

The Pandemic Diaries.

Hitting The Wall.

**FRIDAY 1st JANUARY 2021**

**New Year's Day.**

Canadian deaths: 15,606

World-wide deaths: 1,834,519

Nothing of any factual significance has changed in the time span of one night; the virus continues to rage away with case numbers and death numbers soaring, hospitals around the world are all still bursting at the seams, and yet.....something has changed. Is it that age old feeling of a new year bringing new hope and possibilities? It must be. For there is a definite subtle shift in tone in the emails and Facebook posts today. It's as if we're now consigning the bad year we've just lived through to 'the past', and we're now looking forward. People are looking *to* the vaccine and *beyond* the vaccine, to living life fully again, and hopefully addressing the causes of such an event, so that similar circumstances can't arise again. That is a wonderful thought – there are so many lessons learned in this pandemic, and I pray we will remember them over time, and make real change.

But for now, Dear Husband and I issue a challenge to our immediate family; well, it's always good to start the new year with a game! Having talked about this ourselves last night, and made our own predictions, we decide to set up a competition, with prizes, of who in the extended family can most accurately predict the date of their *own* vaccination. When will *they personally* get vaccinated? When DH first tells me his guess of March 31<sup>st</sup>, I nearly choke on my food. March 31<sup>st</sup>?? Surely not! They have all the care workers, health workers, seniors, indigenous peoples, and those with underlying health conditions to get through first! I personally think he is bonkers and there is no way they can get to us by the end of March. But he smiles and remains confident; he's sticking to his prediction that it will be chaotic and slow at first, but then there'll be a rush of vaccine by March. I'm still stuck on who is going to administer all of that vaccine he's predicting a rush of, so I'm much more cautious and submit a date of May 9<sup>th</sup>.

The family respond with enthusiasm, and here are the best guesses so far:

T (aged 78) – March 16<sup>th</sup>

Big Bro (aged 70) – March 30<sup>th</sup> at 10am (!)

Dear Husband – March 31<sup>st</sup>

Wee Bro – 'Before the end of March' (see email as to reason why)

B – April 27<sup>th</sup>

Me – May 9<sup>th</sup>

H – May 15<sup>th</sup>

G – May 31<sup>st</sup>

K – August 10<sup>th</sup>

M – Late September

J – October 18<sup>th</sup>

We are all of varying ages, so we may all be right (!), but it seems to me there is a lot of wild optimism!! Nothing wrong with that. We could all do with some optimism right now ☺

Email voices:

*Wee Bro – Sao Paolo, Brazil*

*Happy 2021! Wishing you all every joy and happiness for the year ahead. Surely it can't be worse than 2020?????*

*As for the `vaccine challenge`, it is indeed tricky to predict. I am guessing here that the first vaccine will start to roll-out at the beginning of Feb, and I suspect we ourselves will probably have access to it before the end of March, maybe even before. The reason for my optimism is that the first vaccine*

*likely to be available here in Sao Paulo will be the Coronavac, which has been greeted with much distrust and suspicion in these parts (simply because it is the `Chinese vaccine` - and people seriously suspect the Chinese of having some hidden agenda to implant us all with malicious DNA or some other means of taking over the world) - suspicion stirred up significantly by Brazil's wonderful president). So, it could be that when it is finally available, we will be the only ones in line. But it can't come soon enough, that is for sure.*

*E – London, England*

*Many thanks for your email and kind words. I think everyone will be glad to see the back of 2020! We were very lucky to have been able to book a slot for the funeral on 17<sup>th</sup> December in Cowbridge for a small gathering of immediate family and 3 close friends, so 14 in all, which was the maximum number of people allowed! It was impossible to book a venue for the 'wake', so we all went back to the house for a socially distanced gathering in the garden and a packed deli lunch. It was very odd not to be able to hug one's relatives!! D, L's husband, is hoping to arrange a memorial service in due course for friends and family, but as things stand that might be some time ahead!*

*I am so sorry that you were unable to be with the girls over Christmas – it must have seemed very strange. Who would have thought we would find ourselves in this situation – it just shows how vulnerable the human race is. I hope this awakens the instinct in people to respect our environment, nature and each other! Our hopes all rest on the vaccine, so fingers crossed that the vaccination programme can be organized quickly.*

*Cousin H – London, England*

*I'm keeping my fingers crossed this is a call to action and we will be better for it - more in touch with what's important and how we want to live.*

*Pastor A – Devon, England*

*So as one year sets and another rises what will we take from one into the next? One truth, which I think has been reinforced very obviously this year, is that though we would like to have, and though we think we have control in life, we do not. Stuff happens which is beyond our control. And God allows stuff to happen too. My prayer is that, day by day, we will make sure we build our lives on the sure and strong foundation, which is Jesus, so that whatever happens we are not crushed. Shalom everyone.*

## MONDAY 4th JANUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 16,074      World-wide deaths: 1,860,427

It was a super quiet weekend for us; saw no-one, didn't go outside into the wet gloom, but as I told Dear Husband "People spend a lot of money to go somewhere they can just relax completely and chill out. Let's pretend we're on a luxury retreat this weekend, choosing to do nothing!". He muttered something about it being nicer doing nothing sitting by a pool in the sunshine, as opposed to pouring rain in a lock down, but nobly got into the spirit, so we read books by the fire, and we played a board game while drinking tea and munching homemade gingerbread cookies, and all was good. Bears in our den. Hibernating.

We may be retired and on 'retreat', but today is the day that the world went back to work after the Christmas and New Year break. The figures will soon tell us how everyone behaved during the break, and if they respected the guidelines or not (no less than SEVEN Alberta politicians having travelled abroad and being in that latter category of not!!). In the UK, the results are already in..... the case numbers have risen out of control and the hospitals can no longer cope, so today Boris Johnson addresses the nation and imposes a new full lock down for the whole of England until at least mid-February. Schools are closed, non-essential businesses and stores are closed, people are allowed out of their homes once a day for exercise only. They are calling it Tier 5 – a new category (on top of Tier 4, which was a new category they brought in 2 weeks ago) – to define full lockdown. The hope is that by mid-March enough folks will have been vaccinated that they can ease restrictions again. We always knew January and February were going to be tough months, and it looks like we weren't wrong..... It will be interesting to see how BC fares in comparison.

With people going back to work today, I receive 2 'official' newsletters in my inbox, which also provide different perspectives on the virus around the world. The first is from Dr Rob Rutledge, an oncologist from Nova Scotia, whom we had the privilege of working with over many years. In his newsletter (sent on behalf of his not for profit group, Healing and Cancer) he says:

*I'm super proud as to how Nova Scotia has responded to the pandemic (though I want to acknowledge the 65 people who died here during the first wave – bless their families). In March when we didn't know what was going to happen, I worried about my colleagues and the radiation therapists who continued to treat many patients every day. I figured maybe one of us may actually die - yet not one person in the cancer centre has gotten sick this entire time. The medical system responded with lightning speed – we donned masks and gloves, created a triage system, and put procedures in place like doing the initial consultations and follow up by zoom (nowadays I see my new patients in person because the risk is low). And hats off to the public – everyone wears a mask in the malls and stores. No fuss. We do it to protect others and they do it for us. And as of today we're averaging about 5 new cases per day, and nobody is in hospital from Covid. Thank you, Nova Scotia!!*

That is a wonderful statistic and he is right to be proud of his community. The Atlantic Bubble on the Canadian east coast has been an encouraging example of the community pulling together to defeat the 'enemy'.

The other newsletter today is from Arne and Carlos, two Norwegian knitwear designers whom I follow online. They have produced regular Youtube videos throughout the whole of the pandemic, bringing cheer and entertainment to their hundreds of thousands of followers. I am a big fan, so was sad to receive their newsletter this morning:

Nine months after Carlos got critically ill from coronavirus, he has still not recovered well and continues to suffer due to the long-term effects of Covid-19. Among other things, his lungs and his short term memory, have been affected. Therefore, he will soon be admitted to a Lung Hospital in Southern Norway, to receive treatments, therapy and rehabilitation and be away for several weeks. This means that our Wednesday podcast "Sit and Knit for a Bit" will take a little break until sometime in February. We will be back as soon as Carlos returns from the hospital, hopefully fully recovered and back to his old self!

One of the fascinating things about this virus is that it seems to have different effects on different people; the symptoms we commonly hear about are breathing difficulties, loss of smell, and fever, but people we know have also reported sickness, diarrhea and this brain function impairment that Carlos is suffering from. And which my Aunt Cil is also suffering from. This is a tricky, nasty virus.

### Email voices:

#### Cousin D – Devon, England

I spoke to both Aunt Cil and the carer in charge of her this morning, and the news generally remains positive. Her appetite has improved, not normal yet, but definitely better. Her taste is also improving. The two main issues are lethargy and a muddled mind. She finds that despite sleeping all night she can get up in the morning and immediately fall asleep in her chair, have breakfast and fall asleep again! She said that she fell asleep while being washed the other day. Her mind hasn't allowed her to do her card games, puzzles, books etc yet. Thankfully no more sickness recently.

#### B – Beaconsfield, England

We have just been put back into strict national lockdown! Looks like this new lockdown might go on until March, even with the vaccine rollout to the vulnerable. It is absolutely vital now to stop the country being overwhelmed by COVID. I do wish that selfish minority of people had kept the rules over Christmas then, even with the Dec 20 variant, things would not have been so bad. One doctor has even been quoted as saying "those who broke the rules have blood on their hands".

#### Cousin H – London, England

We're now in for tighter lockdown again - things terrible here. 1000 deaths in a day. L looks like he's going to have to move out if they put me in high risk (H is sadly suffering serious health issues right now). I've got to chat to the doctor tomorrow to get more drugs and understand a bit more about my risk / results etc. I'm guessing that if they find out I need more treatment nothing will happen. The hospitals here are at critical pitch right now in this area. Staying safe is difficult. I went to the corner shop with A and saw two people enter and exit with no mask on - a sign that not everyone takes things seriously despite all the pleas.



**WEDNESDAY 6th JANUARY 2021**

Canadian deaths: 16,336      World-wide deaths: 1,885,915

Yesterday was Epiphany, the Twelfth Day of Christmas, the day we all traditionally take our lights and decorations down. But, and here's the but....we've not had our Christmas yet! The presents are all still waiting under the tree, the turkey is in the freezer, and we've not seen our kids for months now. Dammit, we are going to have a Christmas get together, even if it's Janumas or Februmas!!

Our latest BC severe restrictions, saying there should be no get togethers AT ALL (inside or out), with *anyone* not in our household (ie sharing our bathroom), was put in place until 8<sup>th</sup> January. i.e. 2 days away. We have been anxiously waiting to see what the case numbers in BC would do after Christmas; how many people would have broken the rules, and what Dr Henry would feel was necessary in terms of new restrictions. Well, the good news is, that although it seems as if folks in Ontario and Quebec flagrantly broke the rules over Christmas and New Year, as their numbers are off the chart and the hospitals are full and struggling, the folks in both Atlantic Canada AND BC did abide by them, as our case numbers have only gone up very marginally. This is great news and it means that the BC Supremos have extended our current tight restrictions by only 10 days, hopefully with a view to removing these tight restrictions to a slightly lesser level after that, IF our numbers stay low. That takes us to Monday 18th January. So, we *might, might, might* be able to do Janumas on Sat 23rd???? We're keeping everything crossed and will of course keep all of our Christmas decorations up until then, in hope.

