedent in our lifetimes. Hers is a thankless job;She gets hate mail and

death threats. She opens herself to verbal abuse and physical risk whenever she appears in public. Think your freedom has been restricted by COVID? Henry has lost more than you have. And now the protesters have reached into the Trump playbook with shouts of “lock her up.” In the middle of a public health crisis, these braying fools believe Henry should be jailed. It’s a highly offensive, and highly ignorant, thing to say — and also a reminder of what we are dealing with.

A few days ago, columnist Geoff Johnson used the word “stupid” to describe those who are challenging health authorities. That harsh word drew complaints from some readers, but I would argue that as a society, it’s time to stop being so darn delicate. Consider that while the government is offering vaccines for free, there are people in our community ready to pay for, and use, horse medicine instead. If that’s not stupid, what is?

Those people have fallen victim to the lies and misinformation that seems to be coming from all sides, and are at greater risk of falling victim to — and infecting our loved ones with — COVID as a result. People who spread quack theories are working against Henry, the health-care workers, and all of us. Those who claim to be fighting for freedom are trying to take it from us.

The protests are getting uglier and more aggressive. That’s what happens with bullies; unless they are challenged, they get bolder. Last weekend, our photographer Darren Stone was called an “enemy of the people” when he tried to cover an anti-everything protest. The protest on Wednesday was just as ugly. “Today I was threatened, followed, called disgusting, called a liar, told to remove my mask and eventually forced to leave Victoria’s anti-vax card protest,” CTV’s Scott Cunningham tweeted.

It’s time to stand up to the goons. We need to drown out the voices of those who are, through ignorance or anger, hurting the entire community. And above all, we need to assure health-care workers that yes, we are on their side.



The arguments are raging and it's all getting uncomfortable. We discuss it with D2 who is up for a chat, and we all agree that we feel like withdrawing into our burrow and hiding until it all goes away. Certainly downtown doesn't look like an inviting place to visit right now, and the thought of having to break through a wall of protesters to get to the hospital if we have a health emergency is downright scary, particularly as our health services are clearly struggling right now. D2 needed a blood test and spent FIVE DAYS waiting for a time at Life Labs trying to get it done, getting up at 7am each day, and waiting hours in line for the paperwork to arrive and for a test slot. She finally had it done this morning, after another 4 hours in line. How can you do a job if you have to spend 5 days just getting a simple blood test??

It's unsettling, it's worrying and it's divisive. Businesses are worried how they are going to cope when they are obliged to check people's vaccine passports and many are talking of hiring security 'bouncers' to do the job at the door. All of this puts businesses in a very awkward spot, as highlighted by this message from a local spa which arrives in my email inbox later today:

While visiting the spa we kindly request guests refrain from discussing Covid 19 in the treatment room. Our goal is to maintain a relaxing, positive and stress free environment. With so many varying opinions, we choose to focus on self care, mindfulness and gratitude. We still perform all of our usual safety protocols to ensure everyone's safety.

Yup – that's the answer. Let's not talk about it and hope it all goes away.

Email voices:

B – Abbotsford, BC

I was shocked to hear that a teacher who I've worked with in the past, and who teaches at a minimum 3 classes of grade 6s, is refusing to get vaccinated! Time to mandate teachers - especially those who teach children who are not yet eligible for the vaccine and may have underlying health issues - get the vaccine! She also has elderly and compromised parents with whom she lives! Just makes me angry to think of it, but I guess that's just the way it is. Our numbers are going in the wrong direction.

Our friend in Kelowna, who also refused to get vaccinated, was just released from the hospital there after a week in ICU and two weeks on a regular ward still on oxygen, and now needs a walker as she's very weak. Her husband has been vaccinated and didn't have any symptoms. I've been very worried for her but also a tad angry that she let it happen. She plans to get vaccinated now once she's strong enough but all that needless pain and anxiety....

