

# The Pandemic Diaries.

Panic.

## TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> JANUARY

### Today's News:

China announces that they have 300 confirmed cases of a new virus, and that 6 people have died from it. Their first case was apparently 10<sup>th</sup> January.

World-wide deaths: 6

Airports are strange places; when you enter them, it almost feels as if you're entering a parallel universe. A sort of bubble where normal rules don't apply. They're stressful as you're surrounded by people rushing in every direction, you have rules to obey and timetables to meet. But they're also kind of relaxing as, once you're there, it's too late to worry about what you've forgotten to pack or arrange, so you might as well switch off and give in to the business of getting where you need to be as efficiently as possible, then settle down and find some way of filling the time while you wait for your connection.

Dear Husband and I navigate our way through no less than 3 airports today, en route to Barbados, where we will meet up for 2 weeks with our dear friends M and L for our annual sunshine winter getaway. Yay! We're excited to be going and are looking forward to the trip, but we have hours to kill at the airports, with our various connections. Like many other travellers, we spend some of that time in a zoned out brain fog, gazing blankly at the TV monitors in the departure lounges. And while gazing, we dimly become aware of an item of news that crops up several times over the day. A news item coming from China.

It appears that there is a brand new virus, popped up out of no-where, or, more accurately, from the live food market of a town called Wuhan. Those live food markets have always broken my heart whenever I've seen images of them; the animals are squeezed into tiny cages in appalling conditions, clearly suffering and unhappy. And this isn't the first time that infections spreading to humans have resulted from them ('Avian flu', and 'Swine flu' being 2 examples). Apparently 6 people have died from this virus. We shake our heads and feel sad for the animals, but then think no more about it. This has nothing to do with us – we're the other side of the world and have a plane to catch. This vacation is going to be great.

## TUESDAY 4<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY

### Today's News:

With a few cases of this new virus now having spread to other countries, and the situation in China much worse, Air Canada has stopped all flights to China, and is re-patriating Canadian citizens currently in China. Those people are being flown to the military air base in Trenton for a mandatory 14 day quarantine period before being allowed home.

World-wide deaths: 492

We have spent the last two weeks in blissful ignorance, enjoying the many delights of Barbados and the even greater delights of time spent with dear friends. None of us has looked at the news in the whole time we are together, and it has been a wonderful, relaxing break. Today L flies back to London, M flies back to Calgary, and DH and I fly on to Grenada, where we have booked 2 weeks in a 1 room studio apartment, in a quiet part of the island. We enjoy our time exploring Grenada together, the hikes and the daily swims in the studio owners beautiful pool, but, during the course of the 2 weeks, we do have time to check back in on world events and news, via our laptops. As well as watching the emergence of new cases of this mystery disease in neighbouring countries to China, we follow along with the story of a cruise ship, the *Diamond Princess*.

The *Diamond Princess* is one of those cruise mega ships with a capacity of almost 3,000 guests and some 1,100 crew. That's a lot of people squished into close quarters together. And over the next days, the comparison of a cruise ship to a Petri Dish is something we frequently hear used by journalists on the news. The ship is stuck off Japan and not allowed to dock as there are a couple of cases aboard. It is decided, for the protection of all, to quarantine the whole ship. Turns out that this isn't the best decision...those poor souls are stuck on their own in their tiny cabins for 2 weeks (aside from being allowed out for daily exercise I believe). There are interviews with some of them via their cell phones, and these people, despite putting a very brave face on it, are clearly going stir crazy in there. Worse, it turns out that the virus is very good at transmitting itself, and, despite the best efforts of all concerned, by the time those onboard are finally allowed to disembark on 19<sup>th</sup> February, to either hospital or further quarantine, 705 of them are now infected and 13 will die.

## **TUESDAY 18<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY**

### Today's News:

More cruises ships are being turned away from ports around the world.

Iran is the new 'hotspot' for the disease, with 100's infected, including many of their government.

World-wide deaths: 2,009

It's not an easy journey getting from the Caribbean to the Pacific North West, and for us it involves 2 days of travel to get home. (This is probably why we've never been before. It's quicker for us to get to Europe than it is to the Caribbean!). Having spent yesterday flying from Grenada to Miami, and then getting a taxi from Miami to Fort Lauderdale, today sees us flying from Fort Lauderdale to Seattle, where we have a few hours to kill before getting our connection home to Victoria. We like Seattle airport; it has that chill vibe so redolent of the Pacific North West. Everyone is friendly and helpful there, and the passengers are usually pretty relaxed. We're happy to be almost home too, on what feels like home geography, and we pass the time wandering around the airport, having a tea and people watching, chatting with a couple of them. I also spend a relaxed hour browsing one of our favourite gift stores, *Fireworks*. It's fun to pick up and examine all the quirky items there and I buy a few things as birthday gifts. The time passes, and by 5pm we are back at Victoria airport, so happy to be greeted by K, who kindly comes to pick us up. We give her a big hug. Hugs are wonderful.

## **SUNDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY**

### Today's News:

Italy is the new virus hotspot, and puts 50,000 people in lockdown and cancels the famous annual Carnival in Venice.

The Canadian government issues an advisory not to travel to China, Korea, Iran or Italy.

World-wide deaths: 2,618

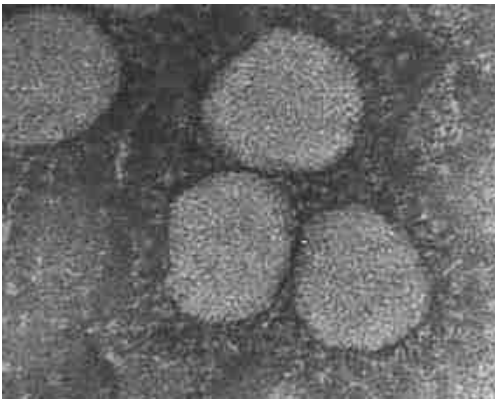
We've been home nearly a week now, and more and more of the news is being given over to the new Coronavirus, or Covid-19 as it's called. Italy, for some reason, seems to be particularly hard hit and now this threat is no longer a story happening in far off China, or on a cruise ship off the coast of Japan somewhere, but, being in both Iran and Italy, is now in the heart of the Middle East and Europe. If it's in Italy, it'll be with the rest of us soon.

It's time to meet this thing properly.

Called Covid-19 as apparently the Chinese identified it in 2019, (and just 'forgot' to tell the rest of the world about it then), this virus is apparently related to other flu viruses we've faced in the past, such as SARS. Like SARS, it is transmitted from animals to humans, and then from humans to humans. Coronavirus disease spreads primarily through contact with an infected person when they cough or sneeze. It also spreads when a person touches a surface or object that has the virus on it, then

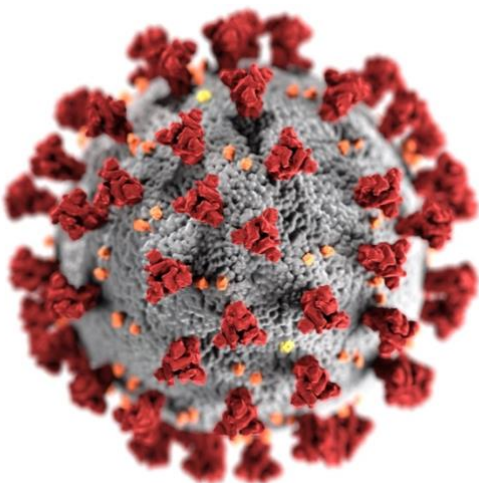
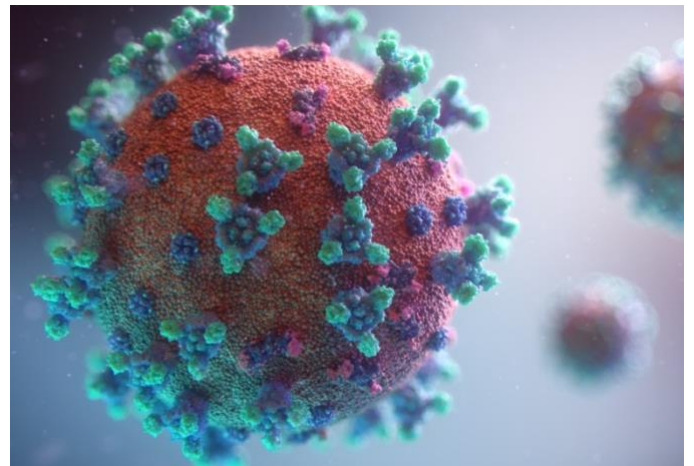
touches their eyes, nose, or mouth, ie it is transmitted through liquid droplets which carry it into the new host.

So what does it look like? Well, we can't actually see it of course, like we can't see any other virus, so the biologists have helpfully provided us with some images.



This image is a slice of one seen under a very high powered microscope and I'm ok looking at this. It looks like your typical sliced cell under a microscope. Round blobby thing, obviously full of squiggly energy ready to move and expand.

This image though is closer up and man, that is one seriously UGLY virus. I mean, look at those **nasty** protuberances. I don't know what viruses normally look like, but if they all look like this? UGH. It makes me want to gag – I find it totally repulsive and maybe even wonder if I suffer from Trypophobia, which is officially described as: *an aversion to the sight of irregular patterns or clusters of small holes or bumps. It is not officially recognized as a mental disorder, but may be diagnosed as a specific phobia if excessive fear and distress occur.*



'Corona' is Latin for 'crown', which of course helps explain the name, as it has the crown of spikes all around it.

Whatever, the thought of this thing floating around in water droplets, on surfaces, or, even worse, floating around inside my lungs, is quite a revolting one, and provides great incentive not to catch it. We definitely do not want THAT over here!! It is GROSS.

## FRIDAY 28th FEBRUARY

### Today's News:

The world stock market starts to fall.

The annual Haj pilgrimage is cancelled.

Disney shuts down its resorts and cruise ships.

World-wide deaths: 2,923

More and more measures are being implemented around the world in an attempt to stop the spread of the disease caused by the Ugly Virus - To stop large numbers of people gathering together where it could be transmitted to each other. It's now fairly clear that this novel flu strain transmits very easily and is highly dangerous to those with compromised immune systems – the elderly or those with an existing medical condition.

My perspective? We're all going to get it, and for most of us it will be fine. We'll deal with it like any other cold / flu, but that is not true for the old and /or health compromised. Which is why not going out if you have it is a good idea as it helps protect those folks. But as for getting it ourselves? Obviously we don't WANT the thing - we don't want any cold, flu or other infection, (which is why we have the flu shot each fall), but we'll catch it, our bodies will deal with it, and we'll have built more immunity. Story of our natural lives from birth until we get too old or ill for our immune systems to fight back any more. The damage caused by mass hysteria could be way worse than that caused by the illness. For instance, those low wage and temporary workers in the hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants) who will lose their jobs and may then not be able to afford their regular medications. Mental health issues could also be huge. The potential effects of this outbreak could be so damaging in so many ways.

However, we don't have much time to ponder these issues this weekend, as we have a very hectic weekend planned. Our friend H, from Delta, is coming to stay tonight, and we have tickets booked to see a new opera, called *Flight*, at the Royal Theatre. Although I've grown to appreciate opera, I'm a bit leery as it's a 'modern' opera, and I'm worried there won't be a line of actual melody in it. As DH says, modern opera can sound as if it's 2 hours of the orchestra tuning up. (In the end, it's fine. A bit discordant here and there, but the staging is great and we really enjoy our time with H). On Saturday we have our friend C, from Edmonton, coming to stay and we're all looking forward to that as we've not seen him in ages; we've arranged a family dinner and games session for Saturday night, which will be a lot of fun. Then on Sunday, we'll be viewing our first house....yes, K, M, DH and I have decided to buy a house together, so, now that the spring house selling season is here, have spent the past week desperately cleaning and tidying ready to put our house on the market. We're all excited to go and view the first house, which has some acreage and is in a convenient location. No time to think about nasty, ugly viruses this weekend at all!

Today's News:

I'm sick!

World-wide deaths: 3,202

Yes, well, I'm quite convinced there's more important news in the world, than me being ill, but from here, this is the news I need to consider. My symptoms? Tight and painful chest, sore throat, dry cough and a slight fever. Yes, they exactly match the Covid 19 symptoms. But surely I can't have caught it already? I think there are only 1 or 2 official cases in Canada so far (admittedly in BC, but on the mainland). So the likelihood of me having THE virus must be 0.000001 or something. This is most likely the 'regular' flu. Except we had our flu jab back in November. Oh well, most likely a *different* regular flu then – a different strain, not in this year's vaccine. I'd like to say it's just a cold – they are so common this time of year. But, I have no runny nose symptoms, no congestion, and no sneezing, and those are the most basic cold symptoms aren't they? And besides, it can't be Covid, where would I possibly have caught it from?? The incubation period is apparently between 1 and 14 days, so I go back through my planner and have a look...all fine last week...lots of social activity, lots of out and aboutness; it was a good week. Back to the previous week....and there it is....Seattle airport, 12 days before my first symptoms started last night. Seattle – a mini Coronavirus hotspot in its own right, (though we didn't know that at the time), with several deaths so far. Seattle – the first port of entry for many travellers from Asia. It's possible. Not really likely, but *possible*.

So what to do?? I have a germ. In all likelihood it's a form of the regular flu. But it might, it just might, be THE germ. Trouble is, to get tested, I'd have to go to the doctor's office, but that would just expose the people there to it, so that's not a great idea. And besides, I'm not even sure they are testing the general population are they? If I did go to the doctor's office, what would he say....? Hmmmm, he'd probably say "go home and get better, but completely self isolate yourself, just in case. Let us know if it gets bad" or something along those lines. More likely, he'd think I was an over-reacting twit to even think this, when the official stats in BC are only 1 or 2. The decision seems pretty easy; out of caution, even though I know this is most probably just a regular flu type thing (and besides, I really don't feel *that* bad), I'll simply stay home and do the self isolation thing for 14 days or until after I'm better.

The other worry is what to tell all the folks I've seen in the past week.....I really should let them know, even though again I'll feel like an over panicking twit, but H has a new grandson and a busy social life, so I bite the bullet and send her an email. She is, of course, very nice about it, and reassures me that she'll self monitor closely. (And I'm happy to report that she doesn't go on to get the virus, neither does C from Edmonton. Phew!!). I also cancel all upcoming social engagements for the next 2 weeks (including a friend's birthday lunch on Friday I was looking forward to) and then give in to the business of staying at home and quietly getting better.

Today's News:

Numbers are rapidly rising around the world, and Canada records its first death, an elderly man in a care home in North Vancouver.

Italy imposes a country wide quarantine – no-one in or out of the country, and people are only allowed out of their homes to buy food or for essential work.

Stock markets crash world-wide.

Flybe Airline in UK goes bankrupt, stranding 1,000's of passengers abroad.

Canadian deaths: 1      World-wide deaths: 4,025

The mild fever lasts just 2 days, but the sore throat, mild chest pain, dry cough and mild headache last all week. But now, a week later, overall, I'm feeling on the mend, Sore throat and headache have just about gone now, which is great, and the tight chest pain just makes its presence felt now and then. The dry cough is persistent, but not constant by any means – it just breaks out now and then. On the whole, this week really hasn't been too bad, and certainly a lot easier to deal with than many 'regular' flus I've dealt with in the past. IF what I've been dealing with is Covid, then my body seems to have duffed it up pretty easily. Which is what the authorities have been saying...for those of us who are in normal good health, this thing really shouldn't pose a problem. But of course, it's a very different matter for those who are elderly or sick, and thus immune compromised. I think of my diabetic friends for instance, and hope they stay safe.

Email voices:

B – Victoria

*I often feel that we (as in "we" in the developed world) have quite lost touch with the whole "circle of life" deal; death just isn't something we're likely to have to deal with often in our modern lives, which of course is wonderful, but has also made it seem more daunting and scary. People in Medieval Europe knew how to have a proper pandemic back then ;P*





## WEDNESDAY 11th MARCH

### Today's News:

**WHO (World Health Organisation) officially declares this virus a Pandemic.**

Schools are closed across most of Europe.

Trump bans all travel from Europe into the USA.

The UK officially announces they are expecting an 80% infection rate, but only 1% death rate, and those are in the over 65's. (Which the Daily Mail newspaper sensitively and kindly referred to as 'The Death Zone'!).

Canadian deaths: 1            World-wide deaths: 4,628

We are shocked by Trump's closure of his country's borders to all Europeans. This drastic measure seems a huge change; good grief, the man was denying the existence of the virus as 'fake news' not so long ago, and now here is shutting all the borders?! And why does he have to make it all so politicised? "*America has no cases, the few cases there are in Washington were seeded by Europeans*". Oh those evil foreigners! Yet again, in times of crisis, it's the fault of the foreigner, the outsider, bringing evil and plague to the community. Mind you, I guess it has to come from somewhere, and in this case, it has emerged from China so yes, he is technically right I suppose, but let's not vilify the carrier and create racist tension.

But, after some days of pressure, WHO has now declared this a Pandemic, so maybe it's time we all take this more seriously. Hmm...what does that involve? Luckily the media obliges us by inundating us with instructions on how to protect ourselves and stop the spread. It seems we are being advised to take various protective steps, chief amongst them being to WASH YOUR HANDS. Well, good advice, yes, but surely that's simple and we all know that? To my amazement, no, not so. It's not just a question of 'wash your hands', but HOW you wash your hands. At first, we're told that to do it properly, it has to be at least 20 seconds, and to make it easier for us, they recommend we sing Happy Birthday, which is about the right length. Well, that would get old very quickly, but I take the point.

But then, we're told we're probably still not doing it properly and we are shown a video of people having washed their hands in a manner which they think is thorough, but then – oh no! – when they look at their hands under the infra-red light (or whatever magic light it is they're using), the germs are revealed, sparkling like glitter in all the skin crevices. Aaagghghggh.

So a special children's song has been created - a washing hands song to the tune of *Frere Jacques*, with video showing the action, the lyrics of which are:

- Scrub your palms.            (Frere Jacques)
- Between the fingers.        (Frere Jacques)
- Wash the back, wash the back. (Dormez vous?, dormez vous?)
- Twirl the tips around.        (sonnez les matins)
- Scrub them upside down.      (sonnez les matins)
- Thumb attack, thumb attack. (Din, din, don)

I watch the children's video and realise with mock horror that, at 60 years of age, I have been doing this wrong all my life. Tips?? Upside down? Thumb focus? Never done any of it! How have I survived? I laugh, and yet, when I next wash my hands, darn it if I'm not doing it as per the video. It probably doesn't hurt to do it right, eh???

The other main protective measures are straightforward: If you can't wash your hands with soap, use hand sanitiser, and, try and keep a distance of 1 metre between yourself and other people so that the virus can't reach you during coughs and sneezes. (This is later increased to 2 metres). If it helps protect the vulnerable and immuno compromised, I can do that.

Email voices:

J – Stratford on Avon, England,

*I can't honestly say that there has been mass hysteria here about the virus (apart from the odd brawl over toilet rolls where the participants were publicly shamed on social media) and Flybe's actually been on its knees for ages (I had a flight cancelled about 3 years ago - rumour had it that they hadn't paid their fuel bills at Birmingham airport). It is very hard for their employees, though, and it won't be much comfort to them to know that the resulting reduction in emissions is going to help meet climate change targets.*

*Boris's Government has, I am delighted to report, reversed its attitude towards 'experts' and seems to be listening to what the scientists are saying. Prof Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer, has recently become a bit of a TV star in his own right by his calm and humourous bedside manner. From what we have seen, the predominant attitude is 'Keep Calm and Carry On' and we are waiting to hear whether the advice is to cancel events like the London Marathon.*

*Still, it's an ill wind, as they say: D and M are up to their eyes in work because they have been asked by the Health Department to extend their GP triage/video conferencing system. This will mean people can contact their GPs from their phones or laptops rather than attend surgeries in person and although many people will still need to do that, it should certainly relieve some of the pressure and possibly change the way that doctors give advice in the future.*

## FRIDAY 13th MARCH

### Today's News:

Many countries have announced they have stopped testing as they have run out of test kits.

Canadian deaths: 1            World-wide deaths: 5,428

My 14 days of self isolation are over and I am feeling better. Which is just as well as we are meant to be putting our house on the market next week, and we have so much to do to get it ready for the brochure photographs. We are in a mad flurry of de-cluttering, cleaning and tidying. We load 2 storage cubes with furniture and other junk in an attempt to make our home look more like something in an aspirational homes magazine (fat chance), and we have a new fireplace installed as, as our realtor says, you can't really hope to sell a home with a broken fireplace. Just the carpet cleaning to go now!

And on Saturday we go to a couple of Open Houses, one of which we quite like. It feels a bit odd though – we are all meant to be social distancing and yet here we are gathering to view these homes. The realtors have put out hand sanitiser and, at the 2<sup>nd</sup> house, we take it in turns to go in, one group at a time, so distance is kept. Afterwards we enquire about the house we like and discover that it has immediately received several offers on it, one of which is \$90,000 OVER asking price. This is craziness! Our realtor explains that many people are feeling pressured as they have mortgage deals agreed, but these are time limited, and folks are worried they won't find a house in time if the current public situation gets worse and house sales stop. Wow. I don't know what to think about this. It certainly indicates that it would be a good time to sell, but .....what if we get stuck with no-where to live??

### Email voices

#### J- Stratford on Avon, England

*There is to be an announcement from the FA this morning, and it is widely expected to say that all football matches are to be suspended until further notice. Apparently Chelsea players are self-isolating, but running scared of a thrashing by Villa, I call it, although I am not particularly good at football punditry. Both of our family Villa fans may have to wait a bit for the team's glorious comeback.*

#### L - Victoria

*I am still holding out hope, although fading daily, that things may be better and we can go to Sweden in April as planned, so haven't tried to cancel yet but we still have 5 weeks til the trip. My sister in laws are still planning to go to Mexico next week, crazy. Yes agreed things may get crazier here over the next 2 weeks for sure. I went to Thrifty's yesterday just to see the empty shelves, still don't get what the toilet paper craze is all about and it makes me sad that people freak out so much. Such strange times eh?*

#### J - Toronto

*I'm getting better and a good thing is I don't have any chest pain or fever. The school hasn't sent any notice whether we also take 3 weeks break, a week is not bad though. Anyway, yes, I'm happy that I could take a rest.*

*K came back home today because of COVID-19; the university will switch courses to online from tomorrow. The dorm and food court will be opened until the end of the term for students should stay. K said some international students couldn't buy flight tickets.*

*In addition, churches have no Sunday services. The government announced: "The immediate suspension of all large events and public gatherings of over 250 people." I think this is a good decision and they should have done already.*

*M – Devon, England* (in reply to me telling my cousins that we've cancelled our travel plans to UK for a get together in May)

*Bloody Coronavirus - spoiling our fun, but we must all be sensible I suppose. Hopefully you'll get here sooner rather than later but, as you say, what will be will be.*

*An update on Aunt C - the care home closed its' doors to all visitors a few days ago so they're having a 'lock-in'. It's going to be very isolating for all the residents but they are a vulnerable bunch so probably the right decision. Aunt C will take it in her stride I'm sure - never one to moan is she.*

## MONDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

### Today's News:

Canadian borders have been closed to all foreign nationals (except Americans). All Canadians flying home must do a 14 day quarantine.

Canadian deaths: 4 (up from 1 yesterday). World-wide deaths: 7,162

Things are happening fast. Every day there are several new announcements; it seems as if things are actually changing hour by hour, not day by day, and I guess truthfully, they are. Today found DH and I huddled around our new, bright red, Robert's radio, listening to Trudeau announce that Canadian borders are now closed to all non-Canadians (except Americans). *"And I say to all Canadians abroad, get on a plane. It is time to Come Home"*. Mind you, that's easier said than done...yesterday on Ici Radio-Canada they told of the last flight leaving Paris for Montreal, with the airline selling the few remaining seats for \$3,000 each. There were not enough seats available. Some 4,000 Canadians are now stuck in Europe and will have to hole up somewhere for the duration. As we listened to Trudeau's announcement, I was struck by a bizarre sense of historical flashback, our retro radio recalling images of WW2 times, when people also gathered to listen to official announcements of a country facing potential threat and danger. Of course, ours isn't war in the traditional sense (although Emanuelle Macron of France refers to it as such), but we are fighting a common enemy – COVID 19.