We're not the only ones doing this it seems: there was a letter in the Times Colonist this week asking people to please keep their outside lights up for January, to cheer everyone up during this gloomy month. There are rumours that the Queen is also keeping her decorations and lights up, as well as cathedrals around the UK. Here is an interesting article on this from The Guardian newspaper.

*In other years, the threat of bad luck if you fail to take your Christmas decorations down by Twelfth Night might have meant something. In 2021, the idea that things could get any worse seems blackly comic. And so it is that for some people, baubles, lights, and trees are staying in place this year. In cities, towns and villages across the country, a few doggedly cheerful celebrants of the season have decided to dispense with the practice of the last two centuries and embrace an older, medieval tradition – which dictates that rather than ending in early January, Christmas celebrations should last until the next Christian holy day, Candlemas (2 February).*



Christmas cheer will be maintained at Durham cathedral during January.

*The idea was raised on Tuesday by Michael Carter, senior properties historian at English Heritage: "There's precious little joy in January at the best of times," Carter argued. "This year the accelerating spread of Covid ... only compounds the misery." It turns out that plenty of others have had the same idea, with dozens of social media users suggesting they had similar plans.*

*“Lighting our way through the long, dark winter months will hopefully create a sense of optimism,” said Becci Wright, a TV unit manager. “The lights serve as a reminder that we are here for each other.” In a “dark and miserable winter with nothing in our lives to look forward to”, she added, “an extension to the festivities seems reasonable. Life isn’t normal, so why pretend it is?”*

*Adam Adshead, a 56-year-old who lives in Billericay, has good reason to seek that kind of solace: he lost his sister in June, and his father, to coronavirus, two days before Christmas. And so he kept the lights on. “This year, more than ever, we need cheering up, and leaving the lights on is a sign of hope for better things to come,” he said. “Maybe there are essential workers going past at night, and just maybe the sight of lights will bring a little joy to them.” Above all, though, Adshead has been thinking of his loved ones – and like most people this Christmas, his cheer has a tinge of defiance. “The lights are for them,” he said. “To remember them, to honour them and to say that despite everything, life does go on.”*

It's good to know we are not alone. We will keep our decorations and lights up with good wishes for all the community in the hope the lights may cheer them on, and with optimism for Janumas.

Or Februmas.

Please God, not Marchmas.

Email voices:

Wee Bro – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*I agree that it sounds as though Aunt Cil is holding up well, which is indeed wondrous news. One never really knows but hopefully she is past the stage where she is vulnerable to breathing problems. When Diogo - who is much younger of course - was in hospital with Covid, his lungs were full of the virus but it didn't greatly trouble him breathing-wise. As you say, Sis, it seems to affect everyone differently. I've read stories of Premier League footballers in their twenties suffering prolonged effects, so age and fitness are not an absolute guide.*

E – London, England

*S has just been told by her friend, who works at the BBC, that employees have been given devices that beep, should they breach the 2 metre distancing rule!!!!*

B – Beaconsfield, England

*Good news is that at last all travellers coming to UK will need proof of covid negative test result from next week. Pity we didn't do that or close our borders in March to stop the import of the virus from EU countries! There is real concern here about the S African variant as the vaccines might not be so effective against it.*



**FRIDAY 8th JANUARY 2021**

Canadian deaths: 16,665

World-wide deaths: 1,916,035

Well that didn't last long! The BC supremos have just imposed a new date for continued 'no mixing at all' restrictions: February 5<sup>th</sup>, i.e. another 4 weeks away. Sigh. So Janumas is out the window and it looks like it will be Februmas. If we're lucky.



It's so hard not being able to see the kids, but for the rest, well, at the moment I'm actually pretty zen about it; the attitude of '*this is a retreat I'm choosing to go on, to keep myself and everyone I love safe, and to rest and refresh*', is sort of working. We are focussing on a healthy diet and some of the Covid pounds are finally coming off, which is great. My hip is actually pretty painful right now, so I can barely limp around anyway. Talking of the hip, I'm now on the FAST list, which stands for First Available Surgeon Triage, and which means I have agreed to take a cancellation with *any* of the surgeons in the group. As my assigned surgeon has a current waitlist of between 6 – 9 months, and as all of these surgeons are apparently qualified and experienced, it seems to me this might be a good way to get this done sooner, Covid numbers permitting. Fingers crossed.

And if we want entertainment at this time, well, we just have to switch on the news to watch the latest horrifying tactics of Trump and his gang of thugs, over the border. It was truly shocking to watch the rioters break into the Capitol building, but what was the most shocking to me was the lack of police response to them. Everyone knew that Trump and his supporters were planning something illegal and violent; it was all over various social media sites, and yet the police protective presence at the Capitol building was negligible, and when it became clear what was happening, and the rioters started smashing windows and breaking into the building, nothing happened! No military reinforcements, no armed police back up, no message from Trump telling them to stop (of course not!). There were photos afterwards of the police taking selfies with the thugs! If that had been a Black Lives Matter protest, the police and military would have been in there instantly, all guns blazing. It is disgusting and upsetting to see this racism and abuse of power in action so clearly. Yet no action to halt the spread of Covid; there were over 4,000 Covid deaths in the USA yesterday. 4,000 in **one** day.

**2020 was a very strange year.**

**Day 6 of 2021:**

Actually, I am sickened by the whole thing; I am sickened that several senior Republicans STILL support Trump and STILL voted against ratifying the election results, even after these violent results of Trump's lies. I am sickened that no-one has the guts to remove him from office when he is so clearly delusional and dangerous. I am sad that some 70 million people voted for Trump in the first place and are still out there, supporting his divisive way of thinking. I am worried for the next 13 days, between now and the inauguration. I bet Putin is chuckling over his caviar.



Email voices:

B - Victoria

*J and I are both feeling generally quite positive right now, in spite of the extended Covid restrictions and the craziness down south. It feels like the end is in sight, now that the first wave of people are actually getting vaccinated. We were glad to see that the government is giving them first to the most at-risk populations, including not just elderly people and healthcare workers, but prison populations and homeless people too.*



**SUNDAY 10th JANUARY 2021**

Canadian deaths: 16,938

World-wide deaths: 1,941,957

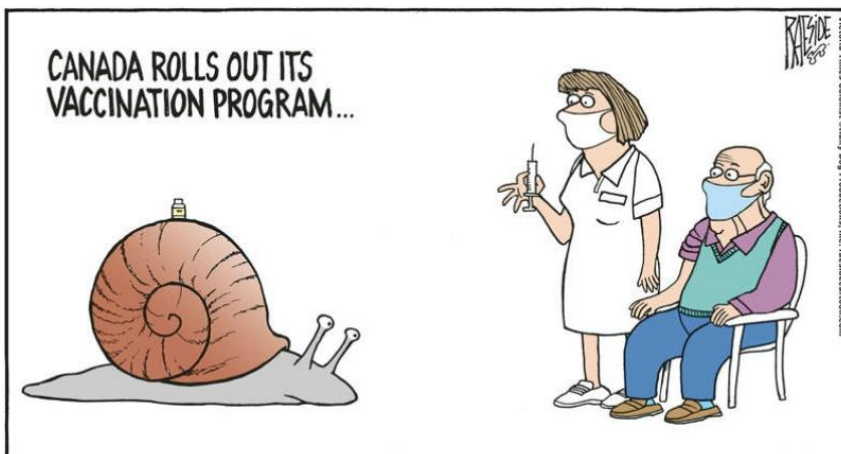
Having all made our wild bets on when we think we will get vaccinated, I discover today that the government has announced an online Vaccine Calculator, and I eagerly dial in the numbers for our family. This is what it says for our age group:



Based on your profile, you are in Stage 3 of the national guidelines for the COVID vaccine rollout. There are between 12,201,641 and 22,456,373 people in front of you in the queue for a COVID vaccine across Canada.

Using these vaccination rates and an uptake of 70.3%, you should expect to receive your two doses of vaccine and be fully protected by between early July 2021 and late August 2021.

Curious as to what happens if you dial in different ages, I get these results: the 78 year old in our family will get their vaccination between January and May (they've given themselves a large latitude to cover their butt there then!!) and the 30 year olds come out as the same category as us, so it's not exactly a very specific or accurate prediction right now, but hopefully as things move along, they will



be able to improve the accuracy of the calculator. Certainly the vaccinations are not rolling out as fast as people would like them – there's no 24 / 7 clinics set up, or drive throughs or anything. It doesn't seem to have assumed the urgency we all were hoping for, but maybe that's because they haven't received enough doses to do that yet, and things will speed up once more doses arrive and more vaccines get approved. On the international stage, Israel is showing us all how it *should* be done – they have already vaccinated

almost 20% of their population (compared to less than 1% here in Canada), and are predicting that everyone over 16 will be 'done' by April. Wow. That's impressive. It's early days yet though here, so we'll need to hunker down quietly for the next 2 months and see what happens.

Meanwhile, the outrage continues over politicians who travelled over Christmas; every single letter on the letters page is a rant against them, so Jack Knox puts things in perspective in his article:

*The good news: it's easier to fight off Victoria's grey, damp winter chill when your blood is boiling. For those keeping score at home (and really, it's hard to keep up) the latest revelations about people in leadership positions travelling abroad include A) a Globe and Mail story about Canada's top bureaucrat in charge of border and travel health taking a free holiday to Jamaica, and B) Global News' discovery that the head of UBC's school of public health spent the holidays in Hawaii. That follows the red-hot indignation aimed at a phone book's worth of politicians — Ontario's (now former) finance minister Rod Phillips, Alberta's (now former) municipal affairs minister Tracy Allard, Saskatchewan's (now former) highways minister Joe Hargrave, New Democrat MP and (now former) cabinet critic Niki*

Ashton, Conservative MP and (now former) ethics committee chair David Sweet and Liberal MP and (now former) parliamentary secretary Kamal Khera, among others — who were found to have travelled internationally at the same time that we in your lower social orders were being admonished to stay home.

Still, before climbing so high on our horses that we pass out from oxygen deprivation, we might want to consider the following: a Leger/Association for Canadian Studies poll found four in 10 British Columbians ignored

the pleas of health officials and visited people outside their households over the holidays. Pot, meet kettle. As though nobody else had a family that mattered to them, or a parent who had gone unhugged for months. In any case, social media blossomed with photos of happy people celebrating the kind of multi-generational Christmas that others yearned to have but sacrificed for the greater good.

Dr. Bonnie Henry addressed those transgressions at her Thursday briefing. “We somehow convince ourselves that it’s one little thing and it doesn’t matter,” she said. In reality, she said, those seemingly inconsequential moments add up. The proof is in the numbers. B.C. is seeing a post-holiday spike in cases. It was no surprise Thursday when the social-gathering restrictions we’ve been living under since mid-November, the ones that were due to expire today, were extended until Feb. 5. It’s not as though the international travel that we’re so up in arms about is the only threat. COVID can fly here just as easily on a plane from Edmonton as one from Margaritaville.

Also, there’s a thirst to see sinners punished. It’s easier to play by the rules when we’re confident that the ref will blow the whistle on those who don’t. Most people like to think that if they go through life doing the right thing — paying their taxes, picking up after their dogs, not budging in line at the ferry terminal — karma will kick in. On the flip side, it’s hard to find the energy to keep bailing when the next guy is allowed to chop holes in the boat. Henry urged against giving into that kind of thinking. “We can’t dwell on the people who make mistakes.” To conquer COVID, we all need to focus on our own actions, not those of others.

And what would the philosophers say? There was an article recently discussing just this thing, saying:

Faced with a question like 'How do we know if we're doing the right thing?' Kant thought people should ask themselves: "What would happen if everyone acted on the principle I'm following right now?" Philosophy professor, MacLachlan, says it's a way of avoiding making an exception for yourself.