At the beginning of the week, D had an employee from her store test positive for Covid so all nine people who had recent shifts with that person also had to isolate (Starbucks mandates that they self-isolate even if they test negative, and pays them but also expects them to do online training, meetings, discussions, etc. if the manager plans it). D didn't have to isolate as she wasn't at work at the time, but then on Wednesday, another employee from her store tested positive and D was working with that person. She had to temporarily close the store for ten days I think as they basically don't have enough staff who can work now, and she got tested and self-isolated too.

L - Victoria

Just cancelled our Maui trip. I hadn't read/heard the Governor's request for people to come only if essential so since I can't see their current situation improving within 2 months we both agreed to cancel. Augh I'm so sad, but someday things will improve.

H had fever/sore throat/vomiting last night so just took him for a covid test. Thank heavens he's had both his shots! I doubt it's covid but we'll have to wait for confirmation.

B – Beaconsfield, England

Our family have all had 2 jabs of the Pfizer vaccine. However M was one of the unlucky young men to have a bad reaction and have chest pain and a numb arm - which is a known side effect of Pfizer in younger people, particularly young men. It is heart inflammation/myocarditis. M is normally very fit and healthy and wild horses would find it hard to get him to a doctor, consequently he did not tell us he had had this reaction until a week later. The advice is to see a doctor /hospital if you have this reaction shortly after the jab, but apparently he simply looked up the problem on the internet, decided the hospital would only give him pain killers so just took those! The problem then recurred a couple of weeks later and this time at least he decided to get checked out at a local A+E hospital department. He had lots of tests over several hours.

I do think it is important that people know about this Pfizer side effect, allegedly it affects only a few, but in my group of 4 uni friends 2 of us have had children affected(M and a friend's 35 year old daughter), and a third knows of another young person affected. My friend whose daughter had the problem thinks that the issue is being played down as the authorities here are desperate to encourage more young people to be vaccinated and do not want to put them off. She may be right. Of course there may also be lots of young men like M who simply think they are fine and do not report myocarditis.

TUESDAY 7th September 2021

Canadian deaths: 27,022 World-wide deaths: 4,594,991

7th September. That date has significance this year. It's the day the schools go back, and everyone is worried sick about the infection levels rising and being shared amongst that age group. It's also the date that John Horgan originally set to be the day we would finally remove all pandemic restrictions and resume 'normal, life. Well *that* hasn't happened! In fact, as the CBC nightly news reports ever increasing Covid cases, hospitalisation and death numbers, showing graphs with markers higher than those of months ago, it feels as if we are roaring *backwards*, and that it is only a matter of time before further restrictions are re-introduced. No-one has an appetite for that. Everyone is fed up with the whole pandemic, and the chaos and destruction it has wreaked upon us all, but the worry is that sooner or later, if more people don't get vaccinated, the politicians may have their hands forced and restrictions may be re-imposed. DH and I are guessing at October.

So instead of signing off this journal, which had been my plan for a while, assuming 7th September would be Freedom Day, I've now realised that it is in fact far from over. My calling this section of the journal 'Hope' was wildly over optimistic. And here I am now, about to start a new, 6th chapter of the pandemic journal. But what to call it? What does one title it when it was originally assumed 'Hope' meant the end? Hope Dashed? Hope Crushed? Hopeless???

And as if to prove that we are indeed, still in the thick of all the issues swirling around the pandemic, this morning I receive this email from my dear friend L, a member of our craft group who I have known for many, many years now. She's writing to us about an upcoming craft session where another of her friends is planning to teach us all how to make table mats out of pine needles.

Hello my friends,

With regards to our upcoming pine basket class....my dear N has not been vaccinated. I have not asked her why. Would you two be ok if we did our basket making outside (weather permitting) with masks?

I didn't send this to J as she's busy getting ready for B's service (J's son died of Covid last year, aged just 50, and the postponed memorial service has been rescheduled for this coming weekend) and don't want to bring up another discussion of vaccinations.