K (29 years old) reminded us that this is a big moment for her; she's never lived through a pandemic before. Epidemics, sure, there have been plenty; SARS (2002-4) killed 764, MERS (2012) killed 862, Ebola (2013-16) was a monster virus, killing 11,300 in a very unpleasant way. Then there was Zika (2015-6) – 53, Dengue and Avian Flu, which all caused panic in various parts of the world. And I'll always remember the horrific images of mounds of burning cattle in the UK, from Kreuzfeldt Jacob's Disease (or Mad Cow as it was more commonly known) in the 1990's. These were all serious public health threats, but none was officially a pandemic, that world wide contagion that threatens everyone on the planet. This virus it appears, as befits its ugly image, is a BAD one.

It's always difficult to accurately assess how serious a threat these things actually pose. The trouble is that the attendant Fear Virus is often way more virulent than the actual virus, which partly explains the crazy desire for many to stock up on toilet paper. The grocery shelves have been empty of toilet paper for a week now, amidst tales of people hoarding pallets of the stuff. There have even been reports of people fighting over packets of toilet paper! Fear of the virus seems to have morphed into a fear of the collapse of society, with no access to 'essentials' for months to come.

But let's be honest here, even if we're not hoarding, we all want to think we're prepared as best we can. There are two very real situations we need to be prepared for:

1. We may need to self isolate for 2 weeks at home, so should have enough supplies to get us through that. (Though most British Columbians should have almost that, being Earthquake Prepared, right???)
2. Canada may announce, like much of Europe, the closure of all shops and suppliers for weeks or even months. So, there may be things that might be harder to get hold of, so we need to think ahead.

I'm afraid my mind doesn't run to toilet paper...with fear of potential imminent store closures in mind, I trot off to the garden centre to get kale, collard greens and lettuces to plant, so we'll have fresh greens throughout the spring, come what may. And, more importantly, I grab a couple of packets of Scarlet Runners – runner bean seeds, so I can go ahead and plant those in May, even if garden centres are closed. No, it's not really that I'm afraid of running out of food (though there's always that

sense of satisfaction in knowing you could be a bit independent if you had to), but it's about knowing that I'll be able to enjoy a personal summer highlight, no matter what happens. Assuming the sun still shines, we'll have our piles of runner beans and I can make green bean chutney 😊 Enjoying the normal, small things in life may become increasingly important.



The empty toilet paper aisle at Thrifty's.

Email voices:

Dr A – Jubilee Hospital

*Yes I am doing well. I am on day 8 of 14 days of working and things are just incredibly hectic. While we don't actually have any coronavirus cases admitted in the hospitals yet, there is a major plan underway to try to clear the hospital as much as possible in case things get much worse. We're all pulling some pretty long days - I don't think I've seen anything less than 10 hours yet, but 12-14 is more the norm now...*

J - Victoria

*The fear virus that is attached to the corona is the one that has me in its thrall. I haven't had cold nor flu this season so every instance of scratchy throat or phlegm clearing cough or nasal clearing has the fear in me ramping up.... In a way, it would be a blessing to be infected and then get over it.*



The empty bread aisle in Thrifty's.

## TUESDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

### Today's News:

European borders have been closed – the whole of the Schengen district has closed its external border. There is apparently a line up of 65 *kilometres* long, of vehicles trying to cross the border from Lithuania back home to Poland.

In B.C., all elected surgeries have been cancelled.

All rec centres, gyms, libraries and movie theatres etc have been shut down.

Canadian deaths: 8

World-wide deaths: 7,979

Trudeau is making his announcements from his home, where he himself is quarantined for 14 days as his wife, Sophie, has tested Covid 19 positive. He's always had a good speaking manner and delivers speeches well (aside from copious 'er's), but now his delivery has become more solemn and portentous to fit the occasion. And it seems that Canadians are listening; already the streets and stores are quieter (with the obvious exception of grocery stores, where bedlam still rules). And there's a growing sense of trying to get things done before the window of opportunity closes, so we have an uneasy mix of staying away from people, yet also frantically trying to get things done "before it's too late".

No-one is ever prepared for an event like this. Everyone has had plans disrupted: work, vacations, trips, family get togethers, events, matches, surgeries, appointments – everything has been put on hold. In many ways DH and I are very lucky as we have just retired and assume (hope!) our pension will keep coming no matter what. We are good at entertaining ourselves and have so many hobbies and activities we enjoy doing, so we're never bored at home. But, like everyone else, we had plans that are now disrupted. We've cancelled the accommodations and car hire in Lisbon, Madeira and the UK for our planned trip back to Europe in May, but can't cancel our flights. There's \$4,000 riding on that and we only get the money back IF Air Canada cancel the flight. That's a lot of money to lose, but at the moment, 7 weeks away is just too far for anyone to predict what will happen by then.....will the borders still be closed so the flights will get cancelled and we'll get our money back? Or will all be back to normal, so we're still obliged to go on that date and will either be scrambling to book last minute accommodations or forfeit the flights? So many unknowns – it's impossible to have a sense of control and planning over such a situation, so we just have to hold on for the ride and 'wait and see'. For an A Type, like me, that's not very comfortable!

Our other major disruption is our plan to move house. Originally scheduled to put the house on the market this Thursday (ie in 2 days' time), we're now behind schedule and who knows if it'll even be possible to sell a house in the middle of a pandemic?! For the past few weeks, the 4 of us have been busy getting ready – new fireplaces, carpets cleaned, decks cleaned, house inspection done, kitchen painted, and packing up two storage cubes of furniture and junk so the place is de-cluttered, all ready to go....and then...Wham! What to do? Is it considered tasteless to even have your house for sale, when your Prime Minister has asked us all to stay home?! And yet the house market is crazy right now...there were swarms of people at the 2 Open Houses we went to on the weekend, both properties receiving several offers. It's clearly a hot market and a good time to sell, and yet..... So we'll just carry on prepping the house ready for sale and again 'wait and see'. I guess, if nothing else, we'll have a lovely clean house in the interim!

*Favourite Facebook post today: "Your grandparents had to go to war for years. You have to sit on a couch for a month or so. You can do this!"*



Email voices:

G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*I've been skeptical about governments' response to the virus from the beginning and my skepticism continues to grow. I just cannot see how the benefits can justify the enormous economic and social cost of the disruption caused in shutting businesses and even whole countries down. What percentage of bars and restaurants forced to closed in New York will never reopen? How many people will be ruined? What will the consequences of their ruination be in terms of ruined/lost/taken lives? What percentage of businesses will go bankrupt in general? How many jobs will be lost? Who will pay to stop all the airlines failing? Etc. And let's imagine Italy, say, does manage to declare itself virus free - is it going to keep its borders closed for another 6-12 months to prevent any Brazilians flying in, where maybe the virus is still floating around? So then there might be a recurring outbreak. Are they going to shut down the country a second time? For me, the focus should always have been on protecting/isolating the vulnerable by all means possible and let the productive part of the population get on with business as usual. But it is what it is, and it will be interesting to see how the politicians try and untangle themselves from the almighty mess they have got themselves into.*

B – Victoria, You can't spell "pandemic" without "panic" :P

*Yep, the panic finally hit our area too! We went to Fairways last night and it was so surreal. Literally not a single package, not a single roll of toilet paper or paper towel left - just a whole empty aisle. The meat section, which runs all along the back of the store, was about 90% empty - just a few discounted, greying steaks, some breakfast sausages, and some disturbing assortment of animal parts you either don't recognize or wish you didn't. Soups and pastas were about 70% empty, and the bread aisle was another that had been almost entirely cleaned out. What's more, they had an armed security guard in a bulletproof vest patrolling the store! J. heard on the news that local Canadian Tires have been selling record amounts of ammo and deep-freezers. People really are launching into this doomsday thing with undisguised enthusiasm :P good grief.*

*Anyway, hope you guys have plenty of loo roll and frozen meat - and weaponry, which apparently people think is going to be necessary to defend their precious hoard, sigh. Still, thank God we don't live in the USA!!!*





## WEDNESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

### Today's News:

For the first time ever in history, the USA and Canada announce they will close the border on Friday, although trade will still be allowed through.

We're told to only go out if it's absolutely essential, or for exercise, and to do physical distancing.

Canadian deaths: 8

World-wide deaths: 8,951

There's a new thing I've not heard of before – a Shelter in Place Order, where the government decrees that you MUST stay at home and only go out for work (if allowed and necessary), for food or for essential medical needs. Nothing else. No walks, exercise or anything. This is what they have right now in Italy, France, Spain and China. You are in your home, and that's it. If you do go out, you must have papers that authorise you to do so, and the police check the paperwork of all motorists and pedestrians. Failure to comply results in a hefty fine or jail time. This is pretty drastic stuff and the Italians have had it for weeks now. (Kudos to them for keeping up their spirits with balcony singing).

The good news is that after 6 weeks of a full lock down, China has only 1 new case in Wuhan today. But we're at the other end of the pandemic event – we're just going into it and, tempting as it is to think it won't happen to us, of course it could. San Francisco has today implemented a part Shelter in Place Order, as per the others, except that you are allowed out to exercise.

We can still go out for exercise and walks (though park facilities are now closed), though of course everyone is practising social distancing. It's a gloriously sunny and warm spring day today; beautiful pink blossoms on the trees, daffodils and bulbs everywhere, skunk cabbage a vibrant yellow in the streams in the woods and the sky a radiant blue, so DH and I decide to take advantage of it and enjoy a walk around the Rithets Bog circuit. It seems we are not the only ones to enjoy the walk in the sunshine and the cheerful ducks and birds we pass, but everyone is very good and gives each other a wide berth when passing on the trail. Most say a pleasant 'hello' and smile, but some keep their heads down and hurry past. We pass some 25 people in all, but I can honestly say that we don't get closer than a metre to any of them. Everyone is making this work.



Even the ducks are self-isolating at Rithets Bog!

The same is true when we have to pop into Pharmasave and Thrifty's to get some cough medicine and food supplies for B, who is not feeling well, (flu like symptoms!), so who is staying home just in case. We are lucky, there is just one bottle of medicine for dry coughs left, so we gratefully grab it for her. Pharmasave has used red tape to mark out 1 metre squares on the ground, for people to stand in while they line up and keep the required amount of separation between them. The system works

well, the line moves calmly and efficiently. Surprisingly, Thrifty's is almost empty. After days of frantic scrums when people were jammed in tight next to each other, mere centimetres apart, in their stock up frenzy, maybe everyone has everything they need now? Whatever, we count our blessings to be able to shop in almost empty aisles (even if many of the shelves are also empty!) and get B and J three bags of food that will hopefully keep them going for a while, and we sling in a large bone for Dog, as he'll get bored stuck at home too!

We drive to B's place and drop the groceries at her door, keeping our distance from her but giving Dog a quick fuss, (as well as his bone, which he is delighted about and dances off to devour it happily), and then we promptly leave again. It feels wrong and sad not to be able to hug my own beloved daughter, but this is the reality of the Coronavirus, and so we wave and blow kisses instead, and I look forward to the time when this is all over and we can enjoy the comfort of a hug again.

### Email voices:

#### T - West Vancouver

*The shelves in the grocery stores are emptying by the minute – some places not even stocking milk. My brother and his wife in France are well and intend to stay that way so they have cancelled any ideas of being anywhere except at home – even to the point of no birthday outing for the 24<sup>th</sup>. He says with some surprise that when you go out into the garden you can only hear birdsong instead of the usual distant hum of traffic. He shared that his eldest son, C, phoned him yesterday and that it was quite emotional as if C suddenly realized he might lose his Dad during this “era”. We have just canceled my birthday dinner for tonight.*

### Favourite Facebook post today:



## THURSDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

### Today's News:

The government has announced an \$82 BILLION aid package to help bail people out financially, (struggling through loss of income / work, lack of EI etc). This should arrive in 2 – 3 weeks.

The tax filing deadline has been extended from April 31<sup>st</sup> to June 1<sup>st</sup>.

All municipal offices have closed.

Courts have closed, and nearly all court cases and prosecutions have been suspended, unless it's urgent or Covid related.

*"These extraordinary measures to contain the virus could be in place for weeks or months".*

Canadian deaths: 12

World-wide deaths: 10,031

I feel an enormous sense of lassitude today: SO tired, both physically and emotionally. I'm guessing it's the body adjusting to the stress of recent events – the chaos of the past weeks and trying to get things sorted and prepared for both house sale, and potential imminent lock down, while emotionally adjusting to the doom and gloom news all around us. This of course all being coupled with uncertainty over the future. Vacations, trips, family and friends get together, events have all been cancelled, the house sale is on hiatus (or is it?? New houses for sale are still appearing daily), and I find myself wanting to hide from both the recent chaos and the future uncertainty by running away to an out of time present.

The 'stay at home' recommendation now feels like a blessing – permission to withdraw, sit blankly and let it all soak in and adjust to the new reality. It's another glorious spring day and I'm so grateful to have a spot on the back deck in the sun, where I'm sitting now to write this. The warmth is spreading through my body and the sounds are perfect (apart from some idiot with a loud leaf blower in the distance. If I ruled the world, those would be banned and people would sweep their leaves (better exercise and less noise pollution). There's a solitary raven loudly cawing from the woods, a flock of little birds happily twittering to each other in the bushes, and a woodpecker is contentedly pecking (not the determined drilling after an already located grub, but the exploratory peck, sounding out the tree for potential grub hiding hollows). It's a perfect spot to de-stress in and I'm aware of how incredibly lucky I am.

And I'm aware of how although home is a refuge for me, for some women and children, it is anything but, and this enforced staying at home will lead to increased abuse as frustrated husbands take it out on those closest to them. These poor victims are going to bear some of the brunt of the Coronavirus, and the next few weeks and months may be horrific for them. There will also be many, many others who are living on their own and will feel unbearably lonely. Being confined to home is not the same experience for everyone.

The only practical thing I have done today is to disinfect all the hand rails, door knobs and light switches in the house, as per the protocol. (Rather embarrassing how grimy the hand rails were, which I hadn't noticed before!). For the rest of the day, I plan to enjoy the sun and read my book. It's one of Philippa Gregory's engrossing historical novels, and when that is finished, there are plenty more great books waiting to be read. This could be an awesome opportunity for a library catch up, so with reading and knitting and other crafts, this moment of 'escape out of time from reality' is looking quite tempting.

**FRIDAY 20th MARCH**

Today's News:

UK closes all pubs as they have 177 deaths so far and the first of the London hospitals is already full. Italy, at 4,032 deaths, has now overtaken China in number of fatalities (3,248) despite their population being 24 times smaller.

Canadian deaths: 12      World-wide deaths: 11,386



It turns out my tiredness yesterday had another contributing factor; the germ is back. ☹️ Not badly, but today I feel tired and lethargic, with a tight chest, that dry cough again and a sore throat. Is it the *same* germ I had before, that has somehow doggedly fought its way back up again? Or is it a new germ, a close cousin, picked up somewhere in the interim? Or is it just a regular cold? There's a lot of them around this time of year.

Again, I consider testing, but this time it's an easy decision as they've announced that only health workers and the critically ill will get tested. Those with mild symptoms, like DH and I, should just stay home. So again I decide to just stay isolated until 72 hours after getting better. But it all re-inforces the fact that the statistics for the numbers of cases are meaningless – there must be WAY more infected people out there than they are officially publishing, which makes the % death rate also meaningless. If you don't know how many people actually have the disease, then how can you state what % of the infected are dying? It seems to me that sadly the only reasonably accurate statistics can be the numbers of actual dead, and those sick enough to need hospitalisation.

Talking of statistics, a sad one was released from Italy today: They have the highest % death rate of any country in the world, by a long way. The obvious explanation for this is that they have a very old population, as people normally live long and healthy lives there, so, being the most vulnerable, the elderly make up by far the largest group of mortalities, with a % death rate of 9%. But what is especially sad, is that it is the country's medical staff that form the second largest group, with nearly the same % rate. 8% of all doctors in Italy that have been infected, have died from the disease. The



very people who are caring for others, the doctors, nurses and all the other health workers, are of course surrounded by the virus and, despite the best precautions, are succumbing to it. With many other health workers quarantined at home, this staff shortage is a real problem and the hospitals cannot cope. And it is the carers who are taking the biggest hit. Here in BC, they have asked retired medical staff to volunteer, and bless them, they have responded in their 100's. In addition, medical students have offered to help in a support role, even if it's by looking after another doctor's kids. The government could introduce emergency laws to force these people back to work, but how heartwarming and encouraging to know that they don't have to.

The government is enacting their emergency powers in another direction though; some factories in Canada are having production lines converted to produce ventilators and other urgently needed hospital equipment instead, so that the country can be self-sustaining, and not have to compete for dwindling supplies of world medical equipment. They're calling it a War Measure. It's amazing to think that this is possible to set up so quickly, and I'm really impressed by the speed of decision making here, and by the willingness of all to find practical solutions.

As for general reaction to events, it feels as if we've all been sucker punched; even my emails have dried up today. It's as if as a nation we're all absorbing this - and everything has stopped. It has completely taken over and we're just communally stunned. The TV news features no other stories, no one talks much of anything else, it's headline news in all the papers each day. Apart from the deaths and sickness, Covid 19 has stopped many of us working, plunged many into financial crisis and desperate worry, cancelled all events and functions, (including weddings and funerals), even stopped us getting together and leaving our homes. Coronavirus has taken over our lives.



Subtle reporting.

What else to do? We put on cheerful music (the Travelling Wilburys always make me smile and dance), get out the bottle of whisky, and the evening passes very pleasantly in a whisky hazed blur. I asked one of the staff at the liquor store last week if it was likely to stay open, or be shut down, and he said they are considered 'An Essential Service'. Thank you Lord.

## SATURDAY 21st MARCH

### Today's News:

Hairdressers, salons and most stores are now closed.

Open Houses no longer allowed.

Playgrounds and all public facilities closed.

Canadian deaths: 19

World-wide deaths: 13,011

It's Saturday, a day that normally sees people busy doing house and garden chores, and this Saturday is even more so. With the huge majority of people staying at home, and it being another beautiful sunny day, the whole neighbourhood is ringing to the sound of lawn mowers, leaf blowers, drills, saws, electric sanders, power washers etc. Everyone may be at home, but it seems they are keeping positive. We join in, in a low key way, sweeping the patio, and I re-pot some spring flowers, enjoying the sunshine and the definite feeling that spring is on the way. Thank goodness for this lovely spring weather which cheers you up, despite the general chaos.

And in the afternoon, we go for a brief walk to Parker Beach, where it is gloriously beautiful; snow capped Mount Baker across the water, a seal idly swimming around and an eagle flying overhead. Really, it doesn't get much better than this. There are other people around, walking their dogs and playing games on the beach, but not many, and everyone is very respectful about keeping their couple of metres distance from one another. It's all so lovely, postcard perfect, and yet our topic of conversation as we walk is inevitably of the virus, of its impacts around the world and of what the world might look like afterwards. There have been several optimistic posts on Facebook today about what the world might be like afterwards, and we are all amazed at how quickly our planet is recovering from pollution now that humans have cut back so drastically on their fossil fuel burning activities.

But we're not there yet, and poor Italy and Spain are really struggling. Italy lost 793 people today. That's almost 800 people in ONE DAY. They have so far lost a total of 4,825 in the space of just a couple of weeks. Spain is not far behind at just under 4,000. And the USA is also ramping up scarily fast. There's not much we can do to help except commiserate and take what action we can to reduce it here in our own population. Empathising with the Italians in our case involves eating an Italian dinner tonight in their honour; lasagne and a beautiful block of Gorgonzola cheese which I picked up cheap last week at Thrifty's. Those Europeans sure know how to make a good cheese!

### Facebook voices:

#### M – London, UK

*The whole Covid-19 misery is beginning to sink in, big style!. The death toll is daily rising. Social gatherings cancelled. City centres like ghost towns. Schools closed. Major events cancelled. Air transport at a standstill and my former Industry in shutdown. Serious sympathies to my old mates.*

*When it is all finished, and gawd knows when that will be, the world will be a very different place. Some things will have changed forever. Maybe now is a good time to think about what might have changed for the better. Less polluting activities happening? More home working to take the pressure off moving people in rush hours? What else?*

Email voices:

E – Rouen, France

*“Here in France it is worse every day, but we are both in good health. I have two freezer and they are full. My grandson and granddaughter are at their home with their parents, who work from home, every one in a room, it is a little complicated but they are in good health. All is so quiet here in our village, everybody are at home .... Yesterday I went to do some shopping and I will do it again in a week with a formulaire to do it. The police control everything. It is so bizarre, in the shop you must stay at 1,5 m distance from everyone. We have internet and phone to keep contact with the family, and photos.*

B – Victoria *I'm so thankful that we've had a week of lovely sunny weather during all this, I must say - it makes such a difference, being able to take a stroll in the fresh air or just sit and enjoy the sunshine with a book, or Warcraft, or a puzzle. We just got back from another such stroll, a couple laps around the dog park, with a happy Dog bounding around. Heard someone else at the dog park talking about how they work at an alarm supply store, where they've been dealing with a huge upsurge in business as people get nervous about home and business security, not without reason... he also said there's already been an upsurge in break-ins, again both in homes and businesses. Many small businesses in town have had to temporarily close down, which leaves them empty and more vulnerable to break-ins. J and I are thinking that tomorrow we'll go to Home Depot and get a "beware of dog" sign to put in our window, being on the ground floor and all (and there's a nice big booming dog-bark to back it up, if anyone wants to push their luck!)*

*You've probably seen in the news that all this social distancing is already having a surprisingly substantial effect on pollution, as people stop commuting to work, many factories close down, and flights are cancelled... it would be nice to think that this might give people pause for thought, when they realize how easily we can make such a big and positive change, but somehow I suspect those kind of changes in thought take longer than this.*





## SUNDAY 22nd MARCH

### Today's News:

Numbers of deaths rise across the world, with USA seeing the most rapid rise.

New Zealand is the latest country to enact a Shelter in Place order, for 4 weeks.

Team Canada is the first to announce it will not send athletes to the Olympic Games this summer.