Our dear friend H, from Delta, was also trying to focus on those taking positive actions, this week, and rather than rant against those doing the wrong thing, she wrote a heart-felt Thank You letter to those who made the tough choice to do the right thing. She sent it to friends and family to encourage them to keep going, and to give them support. I think she's smart – it's all too easy to criticise those doing it wrong, but it is so important to give praise and thanks to those who are doing it right. Here's what she said in her letter:

### THANK YOU

*Thank you for respecting the BC Public Health guidelines.*

*Thank you for doing everything you can to keep our community and province safe.*

*Thank you for being a socially responsible citizen.*

*Thank you for washing your hands, social distancing and wearing a mask.*

*Thank you for recognizing that your actions as an individual benefit the whole of society.*

*Thank you for staying home with your immediate household.*

*Thank you for not looking for loopholes or excuses to gather.*

*Thank you for your sacrifice this Christmas season even if you desperately want to get together with others outside your household.*

*Thank you for putting your community's needs ahead of your own.*

*Thank you for sacrificing your needs for the good of community.*

*Thank you for sacrificing the short-term for the long-term gain.*

*Thank you for showing love with your sacrifice.*

*Thank you for holding yourself to a high standard and be proud that you are sacrificing for others.*

*Thank you for your power and resilience.*

*Thank you for doing the right thing, you are potentially saving a life.*

*Thank you for not travelling outside your community.*

*Thank you for demonstrating social solidarity with shared norms and values.*

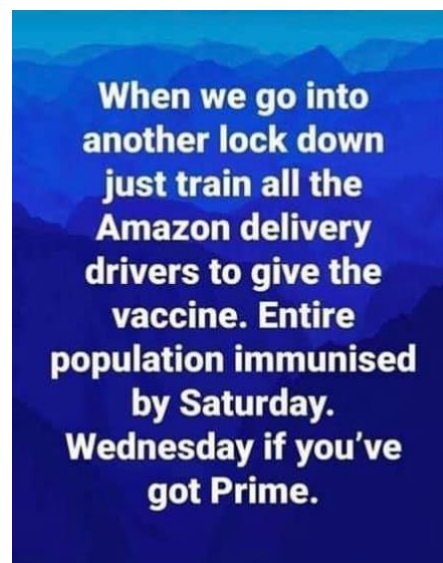
*Thank you for showing compassion, for those who have died of covid-19, by following the provincial guidelines.*

*Thank you for following the provincial guidelines and showing respect for our health care workers, essential workers, teachers, public health officers, and businesses that are shut down.*

*Thank you for hunkering down a little longer because there is a light at the end of the tunnel.*

*Thank you for recognizing that we can get through this together.*

Perfect. As the weeks of lockdown restrictions stretch into months, and we struggle to deal with our own feelings of resentment about those flouting the rules, this is something to hang on to.





## WEDNESDAY 13th JANUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 17,383

World-wide deaths: 1,985,392

UK deaths: 101,160

Having watched the evening news about the political storms in America, last night went on to give us a mega **wind** storm right here! It's been a crazy winter for weather this year, with several extreme wind storms and power outages, but last night's storm was perhaps the wildest. There we were, at 2am, huddled under the duvet, with the power out again, wind howling and screaming around the house, branches flying down and bouncing off the window onto the deck outside, when suddenly there is an almighty and explosive crack and that unmistakable ripping sound of a tree being uprooted or split in two. Of course it's dark, so we have no idea where it's landed or what damage it has caused, and DH sensibly points out that me running round out there in my flapping robe, with a small flashlight peering into the forest, is probably not the safest option with more branches flying down. So, having reassured K and M downstairs that we were ok (they kindly having phoned to check, having heard the almighty crash), we go back to bed, and hope that is the worst of it. But we don't get much sleep!

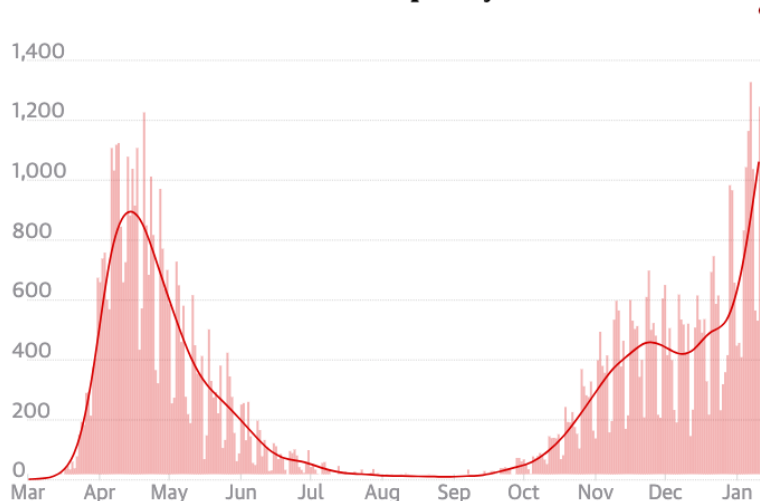
This morning, having found the tree, (pic on the right – the bit that fell being about 5 times that height, now lying along the ground), we give thanks that it fell away from the house instead of on it (!! ) and make a note of the clear up work we'll need to do once the weather improves. Our attention is then turned back to that other storm – the Covid storm - across the pond, with our morning in-box full of worried emails from various family members. Covid death numbers in the UK are at a record high. I am staggered to hear that **the UK now has more daily deaths than at the very peak of the Blitz during the Second World War**. Today alone, over 1,500 people have died in the UK, and numbers keep on climbing.



Here's some statistical perspective from The Guardian:

*Official statistics released on Tuesday showed 2020 was the deadliest year in England and Wales for more than a century. The toll was just behind that of 1918, the worst year of the flu pandemic. The final death toll from Covid is likely to be far higher. "It could add another 50,000 [deaths] before we are finished".*

**UK: number of coronavirus deaths per day**



*On Wednesday the daily figure for recorded deaths was 1,564 – a new record high bringing the total to 101,160. The toll far exceeds some of the worst-case scenario estimates made during the first wave of the pandemic. It comes amid warnings that the toughest weeks of the crisis are yet to come and that Britons are facing an epidemic of grief for lost relatives and loved-ones, with many forced to mourn alone amid lockdown measures and curbs on funerals.*

*Almost one in every 660 people in the UK have died from Covid or Covid-related causes so far during the pandemic. The UK has one of the worst coronavirus mortality rates in the world, at 151 per 100,000 people.*

This is grim stuff and is quite shocking. No wonder our friends and extended family back there are getting more anxious. But at the same time, you have to wonder WHY it is so bad in Great Britain...is it policy? (eg They still don't have obligatory mask wearing indoors). Is it the numbers of people refusing to follow the recommendations? Is it the new variant wreaking havoc? Whatever the cause, it is sobering and we send messages of love, and exhortations to stay safe, back to our loved ones.

Dear Husband's sister is feeling anxious about their elderly father, living on his own in Wales, and she writes this poem for him:

*Dad  
You're eighty-nine and living alone  
No tech for you, just the phone  
I've tried to call each day  
Since Mam died  
I've visited you often  
The M4 our highway  
Now I can't see you, hold you  
Smile with you  
I lost my voice , telephone consulting  
And your hearing's worsened  
"hearing aid appt's postponed'  
Because of Covid  
I love you Dad  
I want you to know -  
And you do.  
Waiting now for your vaccine  
Not making a fuss, no scene  
We both know - you may go  
Before I get chance to say one more time  
I love you  
Dad*

(I am happy to report that in the 2 days since she wrote this, my father-in-law has had his vaccine!).

#### Email voices:

##### Cousin D – Devon, England

*Hi Everyone*

*I've left updating you a little longer this time, mainly because there hasn't been much to report other than Aunt Cil has been struggling with lethargy and is sleeping a lot!*

*They consider that she is actually looking better, her appetite is returning to near normal levels, and she's currently doing a puzzle. Compare that to the end of last week, and a puzzle would have been out of the question. She has suffered weight loss as a result of covid and is about to be given supplements to help. She is being reviewed by the doctor regularly but continues to be lethargic.*

*It seems that invariably the member of staff that I speak to has also had covid and has just returned to work. Their symptoms are all very similar and this one, who was off work for 3 weeks and has been back for ten days, still feels that she is not back to normal and thinks that for Aunt Cil it may take 2-3 months to recover properly. Listening to both Aunt Cil and her various carers I don't think we can expect better care. What concerns me now is the thought of her not leaving her room, the lack of interaction with fellow residents and the absence of general stimulus to what we all know to be a very intelligent and active mind.*

Cousin N – Reading, England

Re- Covid... there are a lot of scared people around here including ourselves. We lost P's aunt, (last remaining sister of her Mum). Then K had her fall and remains in a Care Home during Covid. (She also tested positive). We lost an elderly neighbour and good friend. Covid has been awful with all the sad events.

Cousin H – London, England

We are indeed in deepest darkest lock down here. L is sofa surfing at the moment. He decided he was too risky for me and insisted it was the right thing to do. I'm pretty upset that it has to come to that but also very grateful he cares that much. H has also had to negotiate with his school for special measures to be able to teach from home. I think parents are pushing the system as they find teaching and working too hard. Amazingly they have offered me the vaccination today. Can you believe that?!! How lucky am I that they will do that for me? In the middle of a pandemic, with hospitals at critical overload levels they are still trying to help me. I am hugely grateful to them all.

M – Calgary

Ireland currently has the highest Covid per capita in the world and a lot is the new variant. H is rather down and a bit isolated with daycare closed etc when her work is busy.

I saw this picture on Facebook today and have been really shocked by it. These are the faces of those who carry the brunt of the overwhelming case-loads in hospitals in the UK, and around the world. And while the numbers keep rising, they will get no respite. Heroes doesn't even begin to cover it.





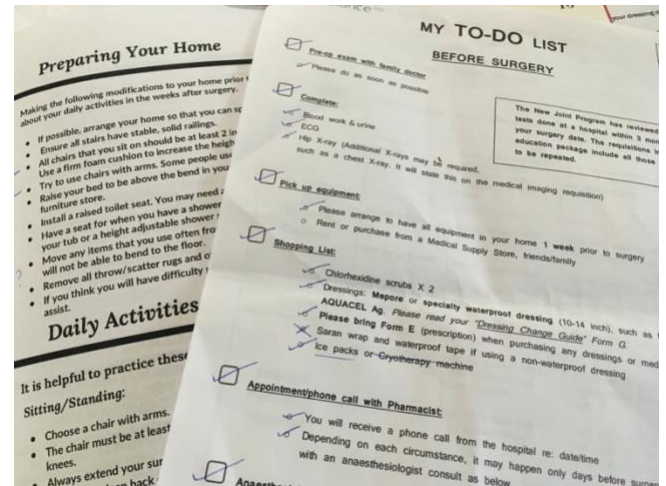
**TUESDAY 19th JANUARY 2021**

Canadian deaths: 18,231

World-wide deaths: 2,059,221

Exciting news! I have had the phone call from the hospital telling me they have a cancellation spot available for my hip replacement surgery! It is now in just 9 days time!!