N is very excited to show us how to do the baskets and understands that we would want to be outside etc. Let me know how you feel when you have a moment.

xo

I can't help it. I struggle with my emotions and my desire to keep the peace, but the other side of me won't keep quiet, the one that is just fed up with the stupid behaviour of anti-vaxxers, and in the end, that side wins out, and so I write the following reply with heavy heart, worried that I am sacrificing a friendship over my principles, and my desire for us all to be done with Covid:

Hello dear L,

Thank you for your consideration in letting us know about N's vaccine status. I really appreciate that. You are a thoughtful friend and I love you.

However, I'm afraid I'm going to stick by my principles on this one; you see, it's no longer a question of whether I feel threatened by the unvaccinated; the truth is that I've had my double dose of vaccine and I trust the science behind it. I'd catch Covid from her, but it'd most likely be a mild dose for me, being vaccinated, and just build up my resistance further, so no worries on that score. My problem is

with those who choose to refuse the vaccine and thus by their insistence on protecting their freedoms, affect mine. You and I can't go to Hawaii for instance because those who refuse the vaccines are prolonging the pandemic, and so we are all forced to stay home. OUR liberty is curtailed because of their actions. Our chief medical officer, Dr Bonnie Henry, has actually come out and said it: "This is a pandemic of the unvaccinated".

So for me, and I'm so sorry if this makes me sound horrid, I just can't condone that behaviour and those choices. I don't want to hang out with people who are so selfish that they are prepared to put their own 'liberties' before the welfare of the whole community. Let me give you an example; my dear friend B, who lives in Abbotsford, has a 37 year old son who's kidney has failed. He is hanging onto life having dialysis twice a day. He desperately needs a kidney transplant within the next few months if he is to live, and 2 separate donors have come forward offering him their kidney, BUT the hospital have told him that they can't do the transplant surgery until at least after Christmas as the hospital is over capacity with Covid patients, the huge majority of whom are unvaccinated. B may well lose her son's life because of those who refuse the vaccine. So how I can I sit there and happily chatter away about pine baskets, knowing N's position? Please forgive me, but I just don't have it in me.

However, if you feel too awkward telling N all this, and everyone else is happy to get together, then maybe you could meet for the pine needles thing on Weds 22nd Sept as I won't be able to come that day anyway, so that way you could just tell her that I'm away. But of course, if you do decide to go ahead on 15th, no worries, I'll just stay home and look forward to seeing you all another day. Just let me know one way or the other.

I'm so sorry if I've upset you by taking this stance, but I'm bloody fed up of this pandemic and want it over. And that will only happen when everyone gets vaccinated.

*Big hugs dearest L,
K xxxxxxx*

To my great relief, I shortly receive this email in reply from C, another member of the craft group, who has been copied on the correspondence:

K, you are wonderful, my thoughts exactly

You said it so perfectly, and it is so true

Tight hugs for your friend and prayers that her son will get the operation sooner.

D's sister was planning a surprise b-day gather, small format, family only for D's mom's 80th b-day, but 2 are anti-vaxers and can't get into the venue, so the whole thing is called off, WTF!! Sorry for my French but ??? if we give in to antivaxers, then what?? I don't get it.

On the brighter note, J has been vaccinated and will demo the braiding technique when we are ready. Looking forward to next Wednesday, take care all

C

And soon afterwards, this email arrives from L. I am so relieved that she is ok about all this, and has not been upset by me honestly stating my thoughts. I was worried I'd lose her friendship, but reading this, phew, it looks like we're ok!!!

Thank you both, and I can't tell you how much your deeply honest friendships mean to me. It is the only kind of friendship worth having. We have two antivaxers in our close family and I am the one who hosts Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter dinners/gatherings. There is nothing I love more than a

*chaotic house full of family. Unfortunately I am going to have to tell the two who aren't vaccinated they cannot come and I still have not faced it. They have two young boys whom I would so love to see, play, hug, hold and cannot imagine a gathering without them.
Such a divisive choice.
Love and hugs to you both. L*

So that's that crisis averted. I'm one of those folks who hates conflict, but we all have different views, different levels of acceptability and comfort, and as the pandemic drags on into the next chapter of the story, it doesn't get any easier.