Canadian deaths: 20

World-wide deaths: 14,640

Another day, another incremental rise in the official case numbers, and sadly, the death numbers around the world keep steadily rising. Italy has had another 700+ die today. In just **one day**. [www.Worlometer.info](http://www.Worlometer.info) provides a minute by minute chart of cases and death tolls in all the countries, so we can see how the different countries compare, statistically. We can see how many deaths each country has suffered that day, and interestingly, compare the % death rate per 1 million head of population. Italy heads the list, with Switzerland in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, just behind them, and Spain not far behind. It makes for grim reading, but there's also a certain macabre fascination to it, an

Country, Other	Total Cases	New Cases	Total Deaths	New Deaths	Total Recovered	Active Cases	Serious, Critical	Tot Cases/ 1M pop
<a href="#">China</a>	81,093	+39	3,270	+9	72,703	5,120	1,749	56
<a href="#">Italy</a>	59,138	+5,560	5,476	+651	7,024	46,638	3,000	978
<a href="#">USA</a>	33,546	+9,339	419	+117	178	32,949	795	101
<a href="#">Spain</a>	28,768	+3,272	1,772	+391	2,575	24,421	1,785	615
<a href="#">Germany</a>	24,873	+2,509	94	+10	266	24,513	23	297
<a href="#">Iran</a>	21,638	+1,028	1,685	+129	7,913	12,040		258
<a href="#">France</a>	16,018	+1,559	674	+112	2,200	13,144	1,746	245
<a href="#">S. Korea</a>	8,897	+98	104	+2	2,909	5,884	59	174
<a href="#">Switzerland</a>	7,474	+611	98	+18	131	7,245	141	864
<a href="#">UK</a>	5,683	+665	281	+48	93	5,309	20	84
<a href="#">Netherlands</a>	4,204	+573	179	+43	2	4,023	354	245
<a href="#">Austria</a>	3,580	+588	16	+8	9	3,555	15	397

intellectual exercise to try and work out why certain countries would have higher % death rates than others. An interesting time to be an anthropologist. (As long as you don't have to do any field work). Looking at all the various charts on the internet, it becomes clear that although each country starts slightly earlier or later than each other, a staggered race if you will, many are broadly following the same trajectory of growth on the graphs. Italy, Spain, and the UK have growth lines almost identical to each other (poor UK – they're just behind the others and it's all about to hit them). The USA on the other hand is growing at a sharper rate than other countries with the greatest increase in daily rates



by far. As DH says, Trump's America First policy is obviously working. It certainly leads to some interesting speculation as to why America should have the fastest rising cases – perhaps this Tweet from President Trump gives us an indication as to why:

*"This is a very contagious -- this is a very contagious virus. It's incredible. But it's something that we have tremendous control of." – March 15<sup>th</sup>.* This, as the country's medical system is crying out for more testing kits and masks. If you have a president in denial, then that will allow the virus more time to spread undetected.

Canada meanwhile is growing in numbers, but so far, quite gradually. Today we stand at 20 deaths. But who knows what's going to happen? None of us has a crystal ball. We can assume we'll broadly follow the graph, the same as the others, but really, we have no idea.

Locally I'm impressed with an initiative of the Times Colonist Newspaper and the Victoria Foundation; yesterday they asked for donations for their goal of \$1,000,000 to help those struggling to cope in this time of crisis – people who have lost their jobs or who are struggling financially and can't even afford rent or food as a result. Just 24 hours later, the Greater Victoria area has donated over \$800,000. That's impressive. The Times Colonist has just announced that they're now going for the next \$million. And the next. This is so wonderful. Makes me proud of my community.

On a personal note, we were meant to be going to C's memorial service today, but obviously it couldn't happen and has had to be postponed. That's hard for his mom and dad. They can't even say good-bye to their son as they wanted. This pandemic has cruel side effects.

And despite everything, unbelievably, we are still moving forward with our house sale preparations. I spoke to our realtor today, and he tells me that incredibly, the housing market is really hot right now.....he sold a condo in 2 days for \$540,000 in a block where condos had never fetched higher than \$390,000 before. And the house we viewed at the open house last weekend received competing offers, including one that was \$90,000 OVER the asking price. Incredibly, and a bit greedily I think, the owners have now re-listed it for \$100,000 more than originally, hoping for an even bigger offer. This is craziness. But he advises us it's a good time to sell. So the photographers are coming tomorrow to take shots of the house so he can list it and we spend this afternoon frantically cleaning up the deck and doing further de-cluttering and staging of the house, ready for the photographers tomorrow. I have all kinds of worries about this – what if we sell our house and are unable to find somewhere else to buy as there'll be a Shelter in Place by then?? What if, what if. But the likelihood is that the Shelter in Place order is going to come down quicker than we get an offer, so these worries are probably pointless anyway. As T from West Vancouver said in an email today, we can only motor our little boat slowly, slowly, keeping an eye out for reefs. Good analogy for life in the time of Coronavirus!

#### Email voices:

##### M – Calgary, Alberta

*I am very lonely and missing R terribly. It's so hard to adjust to being alone all the time. I have nobody to talk about things with on an ongoing basis and in person. The only people I am really able to see now are K and D. R and J were in Mexico March 11-16 so they are in isolation now and both working from home indefinitely till further notice. But isolation ends March 30 for them. Anyone else, I have to see by facetime or phone.*

*In other news L and all of the company employees have been laid off and the business closed for now since they have absolutely no orders and all previous orders were cancelled. E and L's childcare of course closed, but it still charging them full price which is a big problem with L going on EI, so will see what happens there.*

## MONDAY 23rd MARCH

### Today's News:

The Northwest Territories is the first Canadian jurisdiction to close its borders to those from other provinces.

The UK has gone into full lock down; no one can leave their homes, except for essential work, food, medical emergencies, and 1 exercise a day. There will be patrols of the parks to ensure that those exercising, maintain the required social distance.

Canadian deaths: 24                      World-wide deaths: 16,513

Prime Minister Trudeau is fed up with us, the general public. He made an angry televised speech this morning, stating: *"Enough is Enough. Go home and stay home. We've all seen the pictures online of people who seem to think they're invincible. Well, you're not."*

While the majority of Canadians do seem to be adhering to the new restrictions, it appears there is a significant minority who are refusing to do the required social distancing. There were scenes on CBC news last night of Vancouverites all out enjoying the sunshine in Stanley Park, walking closely together in groups along the sea wall, and sitting in groups on the logs on the beaches. No wonder he and the rest of the government are angry. He went on to say that while he doesn't want to 'lock us up', he will if he has no alternative.

With such clear hints, and with California down the coast already under a Shelter in Place order, DH and I decide to pop to the stores and do a quick stock up, just in case.

It's almost a week since we last went shopping, but what a difference a week makes. ALL of the stores in Broadmead's Mall are now shuttered up and closed until further notice, with the exception of Thriftys (grocery), Pharmasave and the Liquor store. We start with the liquor store and are shocked to discover that we are not the only ones to have had such thoughts.....the shelves where the boxes of wine are kept are practically empty. Luckily there are a couple left of our usual brand, so we gratefully grab them, and DH grabs some beers and we breathe a sigh of relief that we got there just in time. After we pay, the teller squirts our hands with sanitiser and wishes us 'good luck'. It's not "Have a nice day" anymore, but "Good Luck!". It seems we won't be having 'nice' days for a while, we'll be having challenging days!



Broadmead's Mall is virtually empty

We move on to Thrifty's to discover that things have radically changed in the week since we were last here; people are asked to line up outside the door, with a 1 metre distance between us each in the line. Luckily there simply aren't many people out shopping, so the line soon moves forward and we are allowed in. However, we are not allowed to bring our reusable bags with us, nor any recyclable returns. The cart handles have been pre-wiped for us. Once in the store, there are so few people, that social distancing is easy, and we quickly move around, grab what we need and are soon out of there. The shelves are pretty well stocked and we find everything we need – yes, even toilet paper! If only grocery shopping were always this easy.....But I'm not going to lie - the whole experience feels really weird, from start to finish; the almost empty parking lot, the lack of people, the shuttered door ways, being squirted with sanitiser, the restricted entry to the store and the deliberate keeping away from everyone and people avoiding each other. I'm sure we'll get used to it, but for now it's weird and it's not a good weird either.



Back at home, there is bad news; our son in law's company (search engine optimisation for high end shopping items) is having to close down permanently, and he has been made redundant, as from next week. He is a software developer, and extremely good at his job, so normally none of us would have any worries about him finding a new job, but right now? This is another stress to an already stressful time, but we know our family is not alone, and many are facing the redundancy challenge right now. We'll pull together and get through, but I'm praying he finds a good new job quickly. Will that be possible in this time of crisis?

#### Email voices:

##### L – dietician in London area, England

*Curry's cancelled my dishwasher installation this afternoon due to social distancing! They were happy to just leave the new machine outside the house .... I declined.*

*Having said that, things are a bit dire here as no doubt you will have learnt. At my hospital we are increasing to 140 ITU beds from 20 and as all the ventilated patients will be tube fed, I am being diverted to help with this.*

##### H – Delta, BC

*It's such a scary and unusual time in history, isn't it? My brother-in-law joked that there will be a baby boom in 9 months!*

*V's sister had a baby boy, yesterday. Unfortunately, the hospitals are only allowing 1 person to be with the mother and no visitors.*

*We are doing well. G is not playing pickleball anymore. Yesterday, he was in front of his computer on a "virtual" photo club meeting with 9 people. I have to admit that I'm drinking more wine and eating more chocolate and chips than I should be. I've been doing some charity sewing and lots of reading. Instead of fitness classes, I've been going for walks with friends and having coffee outside (we bring our own coffee & lawn chairs and keep 2 arm lengths apart). We are still doing our own occasional shopping but luckily have gloves, hand sanitizers and wash our hands all the time. My*



hands are so chapped!

J had a scratchy throat (probably allergies), but is worried that she could spread it to us 65+ year olds. On Thursday, she and the baby came by to pick up a few things and we had a short visit outside, keeping our distance while they stayed in the car. I really miss spending time with the baby!

B – Abbotsford, BC

This Covid 19 pandemic is worry some on so many fronts. Who foresaw this happening? We're not visiting with our kids. I try to talk to all every day.

Monday, whatever date it is, 24th?

Well, thankfully, here we all are. What horrendous times, and yet so thankful for health, for family and friends, for brilliant weather last week, for a fairly full freezer and VERY full cupboards that I've been meaning to sort through for a long time! We can feed the neighbourhood if needs come to it!

Talked with P in France this morning. Things there even stricter and harder than here.

Her daughter and daughter in law are both nurses and one works on the emergency ward. P said that now, the majority of new cases were under 60 yrs old! She also said that the nurses in the family warned that the speed with which Covid goes from a cough to needing a ventilator to be able to breathe, is incredibly fast. A little alarming.



## TUESDAY 24th MARCH

Today's News: Various leaders of various countries make announcements to their populations. They are not, as you might expect, similar in content to each other, but vary wildly, broadly falling into the clichés you might expect from that country. Fascinating.

Canadian deaths: 26                      World-wide deaths: 18,894

You'd think in this time of global panic, there would be a global response, but no, it is quite intriguing to see how the different politicians, leaders and populations are dealing with this. We are now some weeks into the crisis – some countries ahead of the curve in mortality and case numbers (Asia, Iran and much of Europe), and some are just behind them, including many of those of us in the Americas, but with almost 19,000 dead from Coronavirus so far, it is seen by most as the world's most pressing concern. Yesterday, Trudeau gave Canadians a firm message – a bit of a telling off really – and other leaders followed his lead today, including a determined looking Boris Johnson in the UK, who said: *"I must give the British people a very simple instruction – you MUST stay home"*.

In Italy, several mayors are not quite as restrained in their language as Trudeau and Johnson, as their frustration boils over, but the message about staying home, and social distancing, is clearly the same. Massimiliano Presciutti, the mayor of Reggio Calabria, is angry that people are using their dogs as an excuse to leave their house for unnecessary reasons: *"Where the f\*\*\* are you all going? You and your dogs... which must have an inflamed prostate?"*

Antonio Tutolo, the mayor of Lucera: *"Getting in mobile hairdressers? What the f\*\*\* is that for? Who the f\*\*\* is supposed to even see you with your hair all done in a casket? Do you understand the casket will be closed?"*.

And from India, we see images on our TV screens of the police just taking to anyone they see outside with sticks and cudgels and beating them up, on the spot! They have decided on instant physical beating of anyone they see breaking isolation rules. Well, you can't ignore that message I guess!!

At the other end of the spectrum, we have a couple of countries denying the existence of the virus outright! We all laugh as Russia declares that there are absolutely no cases of Coronavirus in its vast country (which borders on China and Europe let's not forget, 2 areas rife with it). It does casually admit that, co-incidentally, it has 1 or 2 additional cases of *pneumonia* at the moment, but definitely no Coronavirus. And Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro is also busy denying the existence of Covid 19, paranoidly declaring it all a plot against him: *"The people will soon see that they were tricked by these governors and by the large part of the media when it comes to coronavirus. It is a shameless campaign, a colossal and absurd campaign against the head of state ... They want to force me out however possible."*

Meanwhile, in America, Trump behaves in a predictable way and is busy looking out for no 1. Despite the country having the second highest number of mortalities in the world today, and the highest number of new cases in the world today, he declares: *"This country wasn't made to be shut down!"*. And the man who has fired his pandemic response team and denies all of the advice of his medical advisors, announces that he'll have everybody back at work again in no time – hinting at 15 days being the actual time. Time will tell how this plays out.

The Lt. Governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, supports Trump and says: *"No one reached out to me and said, 'As a senior citizen, are you willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping*

*the America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren?’ And if that is the exchange, I’m all in. My message is that let’s get back to work, let’s get back to living. Let’s be smart about it and those of us who are 70+, we’ll take care of ourselves. But don’t sacrifice the country.”*

As for us, after much dithering and discussion, we decide to postpone putting our house up for sale. Although the housing market hasn’t actually been shut down yet, we feel it isn’t really in the spirit of the social distancing thing to set up a situation encouraging people to leave their homes to view ours. It feels the right decision to make. And besides, if the Shelter in Place order comes down soon, it would be pointless anyway. So we tell our realtor not to list it this week as planned, and then wonder if we’ve done the right thing as house prices are predicted to fall once life is back to ‘normal’ and everyone recovers. Have we lost money by doing this? Probably, but it feels right and now we can just focus on doing what we’ve been told, by staying apart from everyone else, and enjoying the whole ‘adventure’ of it as much as possible. The longer this goes on, the more we’ll pay to have our things in storage, but it can’t be helped. And besides DH is fighting off something (vague achiness), so we really should just stay in and try and get better, and not share what we have, whatever it is.

So we stay in, and actually it turns out to be a very sociable afternoon; I enjoy over an hour on Skype with my dear friend M in Calgary, and then another hour with G in Sao Paolo, Brazil. It’s really great to catch up with them and hear how they are coping. G looks well, but, as he says, coping with a pandemic in a city the size of Sao Paolo is not easy; the food stores are as crowded as ever, with no social distancing measures in place at all, and people are still popping to the stores daily to pick up fresh food items, as is their custom. Government offices and banks have closed down though, as well as most non-essential stores, so daily life is quite difficult, especially as they have to supervise care for his elderly in-laws. He predicts that *“you can’t keep Brazilians locked indoors for long. If it goes on for longer than 2 weeks, there’ll be burning cars and riots in the streets”*. He also tells us of local graffiti which says *“Welcome to hell, Coronavirus!”*. The feeling being that they’re already dealing with dengue, zika and malaria, so one more into the mix can’t make much difference. We can only watch from a distance, hope that he and his wife Gi stay safe, and hope it doesn’t turn nasty.

**You thought dogs  
were hard to train.**

**Look at all the  
humans that can’t  
even  
sit and stay**

## WEDNESDAY 25th MARCH

Today's News: UK has just announced that it is working with a quick, cheap, testing kit, (from China?) and Amazon will be able to deliver it. (Update: April 5<sup>h</sup>: scientists warned that the 17.5m antibody home testing kits ordered by the government might fail to detect up to half of coronavirus cases).

Canadian deaths: 36

World-wide deaths: 21,282

With everyone at home, the whole country shut down and with all of us feeling practical and emotional impacts, it's beginning to feel like we're in the calm before the storm, but there is no actual storm here yet. Canadian death numbers are slowly creeping up, but so far these are all either very old people in care homes, or ill people, who may well have died within this time frame anyway.

**For people who still don't  
take it seriously.**

### **ITALY:**

**February 23: 155 Cases**

**February 28: 888 Cases**

**March 18: 41,035 Cases**

### **Canada**

**March 13: 150 Cases**

**March 19: 801 Cases**

**Wash your hands  
Do your Part  
Stay at Home**

Yesterday, this image appeared on Facebook. It looks very scary as the first 2 numbers are almost identical matches for each other. But here we are, 6 days after March 19<sup>th</sup>, so surely, if we were going to see an explosion in cases similar to Italy, we'd have had SOME increase in numbers by now, something between the 800 and the 41,000? Obviously, our population being only a third of Italy's, we're not going to see the same total numbers, but if we're all on the same curve, I would be expecting to see higher increases by now. Our hospitals are 60% empty in preparation, and 100s of new ventilators have been ordered in. But are we going to actually need them??? I mean, it's a good thing if our country doesn't suffer the numbers of deaths others have. It would mean that we acted in time and caught it, and that's fantastic, but as the editorial in the Times Colonist says today, is the cure worse than the illness? Here's part of that editorial here:

*If there is such a thing as curing a disease but killing the patient, the measures used to fight the Covid-10 virus have that feel. Countries around the globe appear to be competing with one another to see which can take the most draconian steps..... The rationale behind the measures taken is a version of better safe than sorry. And certainly our governments are right to be prepared. But at any cost? In B.C. alone, by the time the virus outbreak is over, hundreds, if not thousands, of small businesses will have been lost forever, and nothing the federal government can do with financial aid will avert a disaster on this scale. Worldwide, the economic impact will be devastating. We're talking a return of the Dirty 30's, and damage that lasts for years. And people will die, of desperation, despair at losing their life savings, through overdosing on street drugs. ....there is a distressing back drop to all this: A lack of evidence that such desperate measures have worked elsewhere. Italy brought in the toughest measures, and it's death toll has soared. Countries such as Japan and Taiwan took a calmer approach and have not seen a death toll as severe. Could it be that life as normal, but with a strict adherence to basic precautions, is the correct approach? .....What we can say is that we do not know enough about this disease...to employ measures that of a certainty will wreck the economy for years to come.*

Interestingly, there is no author name to the editorial, but just the 'Times Colonist Editorial Board', and there is no on-line version of it either. It's as if no-one dares to own up individually to questioning the measures, because of prevailing public opinion and social shaming (which I have witnessed in various community forums already). But we are beginning to wonder how long it will be, if we *don't*

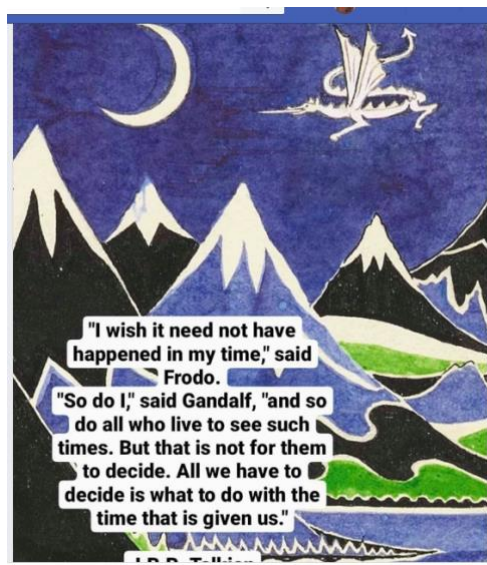


have drastically increased death numbers, before people start getting seriously antsy about the lasting damage being done to the country and its people. Canada is clearly aware of this and hasn't implemented a Shelter in Place order yet, and Bonnie Henry of BC says she doesn't feel it's necessary. Let's hope they're right. They sure have a tough line to tread, trying to get the balance right.

A few hours later, and I have another perspective on the crisis from a country where the situation is a lot worse – England. A long Facetime chat with my dear friend L, who works in one of the big London hospitals in the UK, gives insight into working on the front lines of this fight, and frankly it sounds very worrying. L is not one given to drama – she's been in the medical system all of her life and is also a guide leader and a practical soul – but she described the situation there as “terrifying”. The UK had been taking a more relaxed approach to the self isolation rules, figuring that it would damage the economy of the country too much to shut everything down, and that the Coronavirus deaths would be from within the elderly population. (Nature taking its course). However, L tells me that a few young people are now dying, and what is also worrying, is that the hospitals are running out of (or in some cases actually have run out of) the full face, plastic protective masks for the staff to wear, and the medical staff are now getting sick, and, in some cases, dying. She mentioned going to a senior staff planning meeting where those staff were all crowded into a small meeting room – no social distance – and guess what, many of those staff are now sick. It sounds chaotic and very scary. A makeshift centre – The Nightingale Centre - of 4000 extra beds is being put together in a local arena. They're expecting it to get worse. I don't like the thought of my dear friend dealing closely with intensive care Covid-19 patients, without the proper protective clothing to wear. She is a caring and wonderful person, who would give her all to help others, but it's frightening that she's not properly protected.

She's not the only one on the front lines; her daughter, R has been co-opted from the military to the police, to help with the organisation of the disposal of the bodies and mass burials. Now that's a grim task for a young person! L feels that the UK is just now going into the worst phase of the pandemic and that the next two weeks will be frightening and very grim. We both talk of the encouragement of Italy now seeing a reduction in their numbers, so we all know the end will come, but poor old UK has a tough time ahead of it in the next two weeks. I'm going to be thinking of dear L and R, hoping they stay safe and sane.

And as for Canada? We continue to wait and see.....





## FRIDAY 27th MARCH

### Today's News:

USA, with 100,000 cases so far, now has the most cases of Coronavirus in the world, with half of their 1,500 deaths so far being in New York.

BC invokes emergency powers; to requisition rec centres and convention centres etc (for emergency health treatment centres), to ban the re-sale of medical supplies and cleaning products (to stop profiteering), and to introduce rationing on some items (to ensure flow of supplies).

In UK, it is the first time that someone is jailed for coughing; a guy being arrested for something else, deliberately coughed into the arresting policeman's face. This was counted as assault and he is now facing 12 weeks in jail.

Canadian deaths: 53            World-wide deaths: 27,344

It's been raining for the past couple of days, which adds to the overall gloomy feel of the situation as I hear more scary stats and stories from the UK, and we see images on the news of giant freezer trucks over there, backing up to hospital back doors to collect the bodies. These are the images of horror movies and it is slightly surreal to see them portrayed as happening NOW, in our former home country. We, meanwhile, feel quite cocooned; we are comfortable in our home, we have lots to keep us busy, we know our family are all safe, and we know we have a lot to be grateful for. Our only 'task' as such, is to stay isolated and away from all other people (especially as DH and I are *still* fighting off this mild infection). We are told by our government that we are 'serving the country' by doing this, but frankly, although my head knows that to be true, my heart doesn't feel as if we are contributing much. But let's be honest, it's the easiest of ways to serve, and while not feeling on top form, it's actually kind of nice to be given an excuse to retreat and refresh.

It's also been quite a sociable time, ironically, and we have enjoyed Facetime and Skype chats with various friends – yesterday with dear friend B from Abbotsford, and last night a 2 hour Virtual Wine and Cheese get together with H and G in Delta. Lovely! Technology really does make all of the difference in this. Thank goodness we have it, and good communication with the world around us. Keeping in touch, and knowing what is going on, both in our own backyard and across the world, feels very important while we are holed up at home.



Talking of communication methods, someone on Facebook has posted a pattern for making your own face mask, as the stores all ran out long ago. Being made of cotton fabric, they won't be as effective as the N95 masks that the medical workers are all crying out for, but they'll be better than nothing in an emergency, and apparently they keep *your* germs *in* if you have to go out. And they're washable and re-usable, so that's good. So I rummage in my fabric boxes and find pretty fabrics, and some elastic, and set to with scissors and sewing machine and make a couple of prototypes. And you know what, they work -They actually fit! Now to make them for everyone! That'll keep me busy today!

# How to make a Face Mask

## What you will need

- Cotton fabric, a pretty print is best.
- Rope Elastic, beading cord elastic will work (you may also use 1/8" flat elastic)
- Cut the elastic 7" long and tie a knot at each end (DO NOT knot the ends of the flat)

You can make two sizes: Adult or Child

1. Put right sides of cotton fabric together
  - o Cut 9x6 (Adult) or 7.5 x 5 (Child)
2. Starting at the center of the bottom edge, sew to the first corner, stop. Sew the elastic with the edge out into the corner. A few stitches forward and back will hold this.
3. Sew to the next corner, stop, and bring the other end of the same elastic to the corner and sew a few stitches forward and back.
4. Now sew across that top of the mask to the next corner. Again put an elastic with the edge out.
5. Sew to the next corner and sew in the other end of the same elastic.
6. Sew across the bottom leaving about 1.5" to 2" open. Stop, cut the thread. Turn inside out.
7. Pin 3 tucks on each side of the mask. Make sure the tucks are the same direction
8. Sew around the edge of the mask twice.