The past few days have been a mad flurry of activity as I fill in the many forms, watch the compulsory education videos, go and get blood tests, an ECG, and more X-rays. I have on-line appointments with my GP for the pre-surgery check, with the hospital pharmacist, and with the anaesthetist. And we go shopping for the various bits of recovery paraphernalia that will be needed for the next month or so including spare dressings, a walking frame, and a toilet seat riser. It looks like an old folks home in here now. But I force myself to remember that this is not because I'm getting old, but because I'm getting my active and pain free life back. To be honest, it's been so long now, that I can't imagine it being different – I've got used to not being able to do the things I used to do, and to dealing with daily pain. I'm nervous about the surgery and it's taken a while for the shock to sink in, but I'm also excited. And hopeful. And grateful for the timing – how lucky am I to be at home recovering when we're all at home with Covid restrictions anyway? This is a gift, a blessing, and, scared as I am, I seize it gladly.



It seems that my good fortune has come because some people are naturally leery of going into hospital for surgery at the time of a pandemic, and so the list is temporarily shortened. That is absolutely understandable and I completely respect that decision, especially if they have underlying medical conditions that might make them more vulnerable. But for me, a healthy 61 year old, I'm going to take that risk and trust the system. Certainly I've been super impressed with every single one of the medical staff who have been involved in my various tests, and I walked to the imaging department through totally empty and echoing corridors. There is strict control on who goes in and out of the front doors of the hospital – only patients allowed in, no-one else. It means of course that it's harder psychologically as you can't have visitors or support people to help you get through it, but at least that means the staff can keep going and do their critical work. And they are doing it cheerfully and efficiently, with respect for the Covid protocols. I actually don't have any worries on that score.

Covid however, still marches on. The worldwide death stats from the virus have now officially surpassed over 2 million, but of course there will be many more around the world not included in that number. And, worryingly, the virus is producing various mutations around the world that make it more deadly; first of all was the mutation identified in the UK, then the one identified in South Africa, and now a couple in Brazil. Each one more worrying than the last. So far the mutations don't apparently affect the *severity* of your illness, but they do make the virus much more easily transmissible. The virus is cunning – it doesn't want to kill the host, but it wants to reach more of us, so is finding ways to beat our biological defenses and attack us more easily. The scary implication of this of course is that these new mutant variations of the virus will not be affected by our vaccines, but the scientists have reassured us that so far, we are good on that score; at most the efficacy of the vaccine is reduced somewhat. As they originally considered a vaccine with a 70% success rate to be a roaring success, our current vaccines with a 96% success rate would appear to give us some wiggle room, and we're told not to panic. Yet. But I'm reassured to think of our current flu vaccines, which scientists adapt to the annual mutations, and I hope it will be the same for the Coronavirus vaccines as they too become an annual necessity.

The other thing I want to share today is this Facebook post from Jared Qwustenuxun Williams, whose earlier post, about the smoke, I shared back in September. Jared is a member of the Cowichan Nations and just a fabulous human being. We filmed him while making one of our shows years ago, and instantly liked him for his warmth, kindness, intelligence, down to earth nature, and sense of playfulness. Here he is speaking of a very upsetting aspect of the current Covid situation, but I'll let him tell it in his own words:

*Remember the Spanish flu, more modernly known as the 1918 flu pandemic. If you don't know anything about it I suggest you look into it, it's fascinating. But I want to focus on one part of that pandemic, the reporting. If you know much about that pandemic you'll know that in most countries it was illegal to report on the pandemic, as no one wanted to admit they were suffering from a pandemic in the midst of a world war, no one but the Spanish. Being the only country that didn't impose wartime censorship the Spanish media reported on the pandemic before anyone else. This courtesy led the world to blame the Spanish for the flu.*

*As the proverb goes, the nail that sticks out gets the hammer.*

*Currently our local tribes are releasing Tribal Covid 19 numbers to their members and the media. Sadly this reporting is having a brutal impact on race relations in Cowichan, and I am guessing most of the island, right now. When tribes release a report their location is easily known, and their population easily identified by their skin colour. This is a recipe for racism.*

*Many of my fellow Cowichan community members have experienced this. From direct racism online or in public settings like stores. Even in more subtle ways like appointments asking if you live on reserve. Now I want to make it clear that hwulmuhw people didn't bring Covid here. And that we're all just as concerned as anyone else. Covid - 19 doesn't care what race, religion, gender, or whatever else you think you are. It'll infect you and your family without mercy.*

*So I'd like my friends, relatives, and allies, to step up and help us all out by not standing for this Covid - 19 race shaming that's taking place. If you see it happening, step up and stop it.*

*The world is like a river and we're each drops of water. If we're all going in the same direction, those who oppose us can't help but follow us off the waterfall.*

Email voices:

L – Beaconsfield, England (my friend working as a dietician with intubated Covid patients in hospital)  
*Covid here seems to be rampant, but we are proceeding apace with the vaccine roll out. I had my first jab last week .... which has well and truly knocked me for 6. My tests continue to be negative, so just my body's immune system going into action. I think all ops are pretty much on hold in the UK due to the beds being allocated to COVID. Well done Canada!!*

J – Stratford-on-Avon, England

*You're absolutely correct about the Covid statistics. They are frightening figures which, I am ashamed to say, we have just become used to.*

*We've had a worrying time recently because Ad tested positive for Covid and has had a grim time. His flatmate's girlfriend tested positive at New Year, then his flatmate developed a fever and a continuous cough but his test result was negative. On 4 January Ad started feeling ill, stayed indoors just in case, and then took a test which came back positive. All of his symptoms suggested that he only had the mild form of the virus, but that was bad enough: extreme exhaustion, low mood, headache, muscle pain and he lost his sense of taste and smell. Bizarrely, on about Day 8, he had an 'olefactory*

*hallucination' and could smell a strong, ammonia-like odour for hours. We spoke to him this morning and he still couldn't taste or smell anything. Thankfully, he seems to be on the mend but even yesterday he developed nausea and stomach problems, so has decided to continue his self-isolation until he feels well again to prevent him passing the virus on to others. I am actually relieved because I've been expecting him to catch it since the start of the pandemic. I can relax a bit now because with the 3 grandparents vaccinated, 4 of the family are protected. Phew!*

*The really terrifying aspect of the pandemic in London is the way that the hospitals are full to overflowing and oxygen tanks are in short supply: ambulances are keeping people alive in hospital car parks because there are no beds; critical patients are being helicoptered to Sheffield and Bristol where there is spare capacity and the vast Nightingale hospitals, built so quickly and efficiently last year, are virtually empty because there are no trained staff available. Although the problem is severe in London, this is the pattern generally across the country. What I will say though, in fairness is that the vaccination programme is rolling out quickly and efficiently and, with a fair wind, A and I should have had our vaccinations by the end of March.*

*Two other very strange phenomena have also emerged. You'll be aware of this in Canada too, but anti-vaxxers appear to be gaining ground in this country, spreading disinformation to religious groups in particular and claiming, for example, that the vaccines contain extracts of pork and cow.*

*A second problem is the perverse incentive resulting from the Government making £500 per week available to anyone testing positive and who is struggling financially. A good idea, we all thought, to give people a safety net, an incentive to stay at home and self-isolate when they stand to lose income. However, this has led to massively long queues of people turning up to test centres, all chatting and huddling close together in the cold weather. We've also heard of at least one 'Covid Party' taking place in Swansea where the partygoers thought it would be a good wheeze (literally) to get some extra cash. Madness.*

**SATURDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> JANUARY 2021**

Canadian deaths: 18,962

World-wide deaths: 2,125,419

It's been a positive few days; firstly we had the relief of watching the US presidential inauguration go smoothly and without a hitch or any problems from protestors. Biden and Harris exuded joy, confidence and a determination to make things better, and indeed, that very same day Biden signed some 17 executive orders cancelling a lot of the bad stuff put in by Trump; he re-joined the Paris Climate Accord, he re-joined WHO, he stopped the building of The Wall and ordered that separated Mexican families at the border be immediately re-united, he stopped the planned drilling for oil in the Arctic reserve, and he implemented a raft of Covid measures including a financial aid package and the mandating of mask wearing on all government property, thus leading by example. As our daughter B said in an email:

*We've been reading with enormous relief all the executive orders Biden has been busy signing. He really seems determined to undo as much of Trump's awfulness as he can, as quickly as he can. It feels like when Isengard falls to the Ents, and all the badness is swept away by the flood.*

She's right – there's a huge communal sigh of relief going on, and it feels as if one major nastiness in our lives has been swept away. Halleluliah!

And yesterday BC announced it's Covid Immunisation plan, with predicted timescales for each of us:

## COVID-19 Immunization Plan

<b>Phase 1</b> Dec 2020 to Feb 2021	<b>Phase 2</b> Feb to Mar 2021	<b>Phase 3</b> April to June 2021	<b>Phase 4</b> July to Sept 2021
<b>High-Risk Population</b>		<b>General Population</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Residents, staff, and essential visitors to long-term care and assisted living</li><li>Individuals assessed for and awaiting long-term care</li><li>Hospital health care workers who may provide care for COVID-19 patients</li><li>Remote and isolated Indigenous communities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Seniors aged 80+ who are not yet immunized</li><li>Indigenous seniors aged 65+, Elders, and additional communities not yet immunized</li><li>Hospital staff, community GPs and medical specialists not yet immunized</li><li>Vulnerable populations in select congregated settings</li><li>Staff in community home support and nursing for seniors</li></ul>	<p>People aged 79 to 60, in five-year increments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>79 to 75</li><li>74 to 70</li><li>69 to 65</li><li>64 to 60</li></ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>People aged 69 to 16 who are clinically extremely vulnerable</li></ul>	<p>People aged 59 to 18, in five-year increments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>59 to 55</li><li>54 to 50</li><li>49 to 45</li><li>44 to 40</li><li>39 to 35</li><li>34 to 30</li><li>29 to 25</li><li>24 to 18</li></ul>
<p>Once additional vaccines are approved and become available, people between the ages of 18 and 64 who are front-line essential workers or work in specific workplaces or industries may be included in the later part of Phase 3.</p>			
<p>The timeline for BC's COVID-19 Immunization Plan may change based on vaccine availability. Information last updated: January 19, 2021.</p>			

Looking at the chart, Dear Husband and I are slated for between April and June, though I suspect we'll be in the latter half of that as we're at the younger end of the age group. Apparently in March we will all be invited to register for our vaccine, and then be able to book an appointment either on line or over the phone. I'm feeling kind of smug as my guess in the family guessing game was for mid-May, so I might be in with a chance of winning the bottle of sparkly! Still, our youngsters who guessed August / September also seem to be bang on, so they might win it too. But of course, the real win is that we will

all be vaccinated and able to resume 'normal' life, including being together again, and, hopefully, being able to travel. Here's what Dr Bonnie Henry said about it:

*"I am hopeful that once we start getting the most at-risk people immunized, once we start having enough people in the population [immunized] ... by the summer, we should be able to have some types of our normal lives back again". "But, the full [return] to what we would like to have, in terms of social interactions and being together, it not likely until the fall."*

It's not the March dates some in the family were hoping for (which is now even more unlikely, as Pfizer has put a temporary hold on Canadian vaccine delivery while they do work on their plant in Belgium), but with the Astra-Zenica vaccine soon to be approved in Canada, Pfizer promising we will have our 4 million does by the end of March as promised, and a concrete plan for roll out, it all looks positive.

Email voices:

Cousin D – Devon, England

*Hi Everyone*

*I've seen a marked improvement in Aunt Cil today, a view supported by the staff too, who have also noted her improved energy and wellbeing. She still gets a sense of the unusual dizziness from time to time that beset her in the early days, she considers that her mind is muddled and there's still the tiredness. That said, those of the staff who have returned to work following covid still complain of the tiredness.*

*Tomorrow all the staff and residents at FM are due to receive their inoculations - amazingly the staff don't know which one yet so I assume it will be the AZ jab. And following the excellent news that FM have not had a positive covid test in the last month she has been allowed to eat downstairs, albeit one at a table and maximum of 5 in the room. Conversation among residents is difficult but possible, but just seeing their faces has been a tonic for her. All in all she left me feeling quite positive!*

Update from Carlos, Norway

*Hello! I am writing from Granheim Lung Hospital in Gausdal, Norway, where I am spending time receiving treatment and rehabilitation after dealing with the long term effects from Covid-19, which I got nine months ago. I still have a long way to go, but I am now confident that a full recovery is possible.*

*So far, my days consist of taking many tests, talking to the physiotherapists and the nutritionist and being followed-up by the doctors and nurses. I am also busy working on an exercise program to rebuild my muscles and get back in shape, which I need because I lost almost all my muscle mass during the three weeks I was bedridden due to Covid, back in March/April. And I am learning lots of new things like breathing techniques and other things related to living with lung disease. I have set several goals, most importantly my main plan is to go back to work full time, as I have been on sick-leave ever since I got Covid in late March 2020.*

*I am so impressed with these facilities. Keep in mind that this is not a private hospital, but part of the Norwegian healthcare system, a public hospital which is open and free to all residents in Norway who may need it! I am blown away by our healthcare system's high quality and the staff's dedication and professionalism and consider myself so lucky to live in Norway.*



## MONDAY 25th JANUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 19,187      World-wide deaths: 2,146,853

Today is the one year anniversary of the first case of the Coronavirus being identified in Canada. One whole year has passed, and we're not out of it yet. This time last year, Dear Husband and I were in Barbados, happily unaware of what was happening elsewhere around the world, or how those events would so dramatically affect us all. Ignorance truly was bliss.

Since then, some 2,500,000 people worldwide have died from this virus, America having lost some 450,000 alone. Brazil 250,000, the UK and Italy 100,000 each, Canada 20,000. So far. Some countries have done better than others at controlling it; Belgium comes off with the worst statistic at 1,780 deaths per million of the population. The UK has 1,429 per million, the US 1,284 per million. Canada is currently 53<sup>rd</sup> in the world list, at 500 per million, and New Zealand has just 5 deaths per million of the population. New Zealand, under Prime Minister Jacinda Acern, is the envy of us all.

During the past year, our family has lost 78 year old Glaucia to the virus, 2 friends have lost parents to it, and one friend has lost her 50 year old son to Covid, but my 97 year old Aunt Cil has whopped it's ass. Amazing. Just goes to prove there are no certainties with this virus in any direction! We know several people (including family members in both UK and Brazil), who have tested positive, but all have gone on to get better, some taking longer than others, some recovering completely, and some 'long haulers' suffering life-altering lingering effects months after 'getting better'.

Many companies have gone bankrupt and our own family has struggled financially this year because of this, but, thanks in part to CERB, we're all doing ok and things are turning round. It's been so hard being apart from each other; we still miss our hugs and being able to see each other. We don't feel whole or fully happy. Today's anniversary marks a brutal year of heart-ache, grief, fear, loneliness, frustration and financial worry. A year like no other. And as I sit here, on 25<sup>th</sup> January, one month exactly after Christmas Day, a hail storm beating down outside, and looking at the Christmas presents still under the sparkling tree, I smile wanly and think of Narnia in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, where under the witch's curse, it is Always Winter and Never Christmas.

But Aslan's thaw is coming; I'm having my hip surgery in just 3 days time, and the vaccinations, although delayed, are on their way. We'll get there. We might even have Christmas next month!

### Email voices:

#### Wee Bro – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*The broader picture here continues to be chaotic, but hopefully a few people somewhere are starting to get a vaccination. I may have to revise my own estimates however. I think we might be looking at May or June - but then if you are willing to pay, there is always a way in Brazil, sadly. Ten thousand doses of the vaccine are rumored to have disappeared to protect politicians and their families, which surprises no-one.*



## SUNDAY 7th FEBUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 20,763      World-wide deaths: 2,326,363

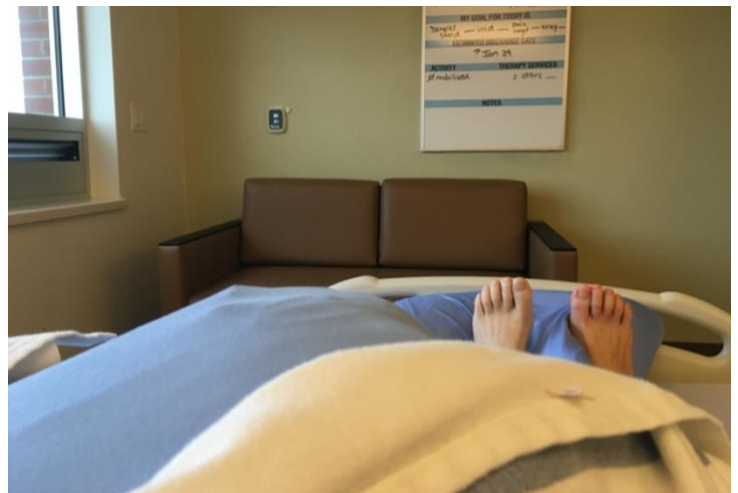
I am delighted to announce that I am the proud owner of a brand new, porcelain and plastic, full hip joint! What was it like? Probably easiest if I just copy part of the email letter that I sent out to concerned friends and family, written the day after the surgery:

*Hello again dear family and friends,  
Firstly, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU for your good wishes, support, love and encouragement over the past few days; I truly appreciate it; your good cheer and positive caring has helped get me through, so truly, thank you. And I thought you might be interested in a 'report back' / update, so you know how it went and where I am currently in the recovery.*

*I have to say that from start to finish, I was SO impressed with everything about the staff at the Jubilee Hospital - every single person was kind, cheerful, calm, friendly, professional and did their job well. This despite the Pandemic situation. I tell ya, that hospital was steaming - they have 16 operating rooms there, and no less than 15 of them were going full tilt for 14 hours on Thursday for a total of 128 surgeries that day!!! Wow. Apparently, on Friday, the 16th theatre was used as well. They're still working on clearing the backlog from postponed surgeries from the first wave of the pandemic, but are apparently almost there. Wonderful.*

*The surgery itself was very straightforward and these days they do all the hip and knee replacements with a spinal block, so you are partly conscious through it! EEP. However, they of course give you a relaxant so you actually couldn't care less about the sawing and hammering sounds going on, and they briefly knock you out for the worst part. I was worried in advance about the needles going into my spine (bit squeamish, sorry!), but actually it was no problem at all, then once your legs are totally numb they wheel you into theatre and set you up with a little tent over your head so you can't see anything, and honestly, it was absolutely fine. I was partly awake, but relaxed and didn't feel a single thing. (Well, except for the hammering part of the carpentry when he was hammering the new socket onto the pelvis - it still didn't hurt but I was aware of the whole body taking the shock of it - most bizarre sensation). And then it was over and you have 2 hours in recovery while your legs get their feeling back, but of course, with no general anaesthetic, there is none of that awful nausea / brain fog etc for hours, and by the time they wheeled me to the ward, I was as chipper (brain function wise anyway!) as beforehand.*

*I was lucky in the ward lottery; in a 2 bedded room in the new Patient Care Centre, and they kept the window open, so I was a happy bunny. The other real positive of the room was my roomie, L; she was lovely, and we had lots of chatting and social time, which after months of not socialising, I think we both enjoyed! In short order we had learned about each other's lives, we'd swapped travel tales and top tips for where to go next, discussed pets, and even what we'd had for Christmas lunch this year it being just with our partners and not the whole family, (and yes, believe it or not, we both chose Beef Wellington!!).*



*Anyway, 24 hours after surgery, to our surprise, both L and I had passed our mobility test (20 shuffled steps, and stair technique) and were discharged, so here I am now back at home, which is of course GREAT. Yay - so happy. And, as you would expect, Nurse Husband is doing a fabulous job - I'm a*

*very lucky girl. I even have a permanent little dish of grapes by my bedside in case I want a pop of freshness in the mouth. :)*

*I'm not going to lie, this is major surgery and it is of course bloody painful and sore, but they have given me a mix of Tylenol and Opioids for the first week or so. These meds are a mixed blessing as they cause nausea and dizziness, BUT they do keep the pain in check enough that I can shuffle to the washroom and back, and, when I'm lying in bed relaxed and with an ice pack, then there is very little pain. It's just walking to the bathroom and doing my physio exercises that hurts, but that will of course ease over time as we're only just on day 3 after surgery, so it's bound to be sore for a while yet, eh? But the main thing is that overall, when I'm just resting, my pain levels are already less than they were pre surgery, so really, that is amazing.*

*So what's next? A few weeks of bed rest with 5 mins of exercise every hour, then I'm sure it will soon be a gradual return to mobility. We're the right side of things now. I think this next week is going to continue to be quite tough (but it would be surprising if it wasn't, don't you think?), but I'm excited for the future and getting back to hiking again. Bring it on! My first post op physio appointment is just 1 week away, believe it or not, and then the staples (all 29 of them!!!) come out the following week. But the wound is clean and I'm not suffering swelling, so actually, I think all is going super well.*

A week after I wrote that, things are continuing to improve: I'm still not doing much of course except lying in bed, but now as well as the basic movements like getting in and out of bed (not as easy as it sounds when you can't twist your legs at all, or bend), and walking with the walker, I can feel the energy is quietly coming back. The first week I was just so tired that I didn't even have the energy to eat. It was like the body was saying "sorry, the digestion department is currently closed - all teams have been diverted to a crisis in the healing department". So now, the body has obviously decided that the crisis is in control, as the first seconded workers are back in their roles in the digestive department, and although I can't eat much in terms of quantity still, at least I can enjoy *some* food and treats. Huzzah. Similarly, when I had my first shower last Thursday, it was all I could do to just sit there while DH washed my hair for me and hosed me down, but today, my 2nd shower, I had the energy and the will to happily do it myself. So progress is being measured in those sorts of steps, as well as in gradually reducing the pain killers.

And of course, while going through surgery and recovery, I've not been focussing on the details of the coronavirus pandemic (nice to have a change of topic, even if it is medical stuff!!). I'm vaguely aware that this past week has contained a lot of brou ha ha around Vaccine Nationalism and fighting between nations over vaccine supply, but it feels like a storm in a tea cup. Everyone will get themselves sorted eventually, and at least Canada is now building its own vaccine production facility, so it won't be caught pants down again. Ready to start production by July theoretically. Good. We'll be in a better position to cope with the next pandemic, whenever that is.

Looking back, how did the pandemic affect my surgery? Well, I wasn't able to have any 'in person' preparatory meetings. And of course you can't have any family support or visitors in hospital with you, but I wasn't in there long enough for that to be an issue anyway. The main hospital experience was excellent and I didn't personally feel in any way negatively affected in the treatment or care I received. We as patients were allowed to take our masks off in our ward (needing to breathe easier for recovery I guess) but the staff kept their masks on at all times. Our health workers will be SO glad to see an end to this virus, on so many levels. And I am very grateful to all the staff for keeping things functioning as best they can through this pandemic. They are amazing .

## SATURDAY 13th FEBRUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 21,162      World-wide deaths: 2,398,339

Another week has passed, and I'm now 2 weeks post-surgery ☺ I've been off all pain killers for 6 days now, aside from Tylenol in the evening when the leg gets tired, achy and stiff. But I'm feeling good, and each day brings gradual improvements in terms of energy levels and mobility. Yesterday was the post-surgery check-up appointment with the surgeon, when I had the 29 (!) staples removed, and all was pronounced to be a great success so far – beaming smiles all round.