It is so easy to make this.

## Email voices:

### B - Victoria

*I've just heard from J, that he will be working at home starting on Monday :) This comes as a big relief. Sounds like they're making the final move to closing the office, so everyone will be either working from home or on EI. He said there's only about 50 people left working on-site, most of them are clearly sick, and the phone lines are completely swamped because of so many people being on leave or working out the kinks in home office situations. So the office has become a pretty unpleasant place to be (J said one guy in particular who works near him seems \*very\* sick, unsettlingly so).*



*I must say, I've been very impressed with how well our government is handling this. The speed with which they've rolled out all this financial aid and safety measures, the amount of money they were able to pour into this and how readily they've done so, and the waiving of so much of the regular red tape and due process in people actually getting that aid, has been much better than I would have expected from a government. Trudeau is doing well - it'd be nice to see a bit more gratitude from the public toward his government really, people are so ungrateful :P*

## SUNDAY 29th MARCH

### Today's News:

Dr Bonnie Henry (BC's chief medical officer) tells us that she is cautiously optimistic that BC may have caught it in time; our curve is already flattening due to everyone self isolating.

Canadian deaths: 65

World-wide deaths: 34,065

Our life is quickly settling into an 'at home' routine. Truth be told, I'm quite happy to have some quiet time – the introvert side of the nature coming out – and so am happy to just potter quietly. DH and I do our daily Qi Gong stretches when we first get up (30 minutes), DH does his weights (30 minutes) and we both do our 45 minutes on the static exercise bike, though to be honest he is way better at all this than I am. He challenges himself on the bike more determinedly, while I pedal along while watching some dross reality TV show, such as *Interior Design Challenge*, or *Love your Garden!* Or some such mindless thing. But that's ok - we're both still getting some exercise and are grateful to have bought this equipment last year, just in time for this time of enforced at home-ness. Once the exercise is 'out of the way' (you can tell what I really think of it!!), then I enjoy my knitting, my journaling, our 2 player board games, reading, pottering in the garden, crafts and making things, or going for a walk in the neighbourhood (obviously social distancing as requested) – the choice of activities is endless and I feel a bit guilty really, that life for us is physically very comfortable while elsewhere in the world others are struggling.

Our walk around the neighbourhood today is lovely; the sun is shining, all of the blossoms and spring flowers are out, tra la la, Hello Clouds, Hello Sky. There are also quite a lot of couples or singles out walking / cycling / jogging and again everyone is super respectful of each other's distance, making a joke of it if actual avoidance is needed ("I'll hug the tree, you run across the road"). There are folks mowing their lawns, or doing yard work, or cleaning their gutters. Everyone keeping at least the required 2 metres from each other, but keeping busy and active. People are smiling and enjoying just being outdoors and seeing that life is indeed carrying on. It is encouraging and cheers us up enormously.

And we are very lucky that we enjoy regular email contact and Skype / Facetime contact with friends and family. We enjoyed a lovely chat yesterday with our friends J and A in England, who told us a wonderful story of a 102 old man in the UK who caught and survived the Spanish flu as a baby, and has now caught, and survived, Coronavirus 102 years later. Coming into life and ending life surviving a pandemic. Those are remarkable 'bookends'. And today I have a group Skype booked with my bros. Again, thank goodness for technology, even if I do struggle with it!!

### Email voices:

#### G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*Did you hear that the German finance minister was found dead in an apparent suicide, believed to have been struggling with the effects of managing the economic consequences of the virus. I hate to say, 'I told you so', but this type of collateral damage was eminently foreseeable. Meanwhile, our president is out pressing the flesh once again. I guess now that he has had the virus (something he denied, of course, being an idiot macho-man, even though his son admitted his father had had the virus after 27 of his party that went to the USA with him, went down with it), he doesn't fear the virus anymore, so is out 'bravely' meeting and greeting the people.*

*São Paulo, meanwhile, is the epicenter of the virus here, with a number of younger individuals apparently killed. However, I did my regular 'weekly-shop' in the 'cheap' (but very nice) supermarket about half-a-mile from here, arriving as usual just after 8am, and things were all remarkably normal. Nothing appeared to be in short supply, and I even managed to buy bacterial soap. As usual for that time of day, the clientele were mostly older than me, and some were wearing masks, but the store was only marginally busier than usual. I'm starting to hope that a sense of calm may yet prevail here.*

### *H – London, England*

*Here things are pretty odd to say the least. L is in bed with severe back pain - a side effect of the hip. We expect his appointment to be cancelled again as the NHS have pretty much locked down everything - including cancer treatments etc. My friend K just made it back from NZ on Tuesday - she said all airports had about 3 flights at most, even the busy hubs. Frankly they were lucky to get back as everything is locked down. We can't even take the car to an open space to have a walk now - even if we were clear, which we're not. Lu, being a physio, is high risk but comes out of 'isolation' - not easy in a house with one bathroom and one do-it-all room downstairs!! - on Monday. Now they promise to start testing front line staff and they need to wear safety masks, gowns etc for ALL patients - hitherto not the case. When the doctors are dying you know it's bad. They are doing the same as Italy, converting huge exhibition centres to cope with the growing numbers of cases - it's all unprecedented. I'm very lucky as, to date, I've still got work. The rhythm of that, as well as the challenges to address, keep me in some sort of a pattern, but still the days are merging into each other, and so is time. I've decided I need a timetable to make sense of this and keep me from going flabby and mad!*



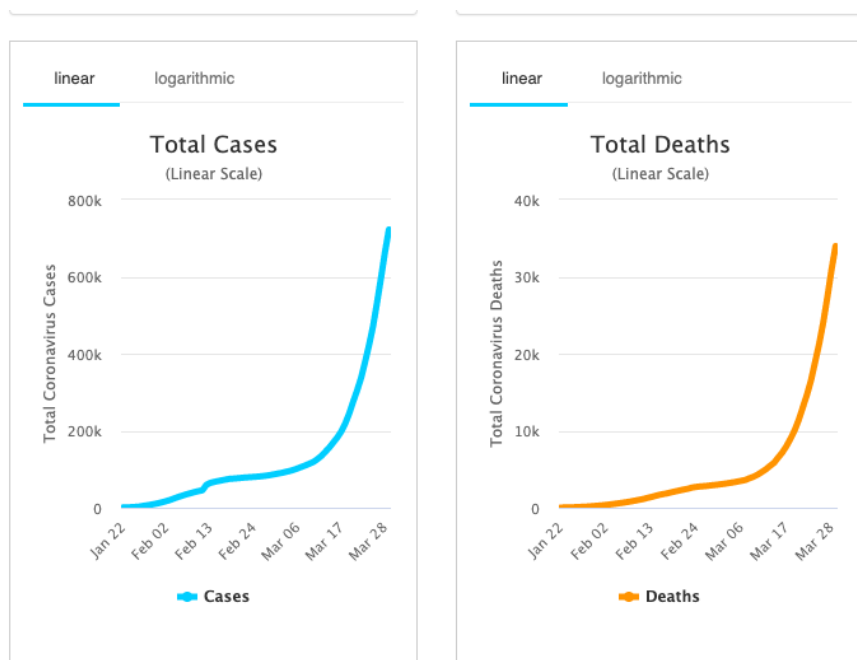
## MONDAY 30th MARCH

### Today's News:

The UK announces that the enforced Shelter in Place order might well last for 6 months.

Canadian deaths: 92

World-wide deaths: 37,773



Although BC has seen a slight flattening of the curve, and there are some slight signs of similar optimism in other places, the numbers around the globe continue to rise dramatically. The chart here (from Worldometer.com) shows both the increase in new cases, and in mortality rates, expressed linearly, and the charts clearly tell their own story. The numbers are rising steeply across the world and none of us have any idea whatsoever when they will flatten off. We can take some encouragement that China is gradually opening up the Wuhan area again, but it's difficult to really know the true situation from that country.....

There was a good article shared on Facebook today by Aisha Ahmad, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Toronto. She has lived through and is a specialist researcher in, crisis situations around the world (war, famine, disease, refugee camps etc) and her article described how we all cope with such an event in 3 stages:

### *Stage No. 1: Security*

*Your first few days and weeks in a crisis are crucial, and you should make ample room to allow for a mental adjustment. It is perfectly normal and appropriate to feel bad and lost during this initial transition. Consider it a good thing that you are not in denial, and that you are allowing yourself to work through the anxiety. No sane person feels good during a global disaster, so be grateful for the discomfort of your sanity. At this stage, I would focus on food, family, friends, and maybe fitness. (You will not become an Olympic athlete in the next two weeks, so don't put ridiculous expectations on your body.). It is OK that you keep waking up at 3 a.m. It is OK that you forgot to eat lunch and cannot do a Zoom yoga class. Know that you are not failing. Let go of all of the profoundly daft ideas you have about what you should be doing right now. Instead, focus intensely on your physical and psychological security. Your first priority during this early period should be securing your home. Get sensible essentials for your pantry, clean your house, and make a coordinated family plan. Have reasonable conversations with your loved ones.*

### *Stage No. 2: The Mental Shift*

*Once you have secured yourself and your team, you will feel more stable, your mind and body will adjust, and you will crave challenges that are more demanding. Given time, your brain can and will reset to new crisis conditions, and your ability to do higher-level work will resume. However, do not*

*rush or prejudge your mental shift, especially if you have never experienced a disaster before. One of the most relevant posts I saw on Twitter was: "Day 1 of Quarantine: 'I'm going to meditate and do body-weight training.' Day 4: \*just pours the ice cream into the pasta\*" — it's funny but it also speaks directly to the issue.*

### *Stage No. 3: Embrace a New Normal*

*On the other side of this shift, your wonderful, creative, resilient brain will be waiting for you. When your foundations are strong, build a weekly schedule that prioritizes the security of your home team, and then carve out time blocks for different categories of your work. Do the easy tasks first and work your way into the heavy lifting. Wake up early. Things will start to feel more natural. The work will also make more sense, and you will be more comfortable about changing or undoing what is already in motion. New ideas will emerge that would not have come to mind had you stayed in denial.*

***Understand that this is a marathon. If you sprint at the beginning, you will vomit on your shoes by the end of the month. Emotionally prepare for this crisis to continue for 12 to 18 months, followed by a slow recovery. If it ends sooner, be pleasantly surprised. Right now, work toward establishing your serenity, productivity, and wellness under sustained disaster conditions. None of us knows how long this crisis will last. We all want our troops to be home before Christmas. The uncertainty is driving us all mad.***

*Of course, there will be a day when the pandemic is over. We will hug our neighbors and our friends. We will return to our classrooms and coffee shops. Our borders will eventually reopen to freer movement. Our economies will one day recover from the forthcoming recessions. Yet we are just at the beginning of that journey. For most people, our minds have not come to terms with the fact that the world has already changed. On the other side of this journey of acceptance are hope and resilience. We will know that we can do this, even if our struggles continue for years. We will be creative and responsive, and will find light in all the nooks and crannies. And we will help each other. No matter what happens next, together, we will be blessed and ready to serve.*

I like this article which sounds like common sense to me, but I am very aware that I'm not anywhere near stage 3 yet. One thing I'm struggling with is the thought that this might go on for months. So far, it's been "well, it's like flu and it'll be over like a regular flu season in a few weeks". We've been thinking ahead, to when we might be able to put the house on the market, and keeping it ready to be shown (as if it might be next week). We've been thinking about the summer outings and trips we might do (eg the one we have planned to Tofino for a few days in July with dear friends B, R, K and D) – it hadn't occurred to me that it might not actually happen. Surely we won't still be all staying at home by then?? That's 3 months away!!! But we might. That's what we're beginning to hear, as in the UK announcement today where they talk of a 6 month lockdown. Blimey, that would take us to the beginning of October! We're booked to fly to UK and onto Kenya in mid October to film a charity video there. Surely it won't last that long?? But it might.

Thus far this pandemic has been a shock to the system, which we've been slowly adjusting to. In the 3 stages system, we are very fortunate and have our security set up; we have our home and our food and somewhere safe just to be. I've had the virus (I think), I've survived it and am ok self isolating at home with DH. But only now is it beginning to sink in that this is perhaps a new longer term reality and here to stay for a while. I guess we're maybe moving towards stage 2, but stage 3 feels like a long way away. Surely this isn't really going to last 12 – 18 months??? But it might.

## TUESDAY 31st MARCH

### Today's News:

18 cruise ships, loaded with passengers and crew, are still sailing around the world, desperately looking for somewhere to dock. Nobody wants them unloading in their area!

Domestic violence crisis help lines in Vancouver are recording a 300% rise in emergency calls.

Canadian deaths: 101

World-wide deaths: 42,309

Dear Husband, worried about the mass hysteria surrounding the virus, and the damage it could cause, has been doing some research and has come up with the following statistics:

Canada has had 101 Covid deaths in the 2 months of the virus so far. The average monthly death rate for Canada is 23,000. It is highly probable that some of those 101 deaths would have been in the 46,000 (for the 2 months) numbers anyway, so in actual fact, less than 100 people will have died due to the virus. How many will die from suicide, drug abuse, partner violence, postponed cancer treatments and other medical treatments, etc due to the stresses of this time? Even if you extrapolate those results and do the same comparison for Italy, the worst hit country in the world so far, they have had 11,500 Covid deaths in the same 2 month time span that they would normally have 120,000 deaths in. It's an interesting perspective, and one ripe for philosophical debate.

On a lighter note, a new result of the virus lockdown is being seen....wild animals coming into town! Here's an article from the Guardian newspaper in UK:



*Goats' town ... the visitors enjoy the quiet streets near Trinity Square, Llandudno.  
Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA*

**Name:** Llandudno.

**Population:** About 15,000. Until now ...

*Taking advantage of the deserted streets because of the coronavirus lockdown, a posse of Great Orme goats has moved into*

*town and is running riot. **Oh my God, it's really happening. The animals are already taking over.** It does really seem to be that nature is returning to the towns and cities of the world. They ate a few hedges in the Trinity Square area of town. They trespassed in several front gardens and ran across a road without looking properly. A man named Andrew Stuart spotted them from the window of the pub he lives in. They weren't keeping the required two metres apart, he observed. And who is Mr Stuart gonna call?*

**Goatbusters?** *Actually, North Wales Police, to whom this particular herd was already well known. They recently caused some damage to a primary school, Ysgol San Sior, and munched their way through a load of newly planted trees. The headteacher, Ian Jones, called them "vandals". **Just don't call it the nanny state. Anyway, what happened?** A squad car was sent and the animals were shepherded (goat-herded?) out of town. **Yeah, for now! Where do they normally live?** In the north Wales mountains. There are said to be about 120 of them. Descended from the goats of the mountains of Kashmir.*

Email voices:

E - Rouen, France

*We are now seeing things we have never seen before! Wild boar and deer are coming down from the forests and roaming the streets. We saw on the news yesterday that ducks are walking through the streets of Paris! This has to be occurring because vehicle and foot traffic is almost non-existent and so an opportunity presents.*

*I will shop for the next two weeks tomorrow. I have ordered/paid for everything on line and will simply drive to the pick-up points where it will be loaded into the car. I will then drive straight home. We will leave the shopping in the garage for a few hours just in case!*

J – Stratford on Avon, England

*Funnily enough, I have been reading Daniel Defoe's 'Journal of the Plague year' in 1665 and I was struck by the similarities with today: Defoe noted that people were walking in the middle of the road in an empty Holburn to avoid contact with infection from the houses or the residents and J described exactly the same thing happening in Glasgow yesterday: people walking in the middle of the deserted streets to avoid brushing past others on the pavements.*

*Defoe wrote that in 1665, the authorities were looking 'severely unto'... 'disorderly tippling houses, alehouses and coffee houses' which were still serving customers when instructed not to and in the last few days the press has been reporting that some pub landlords have been holding illegal secret lock-ins for regulars. In 1665, the court fled London for the countryside and we have recently learned that despite the Government's advice that no one should be travelling to their second homes, Prince Charles turns up at Balmoral, complete with the virus. It seems we have learned nothing in the last few centuries.*

*We are more connected to family and friends now than we have ever been, via Whatsapp, phone and email, and I know that the elderly folk we're in touch with are actually loving this extra time spent talking to others. In a bizarre sort of way, from what we've seen, self-isolation has actually reduced loneliness for a lot of folk out there. The streets here are very quiet indeed – so quiet in fact that I've started to identify different bird calls which I couldn't before, because there was too much background noise. I recognise that we are incredibly fortunate to have life this easy and that it is not typical, but I think it's important, as you do, to record what you observe.*

As people shelter in place and streets remain empty,  
the wildlife is returning to Inverness, Scotland ...





## WEDNESDAY 1st APRIL

### Today's News:

It's April 1<sup>st</sup>, and the joke is on us. No-body is laughing.

Bonnie Henry has said that we may be under restrictions at home / social distancing until June, with a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave coming back in the autumn.

Canadian deaths: 129

World-wide deaths: 47,198

The Times Colonist posted this on its front page today, reinforcing the point that we are in this for the long haul:

*B.C. Health Minister Adrian Dix says there's "zero chance" any of the COVID-19 orders now in place will change by the end of April. "What it looks like in May or June or July is harder to say. A lot of it depends on whether people are committed, as I believe they are."*

*At a news conference with Dix on Tuesday, provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said the first wave of the virus will likely last at least the next few weeks and into May, with a second phase expected in the fall.*

*She is hopeful of a reprieve during the summer, if all restrictions and recommendations are followed in the crucial weeks ahead. Some form of COVID-19 monitoring and restrictions will likely be in place until a vaccine is found, said Henry*

*In an address broadcast Tuesday evening, Premier John Horgan asked people to stick with the advice of public health officials by staying home as much as possible and to keep physical distance from others. "We need 100% commitment from everyone to get this done," he said.*

Canada's numbers are still not too scary, with a total of 129 deaths so far, (and for some reason, most of these are in Quebec, the province struggling the most with this disease right now), but numbers from other countries tell the stories of heart break; Spain has almost 1,000 deaths just today, (for a total of nearly 10,000), Italy has yet another day with about 800 deaths (for a total of over 13,000) and USA is now in the thick of it with 700 or so deaths today (for a total of almost 5,000). Even Trump has conceded that his original idea of having everything 'back to work' by Easter Sunday (ie less than 2 weeks' time) is not realistic, and has now given the end of April as a minimum lock down date. The USA are relative latecomers to the game, so we all worry that they are in for a very difficult next few weeks.

But we have also become aware of some other shocking statistics .....

69 Italian doctors have died so far.

That's a shocking and very sad loss and must make all health workers nervous about working through this pandemic. One health worker being interviewed on CBC last night, reckoned that many of them will be suffering from PTSD after this is over. 60 though, in one country. All previously fully healthy. Trying to help others.

Only 20% of those who are bad enough to need ventilators, survive.

Actually, the CBC news item started off by saying that only 1% of those on ventilators survive, but then quoted a doctor saying 20%, so let's go with that. Until I watched this news item, I ignorantly assumed that ventilators were masks over your face, delivering oxygen. Actually no, they are tubes that are passed down your throat and right into your lungs, delivering 100% oxygen, so by the time you are on those things, you are really at the point of not being able to survive without intervention. I had assumed that if you had that oxygen, you'd be ok though, so it is a real shock to me to discover that only 20% of those (max) on ventilators survive. And apparently, after a few days of your lungs being on 100% oxygen, the lungs become permanently damaged anyway. Didn't know that either. So if you get to a ventilator, you have a chance, but it's a slim one.

About time for a positive statistic I think...Ottawa is throwing more billions at the situation to cover various aspects of it, (including paying 75% of the salaries of ALL workers in the whole country, if their company has lost a minimum of 30% income, and keeps them on), and the Greater Victoria Rapid Relief Fund is now at \$3 million. Wow. That's wonderful. The money is given straight to the charities which are disbursing it to those in need, as quickly as it comes in. Positive news.



Meanwhile, my brother R has gone to his 400 square foot cottage, hidden on a small island, for the duration. It's remote, is on a fair sized acreage, with a vegetable garden, and he is guaranteed not to see a soul the whole time he is there. He is lucky to have it to escape to, a refuge where he will be safe, active outdoors and happy in his home in the wilderness for however long this takes. It means there is no danger of him bringing the virus home to T either, so both of them can ride out the pandemic in their own safe retreats. Both being in their 70's, the safest thing is for them to see no-one at all. Good job they are both good at being self sufficient and living the hermit life for months at a time! The photo is of R with as many fresh food supplies as he can carry in, bearing in mind he has to walk a distance to the property on rough tracks!

As for me? I am grateful because today C from Edmonton kindly sends me a link to a free on-line veggie gardening course from the University of Oregon. A perfect and very productive distraction, which will hopefully have me focussing on happier times when all of this is over, and we can live out a 'normal' retirement!

## FRIDAY 3rd APRIL

### Today's News:

The number of cases in the world is officially over 1 million, though of course, we know that there are many more millions of undiagnosed cases.

Health organisations around the world are frantically searching for more protective equipment (N95 breathing masks, full face plastic masks, gloves, gowns) for their health workers.

Canadian deaths: 208

World-wide deaths: 59,174

The biggest concern at the moment, world-wide, is the lack of protective equipment for health care workers. My friend L, in a London hospital, told me of this some weeks ago, and the situation is now a lot worse. J and A in the UK, donated their welding goggles to the local hospital, to be used by staff. Things are that desperate. We are hearing stories of nurses being allocated ONE mask to use for a whole week (and thus of course the risk of cross contamination between patients, as well as the nurses themselves touching the virus when they take it on and off each time). Every government is scrambling for more supplies, and there are rumours of one government ordering and paying for a shipment, but then that shipment mysteriously disappearing before it can be delivered. If this truly is the problem it seems to be, the 69 dead doctors in Italy will soon be followed by many more medical staff around the world.

But it appears that the Americans have stooped to some rather underhand behaviour in their attempt to get hold of the needed equipment.....the first thing we learn is that Trump has ordered the US company 3M, to stop making and delivering N95 masks to Canada and Latin America, as they have been doing for years now, but to keep them all for the US. Keeping hold of equipment you make yourself, and renegeing on an agreement to sell it to others is one thing, but 2 separate articles in the papers today tell of 2 separate incidents of American piracy...in one incident, a shipment of masks, paid for by the French and on its way to Strasbourg, is intercepted on the runway in China where it is being sent from, the US representatives pull out cash, and pay 3 times the amount the French have paid, and waltz away with the masks. And almost immediately afterwards we hear of an identical incident in Thailand, where the shipment of masks had been bought by the Germans and was headed to Berlin. It's now in the hands of the Americans. This is cut throat stuff, and very disappointing to hear. How can one talk of international co-operation in times of a crisis, when one country behaves like this, blatantly stealing from another??

And internally, US states have found themselves competing *against each other and the federal government* for equipment. The New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, said that it was like "*being on eBay with 50 other states*". And State governors learned they could not rely on the rapidly depleting national stockpile, especially after Donald Trump made it clear that federal help would be affected by 'political preference', saying he wanted governors to be "*appreciative*". 'Appreciative????'. So, now we're talking political bribery and blackmail to get the equipment to save lives? I am speechless at what this man is allowed to openly say and get away with.

Here's another example which would be hilarious if it weren't so shocking that he can say it and get away with it. This is election year in the USA, and the democrats are part way through voting for their leader. The pandemic has obviously halted these elections, but Wisconsin is determined that the elections should go ahead to schedule, even without staff to open the polling stations (?!). Some have therefore suggested a Vote by Mail. To which Trump said that he could not allow Vote by Mail because "*if everyone were able to vote (by voting by mail), I would never get elected again*". So for that blatantly partisan reason, it cannot happen. And people accept it. Unbelievable.