And luckily we got home just before the predicted snowstorm hit; I'm now writing this, propped on pillows (just a couple as you have to stay mostly flat), feeling cosy and snug under the duvet, while the snow swirls just the other side of the window beside me. Not those nice big fluffy flakes that gently float, but tiny little needle like snow, piling into drifts by the icy wind driving it around. The light is cold looking, the air is cold feeling (there are chunks and rivulets of ice on the outside of the window). It's a good day to be tucked up in bed, recovering from hip surgery!

Although this week has obviously been taken up with physical recovery, I've been watching the news, spending time on Facebook, and email chatting with family and friends (all in a prone position; typing upside down is not easy!) and I am saddened to realise that so many in our circle are struggling with the ongoing negative effects of the pandemic. The positivity of getting the surgery has taken DH and I out of it for a few weeks, but now, when I put out feelers to gauge the mood, I am aware of depression, worry and struggle all around. I think the initial optimism back in December over the first vaccines being delivered, has morphed into frustration and a feeling of helplessness and worry as Canada's supply has dried up, and only 1/2 % of our population has received our first dose. I think we currently rank 40<sup>th</sup> in the world or something. Pretty pathetic anyway. Everything is dragging on, the case numbers are still high, restrictions still firmly in place, and it seems as if the promised end is unattainable and forever receding.

Perhaps that explains why some people we know are finding things harder than they normally would. The anniversary of a friend's suicide, the anniversary of a partner's last surgery before dying from cancer, health issues, worry over children's health and work situation; these are some of the issues that our family and friends are dealing with right now; the sorts of issues that we all face as part of our regular lives, but some people are being hit harder by them now than they normally would. Covid has made everything worse; folks don't have access to their normal social support system, to hugs, to normal coping techniques, and it's as if they're therefore at a lower 'base level' for coping. Events that would normally be a cause for sadness are now causes for grief and depression. This pandemic has lasted over a year now and the ongoing effects are clearly creating chronic stress and depression in many people. I am worried for several in our circle.

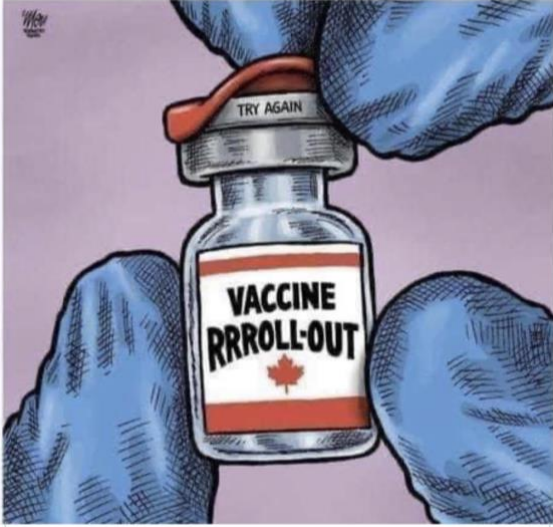
Still, there are also those in our circle who are coping well and I realise that not surprisingly, these are the naturally Hobbit like, introvert personalities among us. Big Bro and his wife T are completely content living their quiet lives, focussed on nature and living in rhythm with it; growing their own food, eating home cooked meals with that food, and carrying out environmental projects in their surroundings. While delightful and charming people, they choose not to have a big social life normally anyway. Both of our daughters and their partners are also home bodies, and their partners are delighted to be working from home. They have each other, they have their pets, and they all have thriving on-line gaming focussed social lives. The pandemic provides the perfect excuse to live a quiet withdrawn life, and I actually worry that they will find it hard to fit back into the 'normal' world again once this is all over! The ongoing effects of the pandemic are affecting everyone, in different ways; we are all coping differently, or not.

## FRIDAY 19th FEBRUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 21,560

World-wide deaths: 2,458,399

Another week has passed. Still no vaccine deliveries to Canada. We're in a holding pattern, all waiting, waiting, waiting. Everything is on hold, no-one feels able to plan anything for tomorrow, or next week, leave alone a vacation in the summer! That inability to plan *anything*, to look forward to something, to have any idea how the immediate future will unfold, has to be one of the hardest things about this pandemic.



The case numbers across the country and around the world are actually in steady decline, which is great news. But on the other hand, there is huge concern over the new variants. Some feel that these variants threaten our assumption that we had the end of the pandemic in sight, and many refer to the current situation as being a race between vaccinations and variant spread. Which will happen faster?! In the UK they have vaccinated almost 20 million people and hope to have everyone done by July. (The majority of our friends in the UK have already had their jabs). In Israel they've almost vaccinated the whole population. Impressive. Here in Canada we're still at 1% or something and we need to ramp things up somewhat if we are to have a chance of winning the race against those new variants! Which is why, right across the country, the lockdown restrictions are still mostly in place. Waiting, waiting, waiting.

This is a time of year that is normally full of celebrations in our immediate family; our younger daughter and her husband both have birthdays at this time, and of course there is Valentine's Day, and several other birthdays in the extended family and friends group, but this month, no-one is bothering with celebrations, especially those living on their own. DH went shopping at Thrifty's just 5 days before Valentine's Day, and reported that they hadn't even bothered to put the Valentine's chocolates out; a carton of a few heart shaped ones, still sitting in their cellophane wrapping, on the floor, was it. Compared with the normal displays you get weeks before any such public holiday, this is a dramatic difference and really reflects the mood. At the beginning of the pandemic, people made a real effort; mailing cards and presents to be opened during a Zoom call with loved ones, festively decorating as best as possible to celebrate life's events, getting in nice food, but now? "What's the point?" is the response. "Yeh, we'll get in some alcohol and chocolate, and we'll watch a movie, but it really isn't the same, is it? We'll wait until it's over and do it properly then". Life on hold. Waiting, waiting, waiting.

Some people aren't very good at waiting mind you.....there have been various tales of people coming up with schemes to get ahead in the vaccinations queue, and this one in The Guardian today makes me smile:

*Two Florida women aged 34 and 44 dressed up as "grannies" – wearing bonnets and gloves – in a failed attempt to pass as old enough to be eligible for coronavirus jabs. WFTV, a TV station in Orlando, reported that the pair had valid vaccine cards after having their first shots, but were denied their second ones. Their real ages emerged later. Officers said they were asked to issue trespass warnings and no other action was taken.*

M - Victoria, via Facebook

*Good grief I miss people. It's Friday night and I've got February cabin fever. Where's the party? Ugh.*



## FRIDAY 26th FEBRUARY 2021

Canadian deaths: 21,865

World-wide deaths: 2,523,656

Yet another week has rolled by without change, and here we are at the end of February, when Dr Henry had originally told us we'd be back to our 6 person bubble. No sign of that. No chance for the 6 of us to have our family Christmas celebration yet. Our decorations are still up. Our presents are still under the tree. The turkey is still in the freezer. Waiting. Endlessly waiting. I can't remember the last time we saw our kids in person.....is it almost 6 months now? Apparently there are a few more vaccines beginning to arrive, but nothing from the BC authorities yet on when and how they will be administered.

There seems to be a wave of depressed acceptance over all of us. Everyone has given up. And it's not just me observing this. I found this on Facebook yesterday, and it sums up the mood perfectly:

*You're not imagining it, nobody seems to want to talk right now.*

*Messages are brief and replies late.*

*Talk of catch ups on zoom are perpetually put on hold.*

*Group chats are no longer pinging all night long.*

*It's not you.*

*It's everyone.*

*We are spent.*

*We have nothing left to say.*

*We are tired of saying 'I miss you' and 'I can't wait for this to end'.*

*So we mostly say nothing, put our heads down and get through each day.*

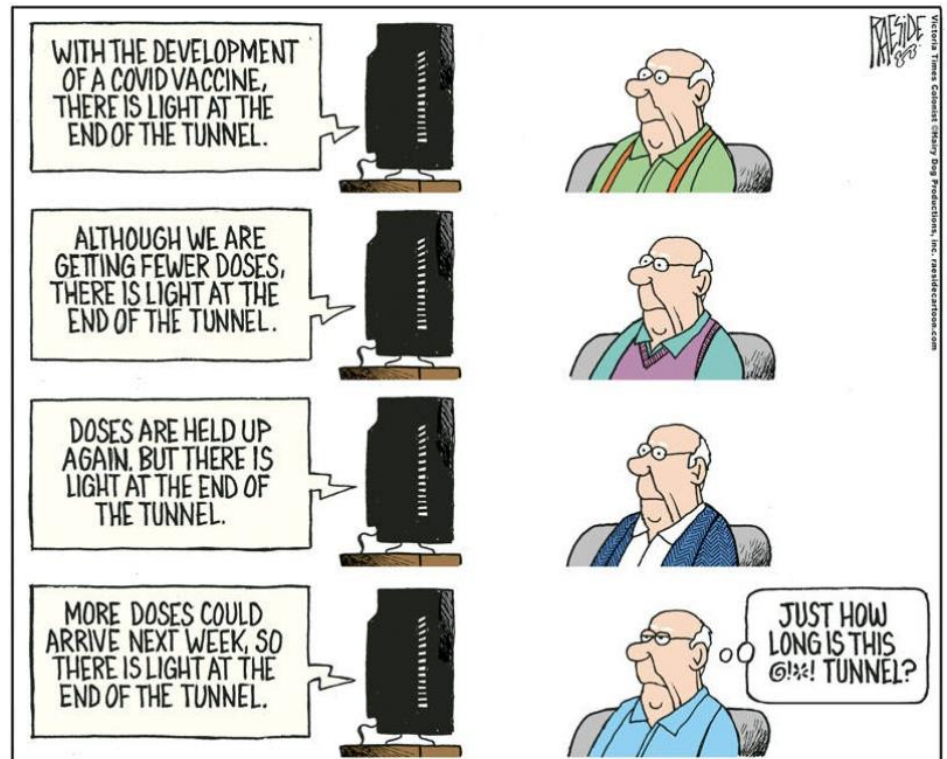
*You're not imagining it.*

*This is a state of being like no other we have ever known because we are all going through it together but so very far apart.*

*This is hard.*

*No one is judging.*

Donna Ashworth, Author of poetry book, 'to the women':



And amidst our desperation to get hold of the vaccine so we can resume normal life, and see those we love, we hear tales of European countries, (specifically France, Belgium and Italy) where there is huge vaccine resistance. Apparently in France and Belgium right now only 1 in 5 of the distributed vaccine doses have been administered – the other doses have been refused or people just don't turn up for their appointment. Crazy! Send them here!!! We'll have them!

Email voices:

B – Beaconsfield, England

*In England the vaccination rollout seems to be going well. This is an achievement I put down largely to the involvement of the Army logistics people who are in charge of front line battlefield supplies in conflict situations. I managed to get my jab a couple of weeks ago. S has his jab booked for tomorrow. The rollout is working down by age group.*

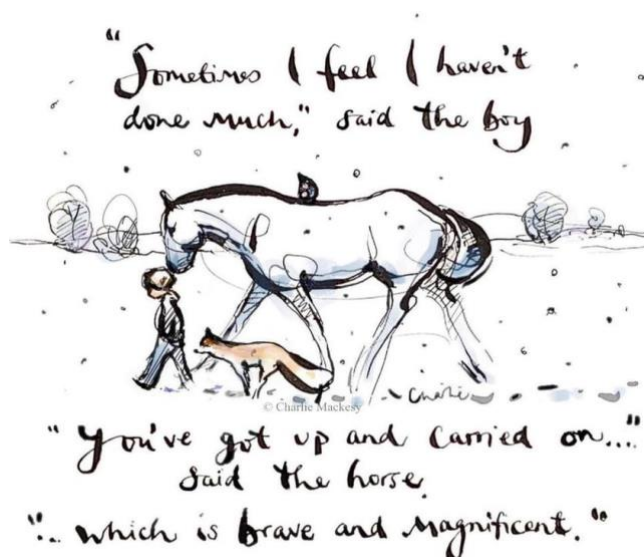
*The BAME stories continue as we have new priorities now which take account of things like poverty and ethnicity when allocating priority for vaccination. Sadly there is still lower vaccination uptake in BAME groups often due to wildly inaccurate information propagated by social media. It is a problem though. If we have pockets of largely BAME areas with low uptake it will be harder to contain COVID. Thank goodness faith groups notably mosques and synagogues have been setting an example and encouraging people in their communities to be vaccinated.*

Cousin D – Devon, England

*Yes we're doing well with the vaccination programme in the UK. Mine is booked for 8 days time. They are talking about re-opening Care Homes for visiting, which will be great for Aunt Cil. Not sure how it will work though. I spoke to her yesterday and I'd say she was on top form.*

J – Stratford on Avon, England

*Well, we have been just been doing what we have been doing for the last 12 months, ie staying indoors, taking walks, eating, drinking and binge watching Scandi noir dramas. I expect it has been much the same with you, only with snow. Only bit of news: J is with us now until September, doing his course online because the university don't want the students to return. We hope to get our vaccinations in the next few weeks.*





Canadian deaths: 22,028      World-wide deaths: 2,554, 569

AT LAST – there is movement! The Astra Zenica / Oxford vaccine has been approved by the Canadian authorities, and the government has apparently ordered 20 million doses of it. That, combined with the Pfizer production facilities in Belgium opening up again, and an increase in the Moderna deliveries, means that Canada should actually be receiving some real vaccine deliveries over the next few weeks and months. It feels as if we are the very last country in the whole of the world (or at least the Western world) to start their vaccinations. And it is especially galling as Canada has been one of the most generous contributors to the COVAX scheme, paying for vaccines for poorer countries who cannot afford to buy their own. I'm really glad we're supporting the COVAX scheme – no-one is safe until we are all safe – but this is kind of ironic.

Whatever, it's apparently coming now, and in a surprise but very welcome announcement yesterday, the BC health supremos tell us that they have decided to roll out all first vaccinations before moving onto the booster shots, in an attempt to get everyone protected by July. Results from Israel, the UK and Scotland all show that as the vaccines have a brilliant 90% efficacy rate, this method of vaccinating everyone saves lives. Here is how the Times Colonist told us the news this morning:

*Everyone who wants to be vaccinated against COVID-19 can have their first jab by July. "Everybody moves up in line," provincial health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry said Monday as she unveiled the province's updated four-phase immunization plan. Under the updated plan, second doses, also called booster shots, will be delayed until four months after the first. Henry said the decision to delay the second shots is based on the "miraculous" protection provided by the first dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, which appear to be 90 per cent effective.*

## COVID-19 BC Immunization Plan: Phase 2

Phase 1 December 2020 to February 2021	Phase 2 February to April 2021	Phase 3 April to June 2021	Phase 4 July to September 2021
<b>High-risk population</b>		<b>General population</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents, staff and essential visitors to long-term care and assisted living</li> <li>Individuals assessed for/awaiting long-term care</li> <li>Hospital health care workers who may provide care for COVID-19 patients</li> <li>Remote and isolated Indigenous communities</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seniors aged 80+ who are not yet immunized</li> <li>Indigenous peoples aged 65+, Elders, and additional communities not yet immunized</li> <li>Hospital staff, community GPs and medical specialists not yet immunized</li> <li>Vulnerable populations in select congregated settings</li> <li>Staff in community home support and nursing for seniors</li> </ul>	
		<b>People aged 79 to 60, in five-year increments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>79 to 75</li> <li>74 to 70</li> <li>69 to 65</li> <li>64 to 60</li> </ul>	<b>People aged 59 to 18, in five-year increments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>59 to 55</li> <li>54 to 50</li> <li>49 to 45</li> <li>44 to 40</li> <li>39 to 35</li> <li>34 to 30</li> <li>29 to 25</li> <li>24 to 18</li> <li>Indigenous people aged 44 to 18</li> </ul>
		Once more vaccines are approved/available, people 64 to 18 years who are front-line essential workers or work in specific workplaces or industries may be included later in Phase 3	

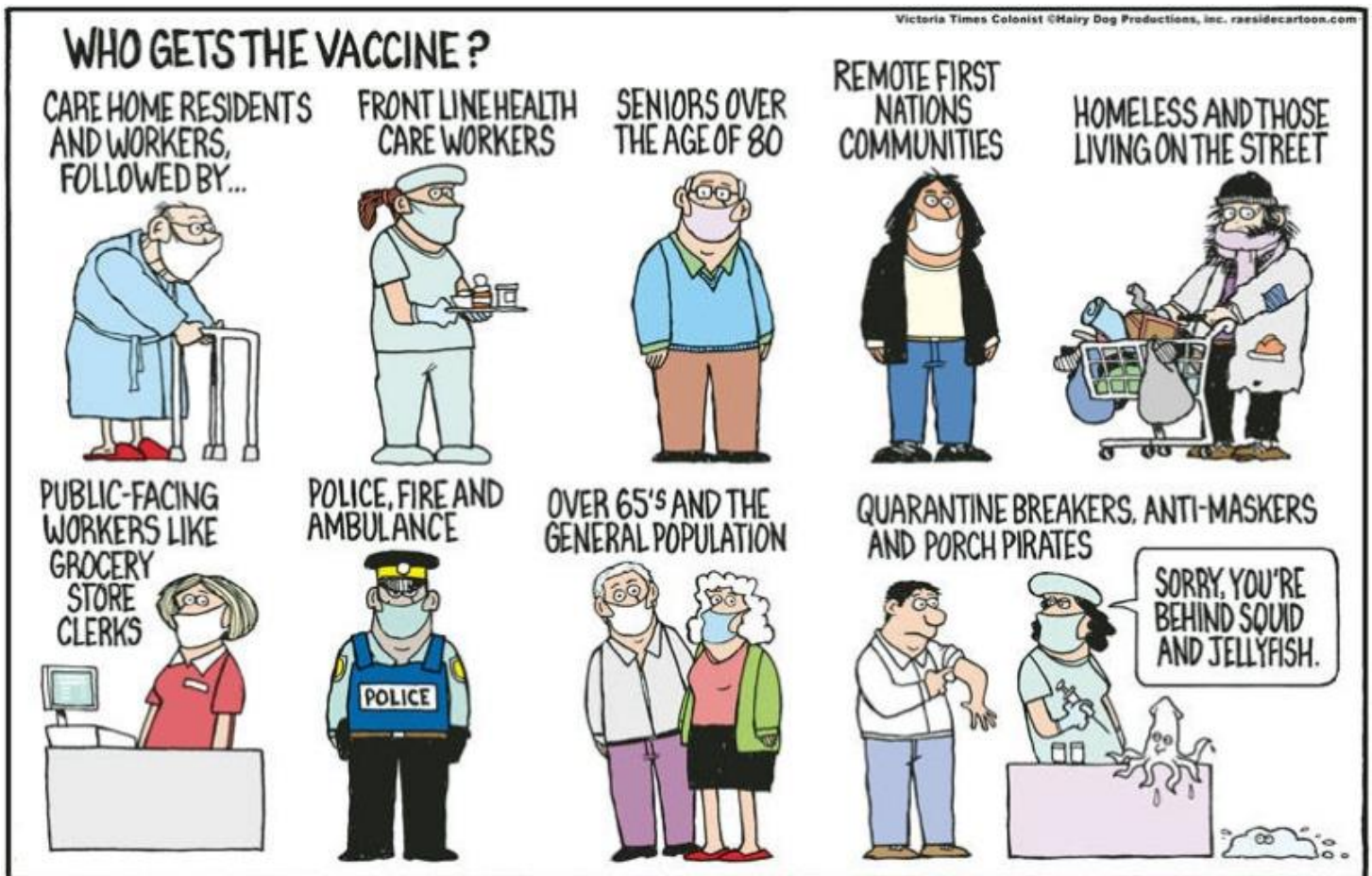
Complete   
 Almost complete   
 In-progress   
 Begins in March

\* First dose administered. | Vaccines are being used throughout the Immunization Plan to manage outbreaks. | The timeline for B.C.'s COVID-19 Immunization Plan may change based on vaccine availability

The phase 2 group can start booking their appointments from next week, 8<sup>th</sup> March, for vaccination starting the following week, 15<sup>th</sup> March. We have a start date at last! The chart shows phase 4 being 'July to September' and yet Bonnie Henry apparently **said** "everyone in BC will have their first dose by July", so I'm a bit confused there – the 2 don't match up, but still, we have a start date. And July is better than September for us all to have been done, (if that is indeed the case).

Meanwhile, there is no indication as to when restrictions might be eased, or in what phases. I have to admit to being somewhat envious of my contacts in the UK, who have all been given their 'road map' out of restrictions, and know that they can plan get-togethers from April, and plan trips within the UK from May, and travel abroad by June 21<sup>st</sup>. Oh to have that luxury of planning and an end goal in sight!

Still, I did get a rather wonderful visit at home yesterday, totally permitted by the restrictions.....Dog! Our daughter B stood outside at the front door step, and didn't come in, I sat at the far end of the room, some 15 feet away from her, and she simply opened the door and ushered dog in! I was ensconced in an arm chair, so he couldn't get near my hip, but he bounded over for hugs and love, covered me in licks, accepted lots of strokes and love back, and then, so cutely, trotted over to the Christmas tree, sniffed out a present for himself (!) and brought it back to ask if he could please unwrap it. Whereupon, he very gently nibbled away the wrapping paper to reveal the present underneath and scampered around the room happily with it, thrilled with his new toy. B then called him, and off he went, new toy in mouth, leaving me happy, having enjoyed a doggy visit, even if it couldn't be a human one! The first of the Christmas presents unwrapped. I wonder when we'll get to open the others?



**TUESDAY 9<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021**

Canadian deaths: 22,276      World-wide deaths: 2,616,550

Another very quiet week under Covid restrictions has passed. We've seen no-one, done nothing. (Well, we went grocery shopping once. Does that count?!).

However, the vaccination programme is showing signs of grinding into action.....the over 90 year olds ("those born before 1931"), and indigenous peoples born before 1956 (ie 65 year olds and over), are now allowed to book their vaccination appointment. And, maybe because the authorities have assumed that this age contingent will not be comfortable using the internet, they have made the booking system for this group, by phone only. People need to call in to make their vaccination appointment. BC's Health Minister, Adrian Dix, calculated that there are about 85,000 people in this category. And yet **1.7 million calls were made to the phone lines in the first 3 hours!** Unsurprisingly this has led to reports of people waiting for hours and hours to get through, unable to make an appointment, and huge frustration all round. Is that huge number of calls because the same 85,000 were ringing again and again, trying to get through, or were large numbers of others, not in that category, also phoning?! The BC Services website is a little confused, as it has 'over 90 years' as their page headline, but 'over 80 years' in the body of the text. So maybe that partly explains the extra calls too? Whatever, it's a chaotic start, and I hope they can iron out some of these problems before they move on to the next category, which will be booking on line (I think). I have visions of crashing websites and more chaos.