Back in Victoria, K has developed symptoms of the virus, but is safely at home and not in too much discomfort, so we hope it will pass quickly, leaving her with immunity to the disease in the future. But later she messages us: *"My symptoms have gotten worse. Mild yet constant tightness and pain in my chest and I can't take deep breaths. I'm constantly feeling an urge to cough due to a heavy "water in my lungs" feeling. M has been a sweetheart and got up at 5am to make me a hot chocolate which helps a lot. Is there anything chocolate can't cure?"*

Not sure how she got it though as they have been rigorous about self isolating and not seeing anyone, except for shopping once every 2 weeks, like everyone else. Of course she may have got it from me somehow??? We kept the 2 metres distance when we saw each other, but was that in the 14 days prior to now? I'm really not sure. Hope she's going to be ok and it doesn't get any worse.....

The trouble is, time is beginning to blur and it's so hard to remember what happened when, or where we are time wise in all of this. Weeks seem like months, and yet the dates are passing; looking at my planner, I see that apart from 2 trips to the grocery, we've not been out or seen anyone in 3 weeks. During the 2 weeks before that, we only did one open house afternoon. So in effect, **we've been house bound and seen almost no-one for a total of FIVE WEEKS already**. So it feels like ages, and yet the time seems to have passed quickly. That doesn't make sense, I know. There is a popular meme going round: *Today is Blursday the 46<sup>th</sup> of Aprimay*. I know exactly what they mean! It's all a bit of an indistinct fog really.

I was told there would be more Zombies and  
Rioting...  
#WorstApocalypseEver



## SATURDAY 4<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Spain has lower death numbers for the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in a row, prompting hope they are over the peak

“As Russian cities go into lockdown to try to contain coronavirus, Moscow is using the latest technology to keep track of residents. City officials are using a giant network of tens of thousands of cameras - installed with facial recognition software - which they plan to couple with digital passes on people's mobile phones. It's prompted concern about whether such widespread surveillance will ever be rolled back”. (BBC News).

Canadian deaths: 228      World-wide deaths: 64,691 (as at noon)

I discovered an interesting fact yesterday.....the word 'Quarantine' comes from the Italian word, *Quarantina*, meaning 40 days, which was the traditional time of Quarantine for the Plague. It was the same amount of time that Jesus spent in the desert, and that we use for Lent. Clearly, 40 days is the time it was considered necessary to be 'shriven' ie cleansed, both physically and mentally.

Not so in the UK apparently; the UK quarantine period is 7 days if you live alone, or 14 days if you live with others (as of March 16<sup>th</sup>. It was 7 days for all, prior to that). For the rest of us, it's a mandatory 14 days no matter who you live with. That seems odd that the UK should go with 7, when we've been told the virus can quietly incubate for up to 14 days after you've caught it, but again it shows the wild differences in the ways that different countries are approaching the pandemic. Some have instituted rigid Shelter in Place orders, (New Zealand, Italy, Spain, France), some have not, (Sweden, Canada, USA). Some have insisted on mask wearing for everyone (Turkey), most have not. The one common factor that all countries share though, is that NONE of us are sufficiently prepared for such a disaster.

I know we weren't prepared. I wasn't prepared for how much I miss seeing my family. I want to see my daughters SO much. I want to give them a hug and catch up on the news and gossip face to face, to go for a walk or play a board game with them, share a meal.....just do all those normal family things that people do. I miss them and their partners. It's like a physical ache.

We weren't prepared for not being able to plan our lives. Not plan anything at all – not close plans, or distant plans. Everything we had planned is gone. We have an empty planner stretching away, and the few things we have written in the distance, are uncertain. We've lost control over our lives.

We weren't prepared for anxiety over every day things. DH describes it thus: *“the stress is way more mental than physical - our home, our society, is a weird foreign place where I don't know the rules any more, and nobody else does either, but they're quite strict. What is now acceptable and what's not? 2 weeks of not shopping – the longer I left it, the more scary it became. The longer you don't do it, the bigger the anxiety becomes. It's been a long time since I felt anxious about going shopping. It's a social anxiety – you have to re-learn the rules and they keep changing. Everyone keeps saying 'we're all in this together' but the whole point is to keep apart and distant from others. It makes you distrust others, and feel anxious to be around others. Going shopping becomes a huge anxiety – a monster in the mind. I'm almost afraid of what's going to be out there as each time we go out, it changes so much. When what is familiar and secure becomes stressful. Like having builders in your home, it means that your personal comfort space, your daily routine, and what you know becomes massively disrupted.”*

We weren't planned for any of this, and we are grieving the losses.

Email voices:

M – Devon, England

*I can still ride although I think most of us horse riders feel we must take extra care not to do anything risky and minimise the likelihood of a fall and the need for any sort of medical help. The biggest difficulty is not being able to hug our children and grandchildren but we chat and FaceTime.*

G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*Here, it's been another unusual week, confined to barracks for the most part, but also busy (with a welcome large translation, mostly). Then capped off with a funeral today - one of Gi's uncles passed yesterday (they don't waste any time in these parts). Arriving at the huge (green and pretty) cemetery, I was expecting to see hordes of people grieving corona-virus victims, but in the event we were the only people there, so I guess the virus has yet to fully reap its havoc here. I did notice 4 other graves prepared for later on though. Also interesting to see the workers dressed in fully anti-bio suits and masks - and spraying themselves (presumably with some sort of anti-bacterial liquid) after the burial was complete.*

J - Toronto

*I'm now feeling completely better, sometimes a bit itchy somewhere on my throat though. It's been fully 3 weeks staying at home and I now really want to go for a drive. But, Ontario government is not allowed to do it. I'd better go for a walk on Sunday or Monday. It's OK if we keep social distance.*

B – Beaconsfield, England

*As I am sure you know we are in lock down. Actually I find that is quite odd. Everywhere is quieter when we go on our allowed one walk of the day, or trip to buy groceries, with less traffic and fewer people around except other walkers or shoppers. The strangest thing is the lack of routine markers -no one leaving for work or school, no church services except on line, people not going out to weekly activities like Pilates and so on. In consequence it is often hard to decide that it really is a week day not a weekend and often hard to know which day!*

*All UK weddings have been halted by the government which is very tough for the couples involved but understandable with the policy of social distancing. Only funerals can take place and even then are restricted to a handful of immediate family.*

*On line shopping has boomed but unless you are elderly or have health issues it is very hard/impossible to sign up as a customer and get a delivery. Alcohol sales have boomed too and there are limits on many items to curb stockpiling. It is a bit like wartime.*

## SUNDAY 5<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Italy, Spain and BC are all cautiously optimistic as lower numbers continue to be recorded. UK PM, Boris Johnson is in hospital as, after 10 days of sickness, his Covid symptoms worsen. Iceland has been doing lots of Covid tests on people right since the beginning; anyone can have a test, and what they have now announced is that they reckon 50% of people who have the disease show no symptoms whatsoever, but just carry it. This of course explains why it spreads so well.

Canadian deaths: 277      World-wide deaths: 69,427

The headline news today seems to mostly all come from the UK: Boris Johnson has been ill with Coronavirus for some days now and has been working from home. We watched him give a televised announcement last night, and he was obviously not well; collapsed on his couch, his hair more dishevelled than usual and looking pale and sweaty, he clearly looked ill. So we are not surprised to hear he has today been taken into hospital. Whatever I may think of his politics and his egotistical buffoonery, I genuinely hope that he gets well quickly. Among other things, the country would be hard hit if they lost their leader – it would be very morale sapping.

Luckily, just when it's needed, the Queen has recorded a morale boosting speech. It's 7 minutes long and I watch it via the internet. Actually, it's a good speech and she delivers it well. It doesn't attempt to sugar coat the reality of what's happening, but she thanks the NHS and other workers who are keeping things going, and she thanks all those who are staying at home. She compares the separation from loved ones to the similar separation during the war. I've included some snippets here:  
*"Those that come after us, will say the Britons of this generation were as strong as any".*  
*"The pride in who we are is not part of our past, it defines our present and our future".*  
*"Together we are tackling this disease. If we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it."*  
*"We will succeed, and that success will belong to each and every one of us".*  
And at the end, one more echo of the conflict that so often this crisis has been compared to. *"Better days will return. We will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again."* She's a good queen and I'm sure this will have helped a lot of people today.



And they will need encouragement; we hear that L's hospital had a critical incident where it ran out of oxygen and the staff had to choose who to take off the ventilators, and who to keep on. What an incredibly stressful situation for the medical staff. I don't envy them that.



So in a tribute to our homeland, DH and I create our own local.

## MONDAY 6<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Boris Johnson has been taken into intensive care.

Numbers in Spain and Italy continue to ease off a bit, but are still between 400 – 600 deaths a day.

Canadian deaths: 322      World-wide deaths: 74,654

While today's 'comfort food item' (Bread and Butter pudding) is baking in the oven, with smells of cinnamon drifting over the kitchen, it seems appropriate today to talk about the whole issue of food and drink during the pandemic.

As I said earlier, the first response to news of the pandemic was for panic buying and, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems that this reaction was world-wide universal. Every single country (with the possible exception of Sweden?) reported panic buying of items that people thought would be in short supply because of the crisis. While this may seem irrational, psychologists have since explained to us that everyone does this in face of a threat – any threat. People are told there is a crisis coming, that could threaten their lives, so they feel they must do *something* to prepare and protect themselves. And apparently that instinct is what leads to panic buying. It may be illogical, but apparently it's our nature. Winter is coming and we need stores to help us get through it. All threat is perceived as 'winter', or at the very least, as a threat against our food supplies. Which kind of makes sense if you think about it; cold weather, war, siege, crop failure, floods – they all result in shortage of food, so Homo Sapiens stocks up the cave to prepare.

Our governments have reassured us that there is no threat to the supply chain and that we will still be able to buy fresh produce and all of our weekly needs, but nope, it seems the message just doesn't sink in, and as soon as certain items appear on the shelves, then they disappear just as quickly, even with stores attempting to ration them. Here we are, some 6 weeks into the crisis in British Columbia, and here's what we still *cannot* buy in our stores today, or even on Amazon:

Toilet paper

Cleaning fluids, especially anything with disinfectant, bleach or sanitisers in it

Medical masks or gloves

Flour, corn flour, gluten free flour, yeast – basically ALL baking products

Lindt Excellence Milk Chocolate

Frozen vegetables and tinned goods are in short supply, but you can get some.

Yeh, the Lindt Excellence milk chocolate is a tough one. Actually, several of the chocolate types are out of stock, but clearly I'm not the only one for whom that blue wrapped bar is a main source of comfort and solace. It's been missing from the grocery shelves for about 4 weeks now – can't find it for love nor money. Even Amazon, when I went on line, have run out and said they could hopefully deliver some at 'the end of May'. End of May??? The chocolate crisis is NOW, don't they understand that?? Again, I make the obvious comparison with the war years, when we heard of American troops arriving with bars of chocolate to give out to desperate Europeans. I understand now!

Chocolate is one of those items that is a staple in the Comfort Eating department, which explains why everyone marooned at home is desperate for it. Other comfort food items are apparently chips, pizzas, tortillas, oh anything really, depending on what our particular weakness is. There is a popular meme going around on Facebook where a sexy shirtless dude is performing dance moves to camera, and as the video goes on, his body transforms from slim and muscly to fat and flabby while he's still

performing the same moves. It's called 'Before and After Coronavirus lockdown'. It seems comfort eating is another universal response to the angst of the pandemic, and we are not exempt. Ahem.

I'm not sure if I thought I was deceiving myself or DH when I first suggested 'tidying up the freezer' by going through it and using up little scraps of leftover pieces to make other dishes from. You know, 'economical and sensible thrift' – 'extending the time between shopping trips' – 'making good use of what we have' – 'tidying up the freezer'. Tried and tested lines. Funny thing is, all of the scraps and leftovers I found ended up being made into fabulous *desserts*! Now there's a strange thing.....

Item 1: Found: Small bag of mincemeat, leftover from making mince pies at Christmas.

Turns into: Large apple and pear gluten free pie, flavoured with the mincemeat leftovers. Pastry base, streusel topping. Served warm with yoghurt or ice cream. (Or both).

Item 2: Found: Small pot of frozen raspberries and blueberries from the garden last summer.

Turns into: French Fruit tart, with gluten free pastry base, lined with melted chocolate, and filled with crème patissiere (had to go on-line for the recipe for that one), and covered with berries.

Item 3: Found: (Well, not so much 'found' as 'leftover from making crème patissiere). 3 egg whites.

Turns into: Meringue nests filled with raspberries (also from freezer) and cream.

Item 4: Found: Bread bag with leftover crusts from GF cinnamon raisin bread and other GF breads.

Turns into: Bread and Butter pudding with raisins and cinnamon, served warm with ice cream.

Item 5: I've spotted a piece of left over GF pastry from a previous baking session. Hmmmmm, now what can I do with that?!

We're not exactly starving in this lockdown, and the comfort tummy is being well looked after. ☺  
Good job we're getting in our daily walks or exercise bike, and Qi Gong!!!

Talking of which, today is a day for celebration.....after our walk round Beaver Lake (absolutely lovely in the sunshine, skunk cabbage out in the pondy bits, and birds twittering everywhere), we popped to Broadmeads to grab some essentials....the liquor store has our favourite wine box reduced by \$5 per box (yay! We grab 2 ☺), and then, on the off-chance, I line up for Pharmasave and score big time...THEY HAVE LINDT EXCELLENCE MILK CHOCOLATE!!! The only place in town or on line I think. I scoop up several tablets of the stuff, as well as some Easter Bunny purchases for the girls, and leave with a whoop of satisfaction. My cave supplies are complete.

## WEDNESDAY 8<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Wuhan, where it all started, after 11 full weeks of lockdown, and with only 3 new cases in the past 3 weeks, has officially 're-opened' to the outside world,.

Lufthansa today announced the permanent retirement of 18 of their big, long haul jets, and have also permanently closed their low cost branch, German Wings, as they believe that it will take years before the airline industry rebounds to where it was before, if ever.

Canadian deaths: 427      World-wide deaths: 88,467

It is so interesting to ponder why one area does better during the pandemic and another struggles. We've been seeing differences throughout the world, as some countries seemingly fare better in terms of deaths per million of population than others. Turkey claims to have 10 per million, Canada 11 per million and Belgium 193 per million, or Italy 292 per million. What accounts for these differences? Is it the physical space allowing the population to be more spread out? Is it the age of the population (as some say explains Italy's high rate)? Is it their speedily enacted lock down policies? Is it the climate? The air quality? Is it the state of the health system?

What is even more bizarre is to see the big difference even between the provinces in Canada. We have come to realise that we are incredibly fortunate in BC and that our death rates are some of the lowest in the country per head of population, and BC has kept the lid on it quite well, already flattening the curve.

**Luck and timing are part of the equation — but leadership at the top could also play a role**

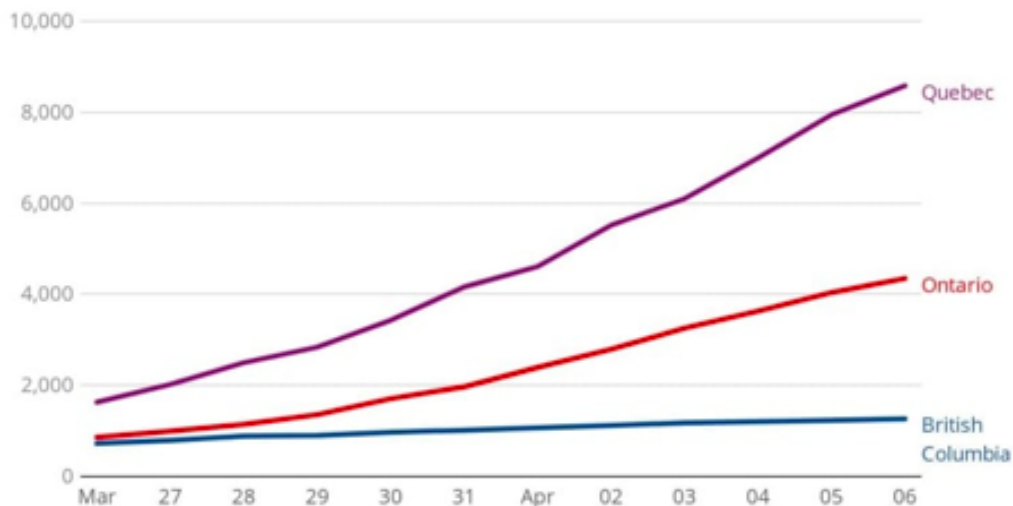


Chart: Justin McElroy • Source: CBC News

CBCNEWS

It seems we owe a lot to good communication between the health bodies and the politicians, so the politicians listened quickly and enacted the Stay at Home policy, and the hospital preparations, quickly. And we also owe a big debt to our Chief Medical Officer, Dr Bonnie Henry who previously supervised the SARS response in Toronto. She has been a great leader and guide for all of us during

this time, and people are crediting her demeanour with why people are listening and (mostly) doing what they're told. And we have clean air here on the west coast. And our population is by and large fit and healthy, though we do have a lot of elderly too.....

But although the graph looks good, and we're all grateful for it, we've been told it'll still be *several* weeks before we come out of stay at home mode. We've had 5 + weeks here in BC so far. They had 11 weeks in Wuhan. We could still have a long way to go. And what they showed us on the news tonight, was that even coming out of lockdown, things in Hubei Province are still far from normal. People still wearing masks, still keeping their distances, travelling in Hazmat suits.....still very frightened. Clearly there is no way that things will suddenly return to 'normal' once this is over. Some things may take a while to recover (they're predicting 3 years for the stock market), some, as Lufthansa shows, may change permanently. But we have no idea what those changes will be yet, or how long they'll last. More unknowns to add to all the others in these strange times.

### Email voices:

#### G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*It must be somewhat a relief to have the virus behind you, so to speak, although scientists seem unsure as to how much immunity to future bouts this offers - but you'd think you'd be good for a couple of years at least, even if it does mutate. I could easily believe that we have had it, but I've not had the classic symptoms (fever, cough, chest pain), and you'd have thought that we would have*



*passed it on to Gi's parents by now, who are far more likely to be affected by it. So we're working on the basis that we haven't had it yet - hence we are now equipped with lots of alcohol gel and masks in an effort to take this more seriously. This photo was taken while waiting at the meat counter yesterday.*

*Brazil's hospitals haven't been swamped with cases, which makes me think that the warm weather we've been enjoying has either diminished the virus's ability to spread or simply not had a strong effect on those it touches - which also makes me think that maybe we should be doing more to expose 'the strong' to the virus now rather than push the peak of cases into the cooler winter months? Some would merely point to Brazil starting later than other countries, though, and believe that our outbreak will follow the same statistical curve. But given that we haven't had a total lockdown yet - and the streets remain fairly busy despite most of the shops and restaurants being*

*closed, and also how hard it is for poor areas to isolate when you share a room with 6 other people - I would have expected to see many more cases by now. So, my hope is, that the virus is indeed quietly spreading but just having much less impact on the population (like with those hardy Icelanders). Time will tell.*



## THURSDAY 9<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Trudeau announces:

*"Normality as it was before will not come back full-on until we get a vaccine for this. That will be a very long way off. We will have to remain vigilant for at least a year."*

Canadian deaths: 509      World-wide deaths: 95,654

There is a meme going round called Covid Hair. Basically, the joke is that with no access to hairdressers, we're all going to look like scarecrows by the time we get 'out'. Having washed my hair and then laid on it today, my hair - which hasn't seen a hairdresser for about 8 weeks – looks hilarious, sticking out in all directions, and so I decide to take a photo of it for Facebook, and I label it *"I've kindly agreed to look after Boris's hair for him while he's in hospital"*. I do it to cheer people up, and yes, it gets a good response, but really, to be truthful, I find it shocking. Frankly, I just look bloody old. And deranged. I don't remember looking old and scary like that.



Here are two photos of me, just 2 months apart, February and April. Before and After Covid. The second photo is after contracting the virus, and with almost 6 weeks of being house bound and not seeing anyone. To my mind, I look so much older in the second photo – there are lines all around the nose and mouth and there are big bags under the eyes. My 'weak' eye always droops when I'm sick or have a migraine or feel really stressed. In this photo, you can see it's half the size of the other eye. Honestly, if I saw that woman the other side of the street, I'd cross over to avoid her in case she started haranguing me.

The photo is hard to look at, but it reinforces what I've felt all along; that the physical side of this pandemic is not the damaging part.....it's the emotional side of things that does the damage. Being cut off from family and friends, worrying over your loved ones, having no control over your lives, the gruesome daily death toll, and being cut off socially – this is what causes the damage and it's clearly

having an effect on me. Yes, we have a comfortable home, and we have food and entertainment, and I truly am grateful for these things, but I hadn't realised how much this is getting to me.

And it IS getting to me. Some days worse than others. Many days are good days. Today is a bad day. Not just that depressing realisation of the physical ravages, but also an awareness of how I feel. And today my brain is mush. The mindless stuff is fine – the exercise bike, the Qi Gong stretches, cutting out and sticking one bit of paper onto another to make birthday cards, but my brain feels numb. DH has installed an on-line version of one of our regular board games onto a computer so we can play it with K and M, and he shows it to me so we can have a practice game. I look at the images on the screen and they mean almost nothing – they're not what I recognise and I find myself crying. The pandemic is emotionally draining and its effects are catching up with us.

I'm sure I'll feel better tomorrow, but I dread to think what I'll look like when this is all over!!

And later, when watching the nightly news, I recognise the same physical ravages in Adrienne Arseneault, the CBC newsreader. Adrienne is younger and better looking than me, and she comes across as a lovely person, but as I watch the news, I become aware that she too is looking pretty haggard, in the same way as I am in my photo. She looks drawn and tired, and much older than she did before. It's actually kind of comforting to realise that others are suffering the same effects, and that stress is being shown in physical ways on other people. I'm not alone.

So I take down the photo on Facebook. Well, Boris is out of intensive care now, which is good news. He can have his hair back.

Item 6: Found: Left over cream from preparing the meringue baskets.

Turns into: An excuse to make fresh GF scones, served with cream and B's delicious blueberry jam.

## SATURDAY 11<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

The world has now surpassed the 100,000 death total from coronavirus, though of course this number will be much higher in reality, with all the non officially recorded deaths. (ie people who die away from hospitals, in their villages, or on the streets, not officially tested).

The USA is now the leader in total deaths, with Trump still promoting the anti-malarial drug that he happens to have shares in, as a cure.

Canadian deaths: 640      World-wide deaths: 108,779

Here is today's chart:

Country, Other	Total Cases	New Cases	Total Deaths	New Deaths	Total Recovered	Active Cases	Serious, Critical	Tot Cases/ 1M pop	Deaths/ 1M pop	Total Tests	Tests/ 1M pop
World	1,761,360	+62,525	107,665	+4,981	395,665	1,258,030	50,031	226	13.8		
<a href="#">USA</a>	521,816	+18,940	20,069	+1,322	28,587	473,160	10,961	1,576	61	2,614,348	7,898
<a href="#">Spain</a>	161,852	+3,579	16,353	+272	59,109	86,390	7,371	3,462	350	355,000	7,593
<a href="#">Italy</a>	152,271	+4,694	19,468	+619	32,534	100,269	3,381	2,518	322	963,473	15,935
<a href="#">France</a>	129,654	+4,785	13,832	+635	26,391	89,431	6,883	1,986	212	333,807	5,114
<a href="#">Germany</a>	123,878	+1,707	2,736		53,913	67,229	4,895	1,479	33	1,317,887	15,730
<a href="#">China</a>	81,953	+46	3,339	+3	77,525	1,089	141	57	2		
<a href="#">UK</a>	78,991	+5,233	9,875	+917	344	68,772	1,559	1,164	145	334,974	4,934
<a href="#">Iran</a>	70,029	+1,837	4,357	+125	41,947	23,725	3,987	834	52	251,703	2,997
<a href="#">Turkey</a>	52,167	+5,138	1,101	+95	2,965	48,101	1,626	619	13	340,380	4,036
<a href="#">Belgium</a>	28,018	+1,351	3,346	+327	5,986	18,686	1,262	2,418	289	102,151	8,814
<a href="#">Switzerland</a>	25,107	+556	1,036	+34	11,100	12,971	386	2,901	120	190,000	21,954
<a href="#">Netherlands</a>	24,413	+1,316	2,643	+132	250	21,520	1,384	1,425	154	101,534	5,926
<a href="#">Canada</a>	22,575	+427	600	+31	6,013	15,962	557	598	16	401,552	10,639
<a href="#">Brazil</a>	20,247	+458	1,090	+22	173	18,984	296	95	5	62,985	296

It's interesting that they have now added the testing statistics in, as well as death numbers per million. It allows a bit more of a picture to be seen. The UK, at almost 1,000 cases per day, is at the peak of its case load, but gratifying to see Spain's numbers coming down.

I'm happy to report that I'm feeling more positive today; with a full day of heavy gardening in the sunshine yesterday (nothing like hours of digging up dandelions and thistles to give your body a good work out), and then a real treat this morning: a walk on Parker Beach with B, J and Dog. We go early and the beach is literally almost empty, (just 3 other people on this vast beach) and it is blissful. Dog is in heaven as he's not been able to have a proper run for ages now, so he hares up and down the beach, paddling in the waves, exploring sticks and generally being ridiculously excited. But so are we. B runs on the beach with him, arms flapping, and J lifts his arms to the sun and the mountains and smiles widely. As for me, I am just so thrilled to see them – even at 6 + feet distance – and we all

enjoy the walk, and talk and being able to connect again. Makes all the difference and I can now go back into isolation in a saner state of mind, ready for the next haul.

But the Easter treats aren't over yet....K and M come and join us on our front deck; sitting some 8ft away, and enjoy a half hour or so of chatting (loudly, so we can hear each other!) in the sunshine. So nice to do that in person as opposed to messaging. Hugs would have been even better, but they will have to wait. For now, just seeing them alive and well is enough and I am happy.

It's Easter Sunday tomorrow, and Jacinda Ardern, the wonderful Prime Minister of New Zealand, made a public announcement to her country last week, that the Easter Bunny (along with the tooth fairy) would be exempt from travel restrictions, so that Easter Eggs could be delivered, (although she warned that because of Covid they may not be able to make all house deliveries as usual). This kind announcement to cheer up children had a positive effect on many, and now most leaders across the western world (including Trudeau) have made similar announcements.

In Belgium, one chocolatier, who thought Easter was a bust for her this year, produced a single bunny wearing a mask and has now been over-run with orders as people, amongst other things, buy them for health workers as a thank you. Her Easter this year is turning out to be a huge success after all. Ingenuity in the time of crisis. A positive story.



Of course, there won't be the possibility of any actual Easter services to attend in person, or services for any of the other faiths this year, so I'd better get on and explore what is available on line for an Easter service in this time of pandemic. Yet something else that is different in the time of Covid 19!



## MONDAY 13<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

While some countries are still in the thick of it (UK, USA), some countries are starting to gradually open their country again; Italy, Spain and Austria are today allowing the opening of small shops and businesses, including bookstores, stationery stores and children's clothing stores, as well as allowing construction projects to resume.

China, having opened its borders with Russia recently, is now reporting a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of cases.

Canadian deaths: 780      World-wide deaths: 119,618

The days continue to roll by, and we're now at Easter Monday; the time when Trump had announced that America would be back to work. Sadly, (and not surprisingly) this is not the case and America is still deep in the horror of this pandemic, with almost 2,000 people dying there daily, half of them in New York. Nightly, we see images on the news of the mass burials of rows of identical cheap coffins in long trenches, with bulldozers shovelling the earth on top of the ones already in there, but plenty of space still uncovered, for more, next to them. These are apparently the bodies of those who have died without a known next of kin. One of the hardest things about this pandemic is that all of those who have died – all 120,000 + of them so far, have died in hospital alone, without their loved ones, and surrounded by anonymous masks and gowns. That really is heart breakingly sad.

That's not to say that the staff aren't doing their best and wouldn't prefer to make it more humane; I am absolutely full of admiration for all the staff and the way they are dealing with this, and their total dedication to their patients, even to the extent of not seeing their own families during the crisis, so that they don't pass the disease on to their own loved ones. There are **many** heroes working throughout this crisis; some of whom are remembered and saluted at 7pm every night when people throughout the world bang their saucepans and pots to make loud noise to let the health workers know they are appreciated. Some people have put cut out paper hearts in their windows to show their love and appreciation for the health workers, and The Times Colonist has printed a giant heart flag for us all to put in our windows, again to show our appreciation. These are lovely gestures and the health workers deserve so much more – I just hope that appreciation will make itself obvious in pay rises and more general respect after all this is over!!



Here, in no particular order, is a list of some of the people I think are doing amazing work and whom I feel for, as they must be stressed, exhausted and emotionally drained:

Yes, the amazing doctors and nurses, but also all the auxiliaries, the technicians, the porters and cleaners who have to clean up the place where each person died and make it ready for the next person, the paramedics, the people carrying out the burials, the people carrying out the tests on the patients, and those testing the samples in the labs, those in the laundries dealing with infected linens, the care workers in the long term care facilities, and the triage nurses dealing with all the stressed and anxious patients. I salute them all.



Item 7: Found – Right at the back of the darkest corner of the cupboard, a packet of GF crumb mix Turns into – Hideous smell that stinks out the entire kitchen. No, not quite the baked cheesecake I had imagined in my fantasy, but a smell that makes us want to retch. Perhaps I should have checked the ‘Best Before’ date *before* starting to cook with it....January 2016. Over 4 years out of date. Ooops.

So now that the cupboard is well and truly bare, we need to go shopping. It has been almost 2 weeks since DH went, so it's my turn this time, and a neighbour has asked me to do their shop for them as well, as the whole grocery shopping ordeal is now so stressful that they can't face it. But that's ok – I'm feeling good; the sun is shining, it'll be good to go. I've got this. So off I drive, all excited to see the world again, to discover that doing the food shopping in the time of Covid 19 has descended to a new level of anxiety hell. There are now arrows on the floor, making sure that we all go in single file in one direction, so if you forget something as you pass it, hard luck. I set off, disgruntled that we have to start the end of the store where the fresh fruit and vegetables are, as they'll land in the cart first and get squashed by the heavy tins and packets at the other end, which will thus have to go on top of them. Can't be helped. Off I go. And it's a nightmare...some people are dithering for ages, so I have to wait a suitable distance behind them with my cart, as there's not enough space to overtake. A woman wants to go back past me and glares from behind her mask as she pushes past, as if the 2 inches gap between us is fine if she goes fast enough. I want to take time to choose my tomatoes – someone now has to wait behind *me* as *they* can't pass, and they glare at me as they clearly think I'm taking too long. Don't they know I'm picking tomatoes for 2 households? And the wretched plastic bag won't open, so I desperately push at it with my fingers to try and get it open, and after a while of fumbling and them glaring at me, I lick my fingers as a wet finger sometimes helps to open the bag, but of course, that is not hygienic and I get glared at some more. Giving up on even looking for mushrooms so that I can scoot out of the fresh veg area altogether, I turn left down the next aisle but almost crash into someone coming the other way.... I've forgotten about the arrows!!! Oh no! He is not giving way and tells me in no uncertain terms, while also gesticulating wildly with his left hand, that I need to go to the next aisle, then circle round and come up behind him. Panic is starting to set in by this point, and I'm tempted to just run out the store, but I grip the cart handle and do the loop. Then as I'm coming out of the end of that very aisle, no less than THREE people barge past me, coming the wrong way, as I had just done. Aaagghgh – what is going on here?? No, I don't tell them off as the other guy told me off, but duck my head down and vow to get out as fast as possible. So I careen up and down the aisles, flinging in whatever looks vaguely approximating to what's on the shopping list, and find afterwards that I've missed several items, but frankly, I just *do not care*.



DH is waiting for me when I get home and can instantly see that succour is required. “Tea or something harder?”, he asks. “Tea first,” I reply “and THEN something harder!”

## TUESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Boris Johnson is at home at Chequers, recovering. They now admit it "could have gone either way". Donald Trump announces that he is stopping all US funding for the World Health Organisation. (?!).

Canadian deaths: 898      World-wide deaths: 126,601

This morning we enjoy a lovely Skype call with J and A, in England. It is so great to see their cheerful faces again and to catch up on their news, but the news from England is pretty drastic. The UK, as we've seen from the charts, is really suffering large losses at the moment, so as well as building more emergency facilities, such as the Nightingale Centre, they are continuing their strict lock down. And strict it is! J tells us of one of their friends who was stopped by the police on the way back from going shopping; they were fined 60 pounds (\$100) for not going to the nearest supermarket to their house, but to the 2<sup>nd</sup> nearest one, and another 60 pounds for their shopping being mostly wine ie it wasn't an essential trip! In addition, the police are using drones with cameras and loud speakers on them so they can boom down in the Voice of God if they see you doing something 'wrong'. eg sunbathing in a park. (!!!). Another weapon in the arsenal is Public Shaming.....J tells us of a popular beauty spot where not only are the police lying in wait to catch anyone going there, but also reporters with cameras are also lying in wait, to snap photos of the unwary nature lover, so they can be publicly shamed. It all seems a bit Orwellian (1984 and all that), but I guess they're doing what they have to in order to get people to comply. I'm so very grateful that things haven't reached that state here.

Apart from that Skype call, I spend the rest of the day outdoors doing hard labour. Having spent several days digging up dandelions and thistles from the scruffy patch of 'lawn' by the suite, today I lay a row of bricks to demarcate it from the border, and then scatter grass seed over the scorched earth where the weeds were previously. If it works it will look a lot better. There is one problem with this plan to create a new mini lawn though, which I realise as I'm watering the grass seeds in – we don't own a lawn mower!! Where does one get one of *those* in times of pandemic?? Ah well, that's a problem for 2 or 3 weeks' time, if the new grass grows. For now, I turn the hose onto the upper decks and spend some hours washing off all the thick yellow tree pollen. One thing about not being able to go out much, the house sure looks a lot better for it!

As I sit here writing this tonight, glass of wine in hand (well, not actually 'in hand' while typing of course, but *in between* bursts of writing), and the few Easter mini chocolate eggs that have survived thus far, sitting temptingly in reach, I think of how the whole business of Easter puts this episode in history in perspective. As a Boomer living in the UK and then Canada, I am incredibly lucky....I have lived the whole of my life in peace, never having known war or major pandemic, or disaster before. (Though there was the emotional stress of the Cold War and the nuclear threat in the 60's). That is actually quite incredible if you think about it. 75 years of peace. 75 years when people have been able to quietly get on with their lives living in peace, and not in fear. I think this must be the longest time in history that this has ever occurred. I am so very fortunate. So incredibly fortunate. And really, if this pandemic is 'it' for traumatic events, then really, I feel blessed amongst generations.

Talking of generations, here is a letter from F. Scott Fitzgerald, written during the time of the Spanish Flu in 1918. A pandemic that killed millions and millions. More people died of Spanish Flu than during the whole of the First World War. That puts ours into perspective! But good to see that Scott Fitzgerald deals with it in much the same way we do!!

A LETTER FROM F. SCOTT FITZGERALD,  
QUARANTINED IN 1920 IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE  
DURING THE SPANISH INFLUENZA OUTBREAK.

Dearest Rosemary,

It was a limpid dreary day, hung as in a basket from a single dull star. I thank you for your letter. Outside, I perceive what may be a collection of fallen leaves tussling against a trash can. It rings like jazz to my ears. The streets are that empty. It seems as though the bulk of the city has retreated to their quarters, rightfully so. At this time, it seems very poignant to avoid all public spaces. Even the bars, as I told Hemingway, but to that he punched me in the stomach, to which I asked if he had washed his hands. He hadn't. He is much the denier, that one. Why, he considers the virus to be just influenza. I'm curious of his sources.

The officials have alerted us to ensure we have a month's worth of necessities. Zelda and I have stocked up on red wine, whiskey, rum, vermouth, absinthe, white wine, sherry, gin, and lord, if we need it, brandy. Please pray for us.

Screenshot



Ladies during the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic.

## THURSDAY 16<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Lisa Helps, Mayor of Victoria, wants to commandeer hotel and motel rooms to house the homeless. They have refused to volunteer thus far, and are not happy with this enforcement.

Canadian deaths: 1,191      World-wide deaths: 145,470

The big question of everyone's mind at the moment is "*When will this be over? When will we start to see the lifting of some of the restrictions? When will life get back to a form of normal?*". There have been conflicting messages on the news and in the media; We see some countries cautiously opening again (China, Italy, Spain, Austria), some talking about it (Australia and, unbelievably, USA, the country suffering most fatalities right now) and some saying it will be months away yet. Even within our own country and province, everyone is guessing different things – some positive, some gloomy, but everyone wants to know "*when is this going to end??*".

One of my pension cheques from the UK has arrived this week and I need to take it into a branch to actually deposit it. (As it's in foreign currency, you can't just photo deposit it on your phone as you can with Canadian cheques). All our bank branches have been closed, save for 3, so I go to the one in Hillside, not my usual one. As expected, there is a long line up, with everyone standing the regulation 6 feet apart, demarcated by lines on the sidewalk, as usual. But as we stand in line, an employee comes down the line asking us pleasantly but factually: "*What is the purpose of your visit today? Is it absolutely essential?*". Some are encouraged to use the ATM for their deposits or bill payments or whatever, but she agrees that I do indeed have to go into the branch for my transaction. Moments later, a 2<sup>nd</sup> employee comes down the line, and she is clearly more stressed than the first. She asks us the very same question we've already answered, only this time I get a different response. "*You shouldn't be here! You could do that as an automatic deposit!*". I explain that that would mean up to a week's delay in getting my money, but she's not having any of it. "*Ah well*" says I, "*hopefully by this time next month, the restrictions will have been lifted somewhat and it won't be an issue any more*". At this, the poor lady practically explodes: "*It's going to be months and months yet! At least until June! My sister is a nurse on the Covid ward and she knows!*". I suspect that there lies the nub of the problem...she is probably sick with worry about her sister. Understandably so. But it would be fair to say that there is a real tension in the branch when I finally get in, and one poor elderly gentleman is practically reduced to tears. He must be in his mid to late 80's, very frail, and is trying to pay his sons' bills, with his son's payment card. The staff tear a strip off this guy for 'invading his son's privacy' and using his card. The elderly gentleman explains that his son is disabled and they dare not bring him out the house. To no avail. Yes, there may well be privacy policies in place that they cannot contravene, but they could speak to him kindly. Sadly, their own stress and anxiety is clearly affecting their humanity and courtesy. The restrictions are having all kinds of unpleasant side effects. Everyone wants to know, when will it be over?



The Times Colonist has a helpful article on this:

*The first week was a novelty. The second and subsequent weeks were about learning disturbing new routines and rising to a challenge. By the fourth week, the curtailment of most social contacts and wholesale job losses amount to a stressful and profoundly upsetting new world for many people.*

*The best we can hope for now is gradual relaxation of some of the measures. When?*

*“The not-too-distant future,” said Horgan. In the meantime, the provincial state of emergency was extended for a second time to April 28. Health Minister Adrian Dix confirmed there will be no change in any of the emergency orders enforcing social distancing until at least then and likely longer.*

*B.C.’s leadership says the determining factor for letting up won’t be the economic havoc and massive job losses caused by all the curtailment. It will be the progress in curbing the virus.*

*That issue is being hotly debated around the world, as people try to calculate the obvious and not-so-*

*obvious costs of shutting down big sectors of the economy against the threat to lives.*



The issue being ‘Hotly Debated’ in the US.....The Zombie Apocalypse is here! Rioters in the US demanding the re-opening of businesses, no matter the threat to lives.

*Provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry is too modest and cautious to say so, but it looks as if B.C. under her leadership has done a very good job at curbing the infection rate.*

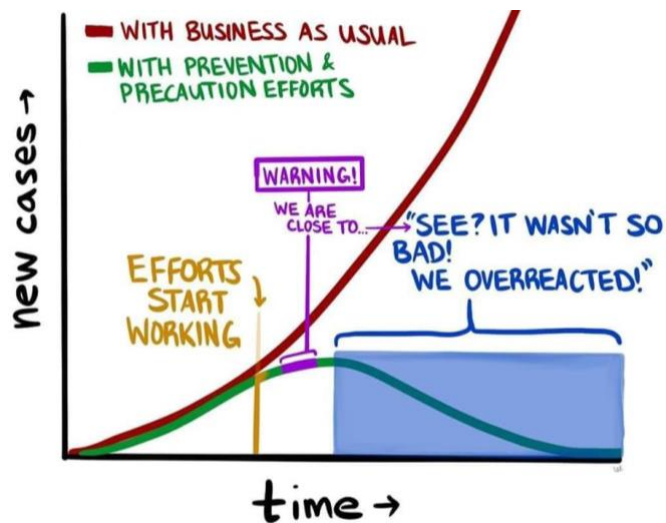
*Since she’s unlikely to proclaim that, Horgan did it for her at an appearance Wednesday where he celebrated the numbers and gave everyone a virtual pat on the back.*

*B.C.’s relative success compared with Ontario and Quebec “is directly attributable to having a provincial plan at the beginning put in place by Dr. Henry and her team,” Horgan said. “We followed that meticulously and we’re seeing the benefits ... but we’re not finished yet.”*

*On Wednesday, she said: “We are not at the point we can let up. I know that is very challenging for some people. We’ve heard about people getting frustrated and angry ... this is often a manifestation of anxiety and fear.”*

*Henry said: “It’s really important to recognize that we are not at the end of our beginning yet. And normal is going to look quite different for some time.”*





Encouraging us to keep going with the Stay at Home policy

And it's not just premier Horgan, or the Times Colonist giving credit to Dr Bonnie Henry; the Vancouver shoemaker Fluevog has created a shoe in her honour!

*"The Dr. Henry is a two-toned pink shoe with bold stitching accents and features her well-known words stamped on it: "be kind, be calm, and be safe." 100% of pre-sales for the Dr. Henry will go to Food Banks B.C. "At times like these, we're so fortunate to have someone who is calm and comforting but direct, and positive but realistic, informing us day to day," said Fluevog. The Dr. Henry Fluevog pre-sales will begin in about a week. The shoes will retail for \$339, and about 200 pairs will be made in the limited run".*



And as if this isn't enough, the Dr Bonnie Henry unofficial fan club produces TWO separate songs dedicated to her today; one, a folksy one, called *The Ballad of Bonnie Henry*, featuring Daniel Lapp and other Gulf Islanders, and the other is a rather good, but short, song from a Barbershop Quartet from Nanaimo "*Bonnie Henry, I love you!*".



To be honest, I kind of like that we can make a hero of a real person, doing their job well. And helping guide us through this time. She's a lot more useful to us than sports stars and actors!

And my favourite article today is about how the artist Banksy, stuck at home, has created art work in his bathroom. Sheer brilliance. (Though I'm not sure that IS his bathroom??? Looks a bit low end for a famous artist whose works sell for millions??).

Email voices:

B – Victoria

*I too have just re-applied for the next month's aid cheque, I just had to check the two boxes again :) Just heard on the radio this morning that the aid cheques being sent out by the US government have been delayed because - guess what - Trump has insisted that the treasury print his name on each and every one of them. The narcissism of the man never fails to amaze!*

B – Beaconsfield, England

*Talk here is of how to end the lock down and avoid a second or third wave of COVID. I think it is widely recognised that COVID is a crisis the like of which we haven't seen since the 1918 flu pandemic and possibly before that.*

*I am constantly surprised to see the COVID graphs charting data from other countries with the Chinese data looking like an outlier. This does raise eyebrows here. There does not generally seem to be much international consistency in data collection though, so comparisons are difficult and we are starting to see lots of arguments about what has/has not been included etc.*

*Nature continues to soothe me and we have discovered new foot paths and woods on our daily permitted walk. The wood pigeons continue to hover under the bird feeders and intimidate the other ground feeders like blackbirds. All await the gold finches and green finches who have few manners and are messy eaters. They work on the principle of one seed for me two for the ground! The blue tits are much tidier! All the new life in Nature gives hope for the future.*

G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*Although São Paulo has been one of the 'best' places for adhering to the stopping home rule in Brazil (I heard a figure of 60% but don't know if that's accurate), it hasn't achieved the level other countries have achieved, so you'd expect the virus to have spread more rapidly (cos 40% roaming free equates to over 7 million people - including all builders, it seems) - but as yet the hospitals are not at max capacity even after a month. So it is hard to know what to conclude. On the one hand, with all the pollution (and a fair bit of obesity), you'd expect people here to be badly affected, but the evidence suggests otherwise. I'm also guessing the virus is a lot more widespread than reported (maybe 100 times?). Anecdotally, I know of one case where a doctor was in intensive care, but his two children tested positive without symptoms.*

*And Monday, we had the news that one of our carers (for Gi's parents) has tested positive (after going to hospital with the symptoms). So now of course we are assuming that D and GI will probably have the virus too - and indeed about a week ago D had 'bronchitis' (at least that was the doc's diagnosis). So it is possible that they have had it and recovered already - and the same might be true for Gi and I. Wouldn't that be a good result? But then the opposite could be true and we're all about to go down with it. So we are waiting to see when we can be tested - with Gi's parents the priority. But if we knew if we'd had it or not, then it would make our lives a lot more straightforward in terms of planning. Fortunately the other carers are happy to soldier on, but taking added precaution, if that's possible with someone you shower twice a day, while Gi and I will wear masks when we visit in future and keep our distance.*

## FRIDAY 17<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

The USA has released its plans to re-open the country in 3 stages, starting with younger people. But the first stage can only be implemented in an area IF it has seen 14 consecutive days of reduced cases and deaths. It is still running at approximately 3,000 deaths per day, current death total 37,154.

Canadian deaths: 1,310      World-wide deaths: 154,145

My mind is with G in Brazil today, after reading this worrying article from the AssocFreePress:

*Dr. Valdilea Veloso is racing against time: she needs ventilators, face masks and medical staff before the coronavirus outbreak peaks in Brazil, where social distancing is proving problematic, not least because of President Jair Bolsonaro.*

*With Brazilians increasingly ignoring health officials' warnings to stay home -- encouraged by their far-right president, who has condemned the "hysteria" over the virus -- predictions for how the pandemic will play out in the hardest-hit country in Latin America are getting dire.*

*Brazil, a country of 210 million people, has registered 1,532 deaths from the new coronavirus so far. But the state of Sao Paulo alone is expecting 111,000 deaths over six months, nearly equal to the entire worldwide toll to date.*

*A number of states face the possibility that their healthcare systems will collapse.*

*They include Sao Paulo; Rio de Janeiro, the second-hardest hit; and Amazonas, a huge territory with a large number of indigenous communities that have a tragic history of being decimated by new diseases.*

*Brazil has not been very good at social distancing. The offender-in-chief is Bolsonaro, who has compared the virus to a "little flu," condemned the economic impact of stay-at-home measures, and proudly broken them himself, insisting on his "constitutional right to come and go as I please."*

*In Amazonas, the health system is already on the brink of collapse. Its capital, Manaus, is the only city with an intensive care unit. Its 50 beds serve a state more than four times the area of Germany. Brazilian media report that new patients have to wait for someone to die to be admitted.*



Freshly dug graves in Villa Formosa cemetery, Sao Paulo. This one cemetery ordered 5,000 body bags.

When gravediggers prepare a burial, they're handed a piece of paper - on the top right, there's a code. D3 means a suspected or confirmed coronavirus death. It also means they have to wear full protective suits, masks and gloves.

The BBC points to lack of testing to explain Brazil's low numbers so far: *because this has simply not been recorded.*"

*"Brazil has not exploded*



Obviously I am concerned for G and Gi and pray they will be safe. This is not a reassuring article, and it has the ring of truth. We loved our amazing trip to Brazil last year, where, amongst other things, we had the opportunity to experience the density of the population in the cities, and I worry for the Brazilians in such conditions, and under the leadership of the egotistical idiot, Bolsonaro, who today apparently fired his Minister for Health over the way he was dealing with the Coronavirus. (Taking it too seriously presumably). It is going to be impossible for G and Gi to stay at home if they have to supervise care for her frail parents, and they will be exposed to potential sources of the virus through her parents and their team of carers. It's a real worry.

And yet, as I sit worrying about G in Brazil, I receive this email from him, worrying about his best friend in the UK!

*I had the pleasure of calling up my good friend T in the UK this evening - he turned 55 today - and was shocked to find that it was actually touch and go as to whether he'd make the landmark. He's just (last night) returned from 10 days in hospital fighting the coronavirus. All quite sobering really, as it would hurt to lose my best friend. But interesting to get a first-hand account of the experience. He was on oxygen for several days and at more than one point thought he was in serious trouble. He said the worst part was he could get no sleep. Every time he slipped into a deep sleep, it felt like the nurses were prodding him awake getting him to breath into some sort of apparatus until his conversion factor was over 90% (I need to research this to understand it better, but I'm guessing this is a measurement of the body's ability to convert oxygen into carbon dioxide). He reckons he got about 5 hours sleep in total, although I suspect that is an exaggeration. He sounded very drained, but should be ok now. He had an episode in the night when he felt he couldn't breathe, and it will take him a while to fully recover, but hopefully there are no long-term effects, although no-one really knows at this point.*

Wow – that's scary. It sounds as if T had a similar experience to Boris Johnson – both 55 years old, both touch and go as to whether they survived, both in hospital for 10 days, and with a long time needed to recover. It's sobering to have it brought home that although half the deaths in Canada have been people in seniors care homes, this is still very much a disease that can affect anyone of any age. Including the people we love. Much worrying all round.

To take my mind off such grim thoughts, I spend some hours in my little veggie plot to the side of the house, clearing the soil and digging in chicken manure, to prepare the ground for planting the runner beans. The kale and lettuces are already growing well, and I am delighted to see that the rhubarb is slightly early this year with all the sunshine we've been having. It is healthy, thick, just right for harvesting, and there is lots of it! I am so very grateful to have access to nature during this time of lock down, and I truly feel sorry for those confined to the fashionable micro apartments downtown, with no access to outside space to provide that respite. Or perhaps not everyone feels that need, as I do? I wonder if condos will be less popular for a while after this? Does such an experience make people re-evaluate their priorities and appreciate nature more?

And we finish the day with a challenge – my own chance for technical re-evaluation....K and M offer to play party games on line with us. Love the idea, but it means getting to grips with technology.....but the bait is a big one – fun times with family – so I grit my teeth, and they coach us through it as we use both laptop and phones to play the game. And you know what, it's fun! I guess Covid lockdown also means an opportunity to learn something new, and that's never a bad thing 😊

Item 8: Found: First batch of rhubarb ready for harvesting in the garden.  
Turns into: Large GF Rhubarb Crumble, with oat and walnut topping.

## SATURDAY 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

The closure of the Canadian / US border, (which was due to re-open on Tuesday) has been extended for another 30 days.

Canadian deaths: 1,470

World-wide deaths: 160,643

I've come to realise what many people would no doubt say is obvious...that how you feel in any given situation is largely a result of your own choices and, more importantly, what you choose to feed your mind with. From the beginning we have tried to avoid listening to too much news and restrict our main news intake to the nightly CBC news, and perusing the articles in our Times Colonist newspaper and on-line access to newspapers we respect (such as The Guardian) in the morning. We get our morning and nightly updates and opinions, and we highly value that information and that insight; it guides us through the progress of the pandemic and keeps us up to date with what is going on "out there" and how that affects us, so we know what new rules we have to follow, or what new way there is that we might be able to help. We want to know what is happening in other parts of the world, as well as in our own country, especially in those countries where we have friends and family. I think I also appreciate the continuity of the same newscasters or journalist voices – people we know (even if virtually), so you get some comfort and continuity in that. I appreciate that the newscasters try to stay human and 'one of us'; for instance, Andrew Chang mentioned that he is going to attempt to cut his own hair this weekend, and so I'm already curious to see how that turns out (he has great hair and clearly takes care with his personal grooming and presentation). Adrienne Arsenault looked better on last night's news – more of a light back in the eyes and colour to her cheeks. I'm glad. It feels, in some small way, as if we are on this pandemic journey together, with these people as our link, and that makes them important to us. In the same way that people have been attached to Dr Bonnie Henry. A comforting guide to help us through.

But apart from the morning newspaper perusal and the nightly CBC news catch up, I have been trying in recent weeks to avoid the topic of Covid 19 and put 'normal', upbeat things in my mind, in an attempt to stay positive and cheerful. And it's working! I genuinely feel good right now. Dare I say, cheerful even. Yes, there is the ongoing stress of what to do about the house – are we moving? Are we staying here for another year? Should we get our stuff back out of storage? If we do move, when will it be? But in a way, that's out of our hands and so the best thing is to keep cheerful.

Here's what's worked for me so far:

1. Keeping physically active. Apart from the daily Qi Gong stretches, working in the garden and the forest each day in this lovely weather has been brilliant. Focussing on the small stuff: The sound of the woodpeckers drilling, identifying the weeds to be removed, the plants to be pruned, the activity of the busy bugs, the sounds of the nuthatches trumpeting or the hummingbirds whirring, and the way the light and shade hits everything around me. Incredibly cathartic and helpful. Literally 'grounding'!
2. Getting out for walks now and then; seeing that the world is still there and there are still people doing their thing. Seeing the progress of the spring blossoms and flowers – nature too is still doing its thing. The seasons are progressing, and the world is still there. The beach looks just as beautiful and the mountains are glorious. These things are not going away.
3. Choosing happy content for books and television shows. Amazing what a difference that makes. I've just finished a book in the *No. 1 Ladies Detective* series by Alexander McCall Smith. So lyrical, so gentle and focussing on simple kindness. It's the perfect book for such times. And last night we completed series 2 of *The Detectorists*, written and directed by



Mackenzie Crook. It was a happy ending and brilliantly done, and it makes me smile even now thinking about it. A beautifully lyrical and gentle series, like No. 1 Ladies, it is full of kind human wisdom and love. A real 'Feel Good' show. Engrossing books are also great, something you can disappear into, but these gentle feel good materials work well for me.

4. Staying in contact with loved ones, even if it means dealing with the dreaded technology. Everything from brief emails to Skype calls, to on-line games together; it all helps.
5. Prayer and perspective. Knowing that He loves us and in the scheme of things, this will pass.
6. My crafts and activities; feeling that something can be achieved, even if it's something as mindless as cutting out bits of scrap paper, ribbon and glittery bits and gluing them all together to make birthday cards. That was such a cathartic activity and guess what, I now have at least a year's supply of birthday cards and other cards for various occasions, safely stashed away. Think of all the money saved there!! But that definitely helped when I was struggling.

So no, I'm not ridiculously cheerful all the time, and obviously we are still anxious about the outcome of the pandemic and sad for all those affected, but I'd like to think that I'm now more back to what I am usually like in terms of mental state. Looking back at Aisha Ahmad's article, (30<sup>th</sup> March), I feel like I'm now moving from phase 2 towards phase 3, and am surprised that actually, it's only taken 6 weeks (from when I first got sick on March 2nd), to do that. So the problem of the pandemic is still there, and we are all still dealing with it and are affected by it, but hopefully the brain has now adjusted to the new reality – that this is going to be with us until a vaccine is available for us all. This is what it's going to be like – kind of – for the next year or so. I feel, for the first time today, as if life now IS reaching its own new routine and new normality. And I'm OK.

A house in our neighbourhood, seen on our walk this afternoon, thanking health workers and all those staying home.



## MONDAY 20<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

80 NHS workers (in the UK) are now dead.  
NHS staff run out of hospital gowns today.  
Riots are erupting in various parts of America.

Canadian deaths: 1,690                      World-wide deaths: 170,397

Today is the day that I decide to finally give in to the inevitable; I was hoping that maybe restrictions would be lifted before it came to this, but sadly, no. It has been a goodly while since I last saw a hairdresser, and I can put it off no longer. My hair has now gone beyond the 'empathising with Boris Johnson while he's in hospital' state, and has reached the point where I can't see, and it irritates the heck out of me. The time has come to wield the scissors.

I have 2 advantages here: Regularly cutting Dear Husband's Hair means a. I own a pair of hair cutting scissors and b. I know how they feel in my hand.  
But I also have 2 distinct disadvantages: a. I only know how to cut *his* style and b. I cannot see the back of my own head.

Nonetheless, needs must. After a few attempts at jabbing the scissors at my hair while looking in the bathroom mirror, and nearly taking my eye out as a result, I stop to put my glasses on. This has the double advantage of offering some protection against the wildly jabbing scissors, while allowing me to see better. (!!). However, being able to see more clearly doesn't actually translate into more accurate cutting – maybe it's something to do with the reverse imaging in the mirror or something, (with me also being naturally left handed but using right handed scissors) but this is not going well at all. So I make the decision to give up on using the mirror (while still keeping the glasses on for protection) and cut my hair by *feel*. I use my left hand to lift the hair up off the head in strands, and sort of feel where the layers are and the ratty bits start, and wildly snip there. The pile of hair on the floor is quite something – clearly lots is coming off – so, encouraged, I keep going.

If this was a novel, the heroine would say "and amazingly, it all turned out fine". (Unless you were Anne of Green Gables and the red hair famously turned green, instead of black). But I am afraid honesty compels me to record that it looks Meh. The 'feel' method worked better than the 'looking in the mirror' method, but it's neither a good haircut nor hilariously bad. Just Meh. Still, Dear Husband knows how to put a positive spin on things and has this to say: "*Well, it's shorter. Which is what you wanted.*

*And it WILL grow back again*". Thank you dear.

And no, I'm not going to post a photo in the journal!!

My personal hair drama moments aside, today brings grim international news on the Coronavirus front lines. The UK is still struggling with daily death numbers at around 750 a day, and shockingly, they reveal today that so far 80 National Health Service workers have died from the virus. This is a real tragedy and I feel **so** sad for their loved ones. And those workers will be sorely missed. There is understandably a lot of frustration too, as there are calls for an enquiry on why the government was so slow to respond to warnings from senior health officials about the coming virus, right back in February.

The Times newspaper states: *Boris Johnson skipped five Cobra meetings on the virus, calls to order protective gear were ignored, and scientists' warnings fell on deaf ears. Failings in February may have cost thousands of lives.*

And today we hear that hospital health workers there have run out of protective surgical gowns! There are desperate pleas on Facebook amongst some of my British friends for people who can sew, to sew hospital gowns. This is craziness, and I wonder how the health workers will deal with this...will they boil wash and re-use old gowns or will they risk their own lives even more or will they simply "down tools" and walk off the job? Somehow I can't imagine that, but still.....



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**NHS staff plea for PPE in video projected onto Palace of Westminster**

And in America, the protests are reaching a new and unsettling level of craziness; there are now stand offs between protesters wanting to go back to work, and medical workers trying to protect the community. This article from the Daily Mail tells what happened yesterday:

*Protests against state lockdowns implemented to combat the novel coronavirus outbreak continued nationwide this afternoon, as a fervent disdain for the restrictions that have shut down much of the country's economy continues to slowly spread across the US.*

*Titled 'Operation Gridlock', the day's largest demonstration took place in Denver, where hundreds of protesters ignored social distancing guidelines, to huddle together on the lawn of the state Capitol, waving flags emblazoned with slogans such as 'Your "health" does not supersede my right', 'Freedom over fear', and 'I would rather risk coronavirus than socialism'. Mobilized by a number of groups on social media, the protesters called Gov. Polis a tyrant and insisted the ongoing economic cost of the shutdown was no longer worth the few lives it would save. But the protesters' efforts weren't met without resistance. A group of healthcare workers stood in the street, clad in their scrubs and facemasks, to counter-protest the calls for re-opening, silently obstructing cars as they drove down towards the Capitol.*





*President Trump appeared to praise the actions of the protesters during his Sunday White House briefing, despite the demonstrations defying state stay-at-home orders. 'I've seen the people. I've seen interviews of the people. These are great people, Trump said. 'They've got cabin fever. They want their lives back.' The president rejected the assertion that he was inciting violence with his words of encouragement, as one reporter pointed out that governors around the country were seeing an uptick in death threats. 'No, I am not. I've never seen so many American flags,' Trump said. 'These people love our country. They want to get back to work.'*

*A video captured a woman hurling racist remarks at a nurse as she leaned out of the window of her car holding a 'Land of the Free' sign. 'This is a free country. Land of the free,' she yelled at him. 'Go to China if you want communism. Go to China.' That video, posted to Twitter by Marc Zenn, has been viewed more than eight million times. By Monday morning, 'Go to China' was trending on Twitter in the US as users expressed disgust over the woman's remarks and said they illustrate a growing rift between healthcare workers and protesters who want to reopen the country immediately.*

*For those who made it through the blockade, the vast majority were not wearing masks or gloves, stood in large groups just inches apart, and some even brought their children along for the occasion. Another protester, Jim Fenimore, told the outlet he decided to attend because he believes the drastic national response to the coronavirus has all been a political ruse to make the economy crash and cause Trump to lose support ahead of the impending election.*

Words fail me here. If this really is the American people, then perhaps they have the president they deserve. They have chosen him after all. This article is one of the most depressing things that I've read in this whole journaling experience and it seems as if the coronavirus death numbers in the USA won't be coming down any time soon. Except I can't just write it off as casually as that.... it has implications for the poor in America who will die without help and without comfort, for the numbers of people who will die now that might not have died otherwise, for the future of the health system of that country, and it also has implications for us. We are their next door neighbours. We have the longest land border in the world, shared with them. Trump is keen to open that border again. Thank goodness that Trudeau extended the border closure for another 30 days (just yesterday, the same day this was happening!). I pray that he will be able to continue to hold the line and keep it closed until genuinely safe.

Not wanting to end today's post on such negative and very anxious making thoughts, here is a letter written today to the Guardian letters page. Brilliant.

*"I pointed out yesterday to my daughter than Newton had invented/taught himself both differential and integral calculus, made some advances in optics, and cracked the concept of gravity during his Plague furlough, and asked how she was getting on. The answer is that she's already onto Series 4 of 'Ozark'."*

## WEDNESDAY 22<sup>nd</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

New Zealand + Australia think they're approaching the end of the virus, with only 4 new cases today.  
Golf courses in BC are now re-open – our first thing to re-open! Members only.  
Canada Day celebrations have been cancelled in Victoria.

Canadian deaths: 1,971

World-wide deaths: 184,066

Coronavirus has totally dominated world news for months now; the nightly CBC news literally only covering various aspects of the Coronavirus story. But recently other stories are edging their way into the news frame, and none of them are good. There has been a mass shooting in Nova Scotia (a dentist turning from making dentures, to making terror, as he dresses in a police uniform, and, in a police lookalike car, goes on a rampage, killing some 22 people. Nobody yet knows why). In Alberta there is panic as oil prices have now dropped into the negative (yes, some companies are paying people \$22 a barrel to take the crude oil away, as they have no-where to store it). In BC, the weather is playing havoc – floods threatened in the interior, yet forest fires on the coast – one in Squamish causing evacuation for several days, and one yesterday in Langford, on the edge of town here. And now we hear that the giant locust swarm (already labelled as the largest swarm since 1968) in eastern Africa is back. At least TWENTY TIMES the size of that original swarm. It is devouring all the crops in every direction – has covered Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Tanzania. It is now so big it is reaching over to Pakistan and the first locusts have just appeared in Western Australia. Really??? First world-wide plague, and now locusts??? It's all beginning to feel a tad Biblical. Some people in the world are coping with multiple disasters, and I'm grateful to be here, with just 1 on my doorstep.

I can't imagine the horror of having those locusts ruining your crop for the year, and knowing you are facing starvation. Parts of Africa could be facing a famine, as well as a pandemic. It doesn't bear thinking about. We are so comfortable here in comparison, and our shortages and problems really are minor compared to that, and yet, we too are having to deal with shortages looming. 80% of meat processing plants (ie slaughter houses) in Canada are now closed as their staff are infected with the virus. With only 20% of meat processing plants working, the country is fast running out of meat supplies. Beef is apparently the worse affected, though we personally have noticed prices rising steeply on chicken and pork. We only ever buy 'Happy Meat', and normally a small to medium Free Range chicken from the Red Barn Market costs around \$10-\$12. They are now \$18 ish. That's a steep price rise! And apparently the Vancouver poultry processing plant closed yesterday with staff illness, so it's going to get worse. Luckily DH and I are happy to eat mostly vegetarian, but again, life is not that simple; we are hearing that Canadian farmers are having problems planting their crops this year, as the foreign agricultural workers that normally keep our farms going, can't get into the country because of Covid. We could soon be seeing shortages all round.

So bearing that in mind, and it being planting time for my little veggie plot anyway, I decide to go to the garden centre today. I've not been for quite a few weeks and oh my – it is quite a shock! It seems that the Coronavirus has made gardeners of us all, and the locust analogy springs to mind. As I drive up, I am astonished to see that *every single parking space* is full – including the ones in the overflow parking lot. I have NEVER seen it this full. And to cope with the social distancing requirements, the centre has created a giant line up area, reminiscent of a Disney theme park, for us all to wait in. I count the spaces – there are no less than FORTY spaces, each marked out at 6 foot intervals with a yellow tape. Incredible. I ask the attendant counting us in, what she would recommend as a quiet time to come. She laughs. "*There is NO quiet time!*" she assures me. "*This is it!*".



Once in the centre, I'm impressed that they have sanitising stations set up everywhere, and arrows on the ground to guide our flow. Actually, it is very well set up and organised, and we all get through without encroaching on each other's space, but still having time and space to choose what we want. And I have lucked out – the variety of tomatoes that we particularly like – Chocolate Sprinkles – arrived just this morning, so I load up the cart with tomato plants, peppers, chilli plants and sugar snap peas, (to go with my already planted runner beans, kale and lettuces) and leave happy. It's been a successful trip, but also a pleasant outing. A real bonus in this time of Covid!



The Disneyfied line up area. I was lucky to arrive at a 'quiet' time it seems!

We're lucky that the garden centres are still open (and even advertising for staff, so clearly busy), but they are one of the few 'essential' services open, along with food stores, liquor stores and gas stations. All the small, speciality stores are closed. So what is a girl to do when her bras need replacing? I've not been bra shopping for a couple of years, and 2 of them have chosen this moment to finally give up the ghost, one with a wire snapping in half, one with the elastic so gone that you might as well not wear it. Again, this lack of ability to access our normal supplies gives me an insight into what it must have been like during the war years, and I think of the girls painting lines down the back of their legs when they couldn't get stockings. Luckily for me, DH is more prosaic and suggests I go on-line, so I type in the name of our little local lingerie store, and am pleasantly surprised to find they have been pro-active and have set up an on-line ordering system. I type in and send my order, not thinking any more of it. But it turns out that what to me was just a simple order, in these extraordinary times represents a life line to the store. Some hours later, the owner of the store phones me. She is emotional and is calling to thank me profusely for making an order. And I think of all the local store owners whose livelihoods have been taken from them by this crisis. Apparently some 30% of independent, local store owners claim they will be bankrupted by Covid 19, and will not be able to re-open after this is all over. That's a horrifying statistic and will have real impacts on our community. Perhaps I should buy some more bras.

Item 9: Left over mini Easter eggs. (How did *that* happen??)

Turns into: Somewhat belated Easter cake, with a pear from the back of the fridge and leftover homemade chocolate sauce on top, and the eggs in a nest.

## FRIDAY 24<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

President Donald Trump suggests people inject themselves with bleach to cure the virus. Yes, really.

Canadian deaths: 2,302

World-wide deaths: 197,091

We're learning more about the Coronavirus virus all the time (though we still have so much to learn), and one of the pieces of information that the scientists have discovered is that Covid 19 is not just one, identical, virus worldwide, but that there are in fact actually several strains of the same virus. They are similar, but not identical; they behave in slightly different ways and vary in strength. There are apparently 7 different coronaviruses that can infect humans, 3 of which originated as animal infections, and pose a more serious threat than the other 4. It is these 3 types that the world is fighting right now. Apparently, the 3 types are:

Type A: which is closest to the one found in bats and pangolins and which has two sub-clusters:

One sub-cluster is linked to Wuhan, and the other is common in the US and Australia

Type B: which is derived from type A, and which has become the most prevalent in Wuhan

Type C: which is the 'child' of type B, and is the one that has spread to Europe via Singapore, and Eastern US. It appears that Type C - the European strain - is the nastiest of all of the strains, which may help explain why Europe and the Eastern seaboard of the US have had such high death rates.

It also makes me wonder about this business of being immune if you have had the virus. I think I had it back in March, but which strain was it? If it was indeed caught at Seattle airport, then it was probably Type A, and I'm still vulnerable to Type C. The scientists don't yet know how strong our immunity is after we recover from the illness. This is a 'novel' Coronavirus after all. Novel meaning new. There's a lot we don't know and any immunity we may have after recovery is a big piece of the puzzle they are still working on. But for now, it does mean that we cannot let our guard down, even if we think we are immune. Immune from which one? And which is the one you may face when you go out to the store tomorrow?

While the scientists are working hard to learn more about the virus, it seems that some people are resistant to scientific fact. But of course, that doesn't stop them thinking that they know the answers and proudly boasting of it. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, Donald Trump said: *"I like this stuff. I really get it. People are surprised that I understand it. Every one of these doctors said, 'How do you know so much about this? ' Maybe I have a natural ability."*

With that inflated sense of self, it's no wonder he feels comfortable making 'suggestions' for random cures....previously it was the anti-malarial drug he has shares in (which has since been tested and shown to have no benefits at all, although 2 American citizens have since died, apparently taking large doses of that drug), and today he suggested scientists try UV light and now this..... *"And then I see the disinfectant where it knocks it out in a minute. One minute. And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning? So it'd be interesting to check that."* Injecting bleach. That product where they warn you on the labels that it is in fact a poison. No surprises that Lysol and other manufacturers of bleach and cleaning products have been rushing to issue disclaimers and warnings to the public NOT to ingest or inject disinfectant. Who would ever

have guessed that the time would come when they would need to hurriedly counter such a suggestion from the President of the United States?!

No wonder that in such crazy times we are all turning to food and drink for comfort. Apparently, Canadians are baking so much that Robin Hood, our main manufacturer of flour, has run out of the bags that it sells the flour in! We've certainly noticed – as has everyone else we know – that baking ingredients are almost impossible to get hold of, both in stores or on-line. We are all taking comfort in, and alleviating our stress with sweet treats and desserts. Some are saying that the name Covid 19 represents the number of pounds in weight we will each probably gain as a result of all this baking and comfort eating! 19lbs sounds a lot – could it be true? I nervously go to the scales and weigh myself....oh heck....5lbs extra already! Not quite the 19lbs yet, but a quarter of the way there!! Trouble is, I have absolutely no desire or motivation to diet them off right now. She says, pouring a glass of wine.

And that extra glass of wine we're all indulging in? Yup – there's even been a name coined for that....a Quarantini. What a splendid name.

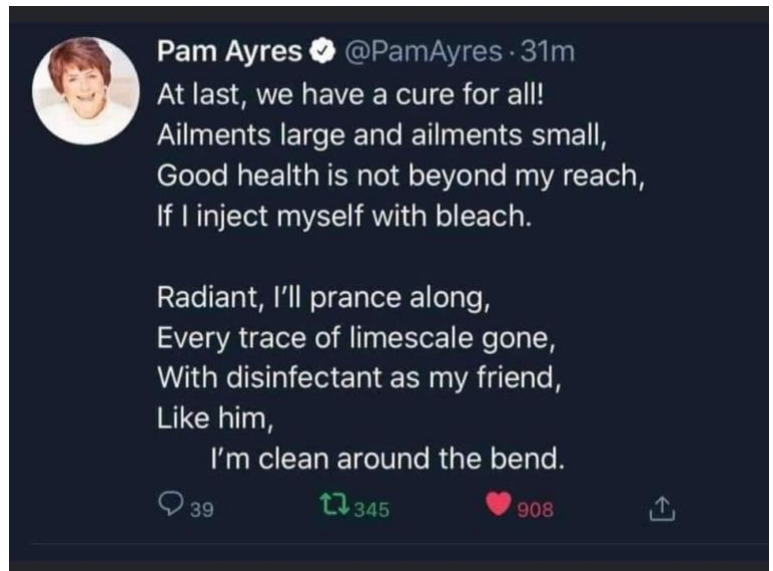
#### Email voices:

##### G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*I'm wondering how many thousands of pubs are going to close this year. I have a feeling the public house landscape is going to look decidedly scarred after all this is over. Some brewers might fold, too, I suspect (especially the smaller ones). Will life ever be the same again? ? After one of the carers went to the hospital with symptoms and tested positive for the virus, we decided to get Gi's parents and ourselves tested too (for a hefty fee). A nurse arrived at their house yesterday and took a blood sample from each of us. And we got the results back today (online) and amazingly, neither of the parents show any signs of having had the virus. So, we are assuming the same is true for Gi and I, but (due to paperwork complications), we don't have access to our results yet. Tis disappointing, as I'd hoped we might magically have dodged a bullet (especially given D's bronchitis last week). So, we'll have to baton down the hatches and hope for the best.*

##### B – Abbotsford, BC

*I think last week must have been a week where the emotional trauma caught up with us all and the realization that this is our new norm and not just a nightmare that we can suddenly wake up from. I also think that Trudeau has been doing a good job during extremely difficult times and am sorry that he endures so much criticism for everything he does. I am glad to be Canadian more than ever right now. The world is a mess, and it's terribly sad that so many people are dying all the time. It's just terrible for every family that loses a loved one from this.*



## SUNDAY 26<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

Victoria council has promised to close the tent cities in Topaz Park and on Pandora Avenue by May 9<sup>th</sup>, putting the homeless in local hotel and motel rooms.

Canadian deaths: 2,560      World-wide deaths: 206,916

Looking at the calendar, I see it's now only 3 months since we set off for our trip to the Caribbean and first heard mention of the virus that would change our lives. That feels like another time on another planet. How many years ago was that vacation?? But when I look at the calendar and count the actual weeks, it seems we've all been in official lock down for some 6 weeks now (and I was at home for an extra 2 before that with the sickness, so 8 in total for us). In some ways that feels so strange. It feels as if we've been living like this forever, not just 8 weeks. In some respects, 8 weeks is such a short time, and yet, here we are, living a 'new normal' and have been for aeons.

Time is just weird right now. It doesn't make any kind of sense. Each day can feel long, yet the days pass quickly. We're here at another weekend when I'm barely aware of the week in between having happened at all. Sometimes I think that if it wasn't for this journal, I'd have no proof that those days even existed. And yet, it feels like forever, not just a matter of 2 months. I don't know how to make sense of it.

Luckily, in the serendipitous way that sometimes happens, there's a really good article in the Guardian newspaper today, by a gifted journalist called Jonathan Freedland, where he examines this whole conundrum. Here is some of what he says about the subject:

*It was a long March, perhaps the longest any of us can remember. And yet April is on course to be unexpectedly the shortest. Strictly speaking, none of that makes sense. There were 31 days in March, as always, and there will be 30 in April, as always. And yet, coronavirus has not just upended space, it has also messed with time. Tell people that Monday will mark the start of week six of lockdown and they stare back in disbelief. Really? How did that happen? "The weeks seem to pass surprisingly quickly," texts one friend. "Yet the days seem to last an eternity." Strange things are happening with time, and stranger things could happen still.*

*When Boris Johnson announced the lockdown on 23 March, the talk – the hopeful assumption – was that it would last three weeks. And then on Wednesday, the chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, warned that "highly disruptive" social distancing measures were likely to be in place until 2021. That is a very different prospect, and it requires us to adjust our clocks. The sober, uber-rational health correspondent of the New York Times, Donald McNeil, suggests an easing by the end of the year is optimistic, given how long it will take to produce either a vaccine or effective treatment for Covid-19. He spoke of how he is expecting a grandchild in June – and is coming to terms with the possibility that he might not meet that child until he or she is two years old.*

*For everyone, this is a challenge of a different order. A sustained, long-run lockdown means that a vast stretch of undifferentiated time is unfurling ahead of us, stripped bare of the usual divisions and markers. We are facing a form of confinement that will not be brief.*

*Tentatively, I called up Erwin James, who served 20 years of a life sentence for murder and for several years wrote a column for the Guardian called A Life Inside. I say tentatively because I wasn't sure a former prisoner would have much patience for comparisons between the kind of lockdown we*



are enduring – in our own homes, sometimes with a garden, often with family, permitted to go to the shops or the park – and the incarceration that he experienced. And yet, if anyone knows about the tricks restriction can play with time, it's a former inmate. It turns out I needn't have hesitated. "There are so many resonances with prison," James tells me. Any inmate would identify with the unnerving paradox my friend had spoken about, James says. "The days drag and then you wake up and a month has passed and you think, 'Where the hell has that gone?'"

At the heart of the matter is the Groundhog Day sameness. When one day is no different from the next, time becomes thick and amorphous, hard to keep hold of. "It's like walking through treacle, in slow motion," says James. To break up the monotony, prisoners hunger for milestones, especially seasonal ones. We can understand why those in prison would feel like that: wishing the days away, desperate to strike weeks off the calendar until the moment they are free and time becomes their own once more. Maybe some of us are already feeling that way about lockdown. But it comes with a great feeling of loss. We want to feel time is precious; we don't want to write it off. We don't want to lose a summer that we'll never get back. We don't want to do time; we don't want to be inside. We want to live.

Exactly. What he said.

Still, we DO have something different to do today! A change in routine! A friend in the UK has invited us to join in with the Saturday night village on-line quiz. (Zoom – the on line conference program, has really taken off during lockdown). Of course – here's another time shifter – the 8 hours difference between the UK and Western Canada means it's actually morning coffee time for us, rather than Saturday night for everyone else, but as I said, time is so all over the place anyway right now, does it really matter that they're all swigging wine and beer while we have our cups of morning tea? What the heck – why not just drink wine with them and pretend it's evening?? I have little concept of what day of the week it is, and none whatsoever of which week we're in, so does it really matter if I also have no idea what time of day it is??



After that fun escape, I'm brought back to reality by a urgent task: I've offered to make some masks for extended family members that can't get hold of them anywhere else. This is becoming a problem it seems – we're being advised to wear masks (and it is mandatory in some situations), and yet, there are none available to buy. For those folks who cannot sew, this is clearly a real issue. But what I hadn't reckoned on when I agreed to help out, is an even more basic issue.....there is no elastic available anywhere to make the masks with. I knew I'd finished the last of my elastic stores with my previous mask making. So this afternoon I phone Michael's and Pharamasave and everywhere I can think of that normally sells elastic, but all to no avail. I am told "we can't get it ourselves - no idea when we'll next get some in!". Everyone is urgently sewing masks and Canada has run out of elastic.



Honestly, it feels like war times, when the basics just become impossible to get hold of! Finally, in desperation, I pull out my 'odds and sods' sewing basket from the cupboard, empty it out completely, and lo and behold, at the bottom, I find enough elastic to make the 3 masks! Huzzah! Treasure! At first, I think how shocking it is that we can't get hold of something as simple as a piece of elastic. And then, on further reflection, after another sip of wine, it occurs to me that actually, it's the other way around.....what IS amazing is that we now live in a time when we *expect* to be able to access anything we need, at any time. We are privileged beyond any previous peoples in history. We expect to be able to buy food from anywhere in the world, or unlimited entertainment options, or pretty much anything our minds can think of. Including elastic when we want it. It's a shame that it takes a pandemic to make me realise our incredible good fortune in living where we do, when we do.

Email voices:

J - Toronto

*Yes, I think I am brave enough going outside finally. I needed Clarinet cork grease so I ordered it online and Cosmo Music the store is so close from my house. The system was very easy and simple. I let them know my plate number then they send me when the item that I ordered is ready. If I send them text or phone call when I've arrived at the pick-up spot - their parking lot, they check my plate number and put it in my trunk. I don't need to do anything; they don't want me - customers to do anything at all for safety. On the way picking up the item, I saw some people walking. I finally realized I don't need to be afraid of going outside. It was just part of our lives. So I will go for a walk from tomorrow.*

## WEDNESDAY 29<sup>th</sup> APRIL

### Today's News:

The doctors have realised there is a bizarre symptom of Covid 19 that appears just in children; Covid Toes, where their toes go purple / red / swollen / cracked.

British Airways has announced they are permanently laying off 25% of their workforce, as, like Lufthansa, they think the industry will never go back to its former levels.

Canadian deaths: 2,984

World-wide deaths: 228,029

History will tell what the permanent effects of this pandemic will be. For those of us living through it, we are absorbed in the day to day losses – society is struggling with the deaths of loved ones, the illness itself, the loss of hugs, physical contact and closeness with those we love, isolation, loneliness, depression, mental breakdown, increased domestic violence, loss of education, businesses being shut down permanently, job losses, huge financial losses and real financial hardship for many, the bad effects on our health through stress, increased alcohol consumption, weight gain and lack of access to regular medical testing / check-ups and many other negative effects. There are a lot of losers in this game.

But surprisingly, there are some winners emerging. One of the biggest positives to come out of the pandemic is that this crisis has ironically helped our other global crisis – the environmental crisis and climate change. With so many businesses closed, pollution has dropped to unheard of levels in cities around the world – the air is way cleaner in normally polluted cities like Beijing and Los Angeles. People in the Punjab can see the Himalayas for the first time in 40 years. British Airways predicting a permanent 25% shrink in the air travel market will be seen as negative in economic terms, but I suspect that many concerned for the future health of the planet, will be celebrating that news. 25% less plane emissions? That's a significant amount.

Another potential winner is the homeless crisis in British Columbia. The crisis that unfolds daily on our streets has been referred to as a public health emergency / major health crisis for years, yet a permanent solution has yet to be found. Vancouver and Victoria still have 100's of people living on the streets in desperate conditions. Some of these folks are simply too badly paid to be able to afford housing in our expensive cities; apparently some 17% of the homeless in Victoria work full time. That is an incredible statistic. But the majority of the homeless have many health issues and could not hold down a job; they have mental health issues, they have drug or alcohol addiction issues, they are broken in health and spirit and unable to look after themselves. I have personally known, and been fond of, several young people who have gone on to die through overdoses or suicide. It is a heartbreak of the most painful kind; vibrant young lives, full of potential, driven to despair by illness or addiction and the inability to cope. We let them down when we decide not to fund the resources or facilities they need to help them. Apparently 1 in 6 British Columbians currently do not have access to a family doctor – where are the doctors and supports for our most vulnerable, the ones that are hardest to treat and care for, if even settled, 'healthy' people can't get a doctor?

Anyway, I'm ranting. But the positive news is – I'm getting there – that because of the social distancing measures required to combat the Coronavirus, 'something had to be done' about the homeless. Something that would enable them to shelter a safe distance from each other and hopefully prevent the spread of the disease. So two tent cities were allowed; one on Pandora Avenue, the area where they currently congregate (near to the Our Place outreach facility), and one in Topaz Park. Tent City in Topaz Park has 200 tents in it, each carefully spaced the required distance apart.

There are washroom facilities, meals provided, drug support services and counselling services, as well as police patrolling. It sounds great, and is certainly an improvement on previous conditions, but perhaps inevitably things soon start to fall apart. Many of these folks are drug addicts after all, and so resort to crime to fund their habit. Soon the crime rates are rocketing in the neighbourhood and the local residents are terrified, some (according to the paper) not sleeping at night to defend their homes. One of our daughters has a ground floor apartment in the neighbourhood, and is scared this week to find a stranger peering over the hedge into her patio, taking photos. This is really scary, and we all worry about her safety. There is no knowing what someone high on drugs will do – they are a totally unpredictable entity. Yes, I genuinely care about the homeless, but I'm a momma bear, and I care even more about the wellbeing of my own cubs.

So it is with great relief that we read that the province has announced that these 2 tent cities, and the big one in Vancouver, Oppenheimer Park, must be shut down by May 9<sup>th</sup>. The mayor has not needed to requisition hotel rooms in the end – 5 hotels have come forward and an agreement has been made for 360 homeless people to be housed in hotel rooms. A few of the entrenched street people don't want this option, but they will not be allowed to stay in the parks – fences will be erected apparently. But obviously, the huge majority of the homeless are absolutely thrilled; and then comes the best news of all. The city announces that it will not kick those people out of their hotel rooms until they each have a permanent home to move to. Incredible! I honestly don't believe this would have happened without the pandemic forcing the situation, but IF, as a result of the virus, policy on the homeless is changed, and they get the permanent supports they need, and thus clean up the downtown at the same time, this has to be a HUGE positive result for us all.

And homeless people are not the only ones to benefit from the pandemic – homeless cats are too! Normally the SPCA in town has many, many (100's?) of cats and kittens awaiting adoption, but now, every single one has been adopted out and there are even wait lists for more! People stuck in isolation at home have welcomed a companion into their lives to make the experience less lonely. With several weeks (months??) at home together before 'normality' resumes, they have the perfect time to bond with them too. I smile at the thought of these new furry friendships formed, and homes found for the homeless of both species.

Shelter is a basic need. And if we're lucky, our shelter becomes a home. Ironically, the email voice today is exactly on the same theme. Purrfect.

### Email voices:

#### T – West Vancouver

*A few weeks ago as I was sitting quietly alone in my home, I became enchanted by the flickering reflections on the walls from the candles. I felt so blessed and embraced by the safety of a shelter which has witnessed many events during the decades. It was as if the house knew the truth of things and had always been a constant – and as I sat there, I recalled this poem.*

*In these special and unusual times, I wonder if the poem might offer comfort to others as we practice self-isolation and call on our homes, perhaps as never before, to be our guardians.*

*(Our house) had a heart,  
and a soul, and eyes to see us  
with; and approvals, and  
solicitudes, and deep*

*sympathies; it was of us, and  
we were in its confidence,  
and lived in its grace and in  
the peace of its benediction ...  
we could not enter it  
unmoved. – Mark Twain*

And for the record, this is what Covid Toes look like!!



## SUNDAY 3rd MAY

### Today's News:

After many long weeks, Spain and Italy are beginning the lifting of restrictions. As is every other province in Canada, except for BC! (Though to be fair, we didn't have as many restrictions in the first place, eg our garden centres never shut).

Canadian deaths: 3,681

World-wide deaths: 247,640

And just like that, it's May. As someone said earlier, this was the shortest April we've ever had. Back in March, we wondered if Coronavirus would have been a thing of the past by now. Silly us. Our friends in the UK are still in the severest of lockdowns with the police arresting and fining people for all kinds of infringements eg exercising not close enough to your home, standing still ('time wasting'), while you're meant to be out exercising etc. And yet despite all this, they now have the same numbers of dead as Spain and Italy, at around the 28,000 mark. Things sound truly grim there and yet our friends are keeping cheerful and positive. Gotta love that traditional British spirit! My cousin H in UK is struggling right now though; her mom, my aunt, died last week (stroke) and trying to arrange a funeral in the time of Covid when they're not even allowed to travel is proving beyond stressful. I think she'll be given permission to drive down to Devon for the actual funeral, (max 10 people, 6 feet apart, no singing, no coffin bearers) but that's it. So she won't be able to sort out her mom's belongings or even lock up the house safely. What a worry. And H's 27 year old son, L, is bedridden, in pain, awaiting surgery but of course all surgeries are cancelled for now. Even though none of the family actually have Covid 19, they are truly suffering from the terrible effects of it.

Here in BC, Premier John Horgan has extended the State of Emergency in BC for two more weeks, re-inforcing the realisation that a new month on the calendar does not necessarily mean a new set of circumstances. But things are changing – there is a definite feeling in the air that we're over the worst and things are improving, here and there. When I went to pick up the bras from the lingerie store 3 days ago – assuming kerb side pick up – I was surprised to find the store open, as normal (but with distancing markings on the floor). The owner had decided the 'time was right' and had re-opened that very morning. Similarly, the little gift shop next door to her had also re-opened that morning, and driving home past the golf course, we saw the parking lot full of cars. It's as if, with the unfurling of the spring leaves on the trees, the unfurling of the restrictions is happening at the same time. We're cautiously coming out of hibernation, quietly, bit by bit, noses twitching in the air to sense for danger.

Premier Horgan says the plan to re-open the economy will be announced this week. He says it will be a slow, methodical, phased-in reopening. "*Social Distancing is going to be around for a long time and we need to get our heads around that.*" But, nonetheless, he's going to be announcing some changes this week.....things are officially on the move to match the quiet moves we've been noticing.

And really, there are many, many reasons why we all want restrictions lifted. Everyone has been affected – even the mice and rats it seems! Apparently with all the food outlets and restaurants closed downtown, there is less food available for them to scrounge, and so mice and rat wars are breaking out over any remaining scraps, and many are dying off. This may sound like good news for downtown human residents, but we have been warned that of course with 'survival of the fittest' of the rodents, they could be a smarter and stronger foe to deal with in the future, when food outlets do open up again. And others warn that, with slim pickings down town, the hungry rodents will be on the move, heading out to the burbs to hunt for scraps and leftovers. Everything has a knock on effect. Still, at least these rats aren't carrying the bubonic plague with them, (we hope), as in previous pandemics!



Talking of stores, today is the last day that our liquor store is having a sale on our favourite wine, so we pop in, not wanting to miss out on that opportunity. While there, I ask them how much of an uptick there has been in liquor sales over the duration of lockdown, and am surprised when they reply "60% up from normal". That's a lot of liquor! Has our own personal liquor consumption been up 60% from normal? No, I can't honestly say that it has, but I'm not gonna lie, it's probably been up somewhere around 30%. It's not consistent – I guess we drank more at the beginning as we coped with the shock of it all, and then went through the grief of adjusting to our losses, but now we're more or less back to our normal amounts. Mostly. A few transgressions, but as we say each time "This is good for us – we need it for our mental health!". It may not do much for our physical health, but it helps DH and I stay positive during these weird times.

#### Email voices:

##### G – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*Things here somewhat less tranquil in the big city but going pretty well all things considered. The main day carer who had the virus now has the all clear finally, so can return to work on Monday. Having someone with immunity will be a real plus.*

*I read today that they are planning to re-start the English Premier League over the coming weeks - and are planning to isolate all the players and play on neutral grounds without fans...which would be pretty crap. HOWEVER - all the teams in or near the relegation zone are saying - 'well, if we play out the season like this, it would clearly 'affect the integrity of the competition' (lovely phrase) - and you can't possibly relegate anyone in such circumstances....for which I wholeheartedly agree, as Villa are 2nd bottom and on a run of 5 straight defeats... We might be saved! Huzzah!!*

*Let's indeed hope for an easing of the virus restrictions soon.*

##### R – West Vancouver

*I love these empty skies and the lack of noise. I hear about Virgin pulling out of Gatwick and BA considering the same. We hear about mass cancellations for new aircraft and how "things will never be the same again." Sounds too good to be true, unless you hold a lot of airline shares in your retirement plan. Wonder how that extra Heathrow runway is looking.*

##### J – Stratford on Avon, England

*Warwickshire has had over 350 deaths from Covid, which does not take into account the many more who previously died in care homes. It's ghastly. Lockdown is still tight and well observed. Other than one daily walk, I go nowhere. A does a Tesco shop once a week, wearing a mask and gloves and we leave non- fridge/freezer items untouched in the garage for 3 days before putting them away. Stocks of food items (and loo rolls!) in the shops are plentiful - and some takeaway restaurants are now open, although we haven't ordered takeaway food since February. We go into the front garden to clap the NHS workers every Thursday and take that opportunity to have a good blether with the neighbours.*

*Despite the restrictions, A and I are having a great time. I am on the phone/Skype/Zoom etc to friends and family for hours each day and try to keep in regular contact with friends who are elderly and live on their own. A has an online session each Thursday with his fiddle tutor. Sometimes, when he has to play the same phrase over and over, I feel like the character in Munch's 'Scream' but the ping from my Duolingo courses probably drive him up the wall too, so we are both practising tolerance, not a quality that has been much in abundance in our household before.*

## TUESDAY 5th MAY

### Today's News:

Dr Bonnie Henry announces: *"We've reached the end of the beginning"*

Canadian deaths: 3,854

World-wide deaths: 258,026

One of the most overused expressions of this whole pandemic is possibly the term "The New Normal". Understandably so, because it's something we're all grappling with. Life has changed in unimaginable ways in just a few months, and we're all struggling to cope. We have now moved on from expecting things to go back to the way they were pre pandemic. We've accepted this is no longer possible. All of our lives have been affected and, to use another cliché, Things Will Never Be The Same. Some people have asked that we insert the word *temporary* to the phrase, so that we get a 'Temporary New Normal'. But I feel that those folks haven't quite grasped the full reality, as by the time this is over (and we get a vaccine and build herd immunity), this could be another year or so away and things will have irrevocably changed. As Dr Henry says: *"It's now about finding a new normal - a way of living with the virus as opposed to going back to previous normal"*.

So as we move towards coming out of lockdown, it's now all about what our lives will look like moving forward. Some of the changes will be hard, but many of the changes will be for the better – on line doctors visits may free up more space for people to have access to a family doctor, more people working from home may free up commuter traffic chaos and allow a better work / life balance for many, similarly, a new acceptance of on-line business meetings will permit more workers to go home to their families at the end of the day, instead of to some foreign hotel, and the reduced resultant business air travel may mean less pollution. In Canada, there has been a realisation that long term care homes need improving, as well as the needs of the homeless. Hopefully there will be a greater focus on food security and supporting local businesses. Some of the changes may be even more radical; with automation improving along with the desire to reduce potential infection, many jobs may be replaced by 'robots' or become fully automated (eg self check outs at stores, on line ordering in restaurants, self driving trucks etc etc etc). So *many* people may lose their jobs that universal income may become a necessity and the whole attitude to the nature of work could change. This pandemic may simply have sped up the changes that were beginning anyway, but one thing is for sure, permanent changes are coming and they are probably coming fast.

There will be a time for looking back at the virus and scientifically appraising where and when it started (and with France recently admitting that their first case was in mid-December, this opens up a whole new avenue to explore), and how it spread. We'll be able to compare how we all dealt with it around the world and which, in hindsight, was the best way of dealing with it, so that we learn and establish new protocols for future events. We're humans – we adapt, which is the secret of our success. The philosopher Yuval Harrari points out that our modern pandemic is so different from plagues of the past, as then it was seen as 'God's will', or 'fate', and humans were powerless to act against the circumstances, but now we all act together, we use science and we say "when the vaccine comes" not *if*. It's a different experience.

So there will be a time for looking back and learning, but perhaps not yet. Right now, around the world, we're still in the thick of it; South America and India's numbers are still rising, and it hasn't even really hit Africa yet. There is a lot of suffering and heart break to go before that vaccine is found. We still have a long way to go in this story, but here in BC we have reached the End of Our Beginning and tomorrow Premier Horgan will announce what restrictions will be lifted. I'm excited. Perhaps we'll even get to hug our loved ones. Which is all that really matters, in the end.