Here at home, the good news for me personally is that the hip recovery continues to go really well; now almost 6 weeks post-surgery, I no longer use the cane in the house and potter around quite happily at home. And I've been walking more and more, now quite comfortable doing a 45 minute stroll at Island View Beach, Rithet's Bog or Beaver Lake. Easy flat paths so far, but so very wonderful to be able to get back outside and feel the spring air, hear the Red Winged Blackbirds calling from the reeds, and see the ducks, geese and divers (the feathered sort) on the ocean. Spring is springing all around us, and it is pure joy to be able to get outside again and walk in it. Without pain. Hip replacement surgery is an incredible operation, and I am so very, very grateful for it.

Email voices:

Wee Bro – San Paolo, Brazil

*Yes, we have a new lockdown here. It started Saturday - I'm not sure why they didn't start Friday evening - maybe one last chance to party and top up the hospitals. There is also talk of a curfew between 8pm and 5am which I would welcome - even if it is unenforceable - most of the problems are illegal parties in the middle of the night in poorer districts. The somewhat disturbing aspect of the current wave is that my doctor friend tells me most of the people clogging up the hospitals currently are in their 30s and 40s...who mostly survive but are taking a long time about it. The new variant is clearly more serious, as many of these younger ones have no complicating conditions. Time will tell, and more vaccines have been ordered. Feels a bit like ordering more buckets when the barn roof is blazing, but better late than never. Diogo had his vaccine today at least, so maybe we might get one before too many more months are through.*

B – Beaconsfield, England

*We too are fed up with lockdown after basically a year (with a short period of partial respite last summer). People are clearly not enjoying being told not to leave home except to shop for food, medicine or to take an hour's exercise and, if unavoidable, going to work because you cannot work at home. As we get more and more people vaccinated, people are getting more relaxed and less careful so the government are issuing strong warnings that it isn't over yet and we must continue to be careful in order to avoid a resurgence of the virus. Well we will see on April 12th when relaxation of rules begins in earnest, and shops/hairdressers start to open. I fervently hope people will be sensible.*

J – Stratford on Avon, England

*No real news here apart from the fact that I am to be vaccinated tomorrow! A is being jabbed on Saturday and L had hers a few days ago. It has taken everyone by surprise that Boris' government can actually do something well and indeed, better than the Germans. My vaccination is being done at the Royal Agricultural Showground in Stoneleigh and I am hoping to win a rosette for being Best in Class, if not Best in Show.*

Cousin H – London, England

*You may be envious of our vaccine roll out, but I'm very jealous of the green space you have around you. Because they are pretty liberal with their fines for travelling outside your area, I'm not getting to many of those. I'm counting down the days, but London is starting to go back up again in the north so can't be too sure we will be released as planned. Being patient is hard! Meanwhile I'm just getting fat and unfit.*

**So, what really is inside of  
the vaccine?**

*Forgotten kisses and hugs. School trips.  
Grandparents at your Christmas table.  
Movies with warm popcorn and coca-cola.  
Sold out theatre shows. Gigs. Evening meal in  
a fancy restaurant with your friends. Last  
minute, spontaneous weekend away. Home  
parties and football afternoons with your  
mates. Roar of the fans when their team score  
the goal. Simple hand shakes. Open borders.  
Teachers walking between the tables. Flights  
every 5 minutes and busy train stations.  
And the best thing is: you can still stay at  
home if you really want...*



## FRIDAY 12<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021

Canadian deaths: 22,371      World-wide deaths: 2,645,464

Dr Bonnie Henry has announced that, effective immediately, we can gather outdoors in groups of up to 10 people. In parks, on beaches, in our backyards, wherever, as long as it's outdoors. We still need to maintain safe distance protocols, but it's a start.

After 4 months of not being able to see anyone, this is very welcome news and emails start flying around the family about how to get together. Is it the right time for 'Christmas' – should we wrap up warm, and drag the Christmas presents from under the tree into separate piles 6 feet apart outside on the back deck, and eat our turkey dinner balanced on our knees, all 6 feet apart from each other in sweaters and coats? Or should we delay a bit longer, hoping that in another few weeks we can do it 'properly'? The girls both vote to wait and do it properly, "having waited this long, it would be a shame not to do it right" is the consensus. So, we will leave the tree and gifts where they are, but meanwhile plan to meet up tomorrow afternoon and sit (at 6 feet distance from each other) around the fire pit in our yard. I am very excited. It will be hard not to hug them, but so great to see them in person and have a proper catch up. Yay!

Although the vaccinations have barely started, the Covid case numbers have apparently been stable for a little while now, and there is huge pressure to remove some of the restrictions and to re-start the economy. After 4 months of this latest lockdown, everyone is pretty desperate. People (including me) are itching to make travel plans, and when the BC Parks system opens up its camping reservations this week, they receive 6,000 bookings on the first day! Several different vacation companies send me surveys "How soon are you prepared to travel? Will you travel even if you're not vaccinated?". The Bay store mails me a 25% discount voucher off *everything* if I go shopping this weekend. (I'm tempted. It would be nice to go shopping). The flood gates have huge pressure building up behind them. I can quite see why the authorities have allowed the outdoor gatherings, perhaps in a bid to let out a trickle and thus avoid the gates crashing open. But we need more vaccines in arms before the gates can open properly. Let's hope they hold over the next few weeks.

### Cousin N – Reading, England

*Finally, I got my first jab yesterday... so I'm invincible now!*

*My second is May 27<sup>th</sup>.*

*P gets her first in a week's time.*

*Hilarious scenario with a neighbour who has OCD and has been worried about Covid; he's been desperate to get his jab for weeks. He's finally jumped the queue but has to drive to Epsom, 30mins away off the M25, whereas his wife, and P, both got their appointments allocated immediately straight after he did that.... Both of them will be in our village hall 2 minutes away!!! He's seething... that he has to drive further and wait longer but that's what happens; more haste less speed !*

### J – Stratford-on-Avon, England

*The vaccinations went fine: really well organised and A had no ill effects at all. I started feeling fluey about 5 hours after the vaccination, had shivering, pains in head and limbs etc but I was pretty much fine by the following lunchtime. Most people I know who have had the Oxford Astra Zeneca one have had similar reactions but of course in the end, it's worth it.*

**FRIDAY 19<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021**

Canadian deaths: 22,590      World-wide deaths: 2,707,572

There's been a lot in the news this week about vaccine nationalism, but to be honest, I just can't summon up the enthusiasm to write about it in any detail. Details such as which country is hoarding which vaccine and not sharing nicely when it promised to, or blocking vaccines from leaving their country even when the vaccines have already been paid for by another country. Or details of which country is now refusing the Astra Zenica vaccine because of various scientifically unproven rumours about it: (basically most of Europe, probably because it's a British developed vaccine and there's political backlash against anything British after Brexit. But then yesterday the Europeans realised that wave 3 of the virus is now taking off in places such as Italy and France because they're *not* using the vaccine and the obvious result is a re-peak in the virus numbers, so now they ARE accepting AZ vaccine again). Or the fact that the USA declared it wasn't going to share any vaccine with Canada (as it had promised to) as it had to prioritize its citizens first, but yesterday they announced they *will* loan us some after all, because they have too much AZ vaccine sitting in warehouses that they can't use in time, so it's politically expedient to do so. Ya-da, ya-da, ya-da.

And so it goes on; it must be an absolute nightmare for those in charge of vaccine procurement for the country. The whole situation feels very volatile and precarious, but Canada is getting in what doses it can, and vaccinating as many people as it can, as fast as possible. We're not at the 24 / 7 stage yet unfortunately, but at least clinics in Toronto are now open 8am – 10pm. (The CBC news reporter asked the head of the Toronto immunisation clinics why they weren't offering shots 24 / 7. The clinic administrator replied "who would come in at 2am?", to which the reporter replied: "I would! AND I'd bring my kids!").



Here in BC, we're not doing 24/7 either, but despite that, the good news is that our immunisations seem to be going well and they are ahead of schedule. The over 80's have been invited to make appointments a week earlier than expected, and the health authorities have released new projected timelines for all of our shots, which now have Dear Husband and I predicted for May and the kids for early June. Fantastic. It is made very clear though that these projections are all of course dependent on a continuing supply and we can't take that for granted. Back to that. I'm very glad that Canada is building new facilities for vaccine production for future pandemics.

Meanwhile, at home, we have a more immediate problem..... a large deer has sadly died under our deck. Early spring is apparently the time for such things, after a winter of food shortage and the older / weaker ones die. So, what *does* one do with a deer corpse?? Saanich is not interested, nor does the landfill want it. The official line is to bury it, but we're on a steep slope and the ground is really hard and full of tree roots that make digging a large hole impossible. Apparently we could dispose of dead cats and dogs in our garbage, but not deer. It will start smelling soon as the weather warms up. Hmmm. I need another cup of tea to think about this one.



**WEDNESDAY 24<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021**

Canadian deaths: 22,753      World-wide deaths: 2,755,307

One thing that this past year has so clearly demonstrated, is the importance that a leader makes in any situation, and especially to the outcomes of a crisis like a pandemic. If we want a good example of how to lead the country through such a crisis, we could perhaps look at Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, who acted swiftly in closing down the country to outsiders, and in imposing restrictions where needed. Yes, they have a small population in a country with space for them, but nonetheless, I think Jacinda has proved a great example of how to run the country in a pandemic. They have enjoyed very low case numbers and have been able to carry on life more or less as 'normal'.

We could look at the Israeli's, determined to vaccinate as much of their population as fast as possible, and thus throwing everything they've got into that programme, with the result that nearly all of their population is already vaccinated. (On the other hand, let's not copy how they are *not* helping their Palestinian neighbours). And if we want a really clear demonstration of the difference that leadership makes, one only has to look at the USA: they endured the first 10 months of the pandemic under Trump, who declared Covid was not a problem, refused to wear a mask, and contravened safety restrictions both personally and professionally. And of course he refused to impose safety restrictions or put any effort into supporting Dr Fauci et al in their push for the vaccines. The United States have now been under Biden for 2 months. What a difference! Already 100 million people have been vaccinated and the case numbers are rapidly declining. Under Trump, there were well over 2,000 people A DAY dying of Covid 19 in America. Just 2 months into Biden's regime, the death numbers have halved. Yes, they still have a long way to go, but by prioritising vaccinations (they have sworn to have the next hundred million jabbed by the end of April!), and by providing financial relief packages to those who are struggling, they have instituted practical steps to combat the virus. By modelling mask wearing and preventative behaviour (such as physical distancing), they are modelling behaviour that they would like their citizens to emulate to help reduce infection rates. It changes everything. It is amazing, and a bit scary, to think of the difference that the person at the top makes. America has lost over HALF A MILLION of its citizens to Covid 19. How many of them were as a direct result of Donald Trump's policies and braggadocio? How many deaths is he personally responsible for?

Another leader who has shown themselves to be devastatingly lethal during these times, is Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro. Like Trump, he has ignored Covid 19 as much as possible, to further his own political gains. The email I receive from Wee Bro today, just boggles my mind:

*Great that you have access to vaccines now. At the very least it should protect against serious complications, and that is what we all wish to avoid, although it sounds like even after the vaccines are rolled out, it could be some time before life returns to 'normal'. Here in Sao Paolo, we are down to 69-71 year olds now, so in some ways, it seems like the roll out is going at a similar pace to BC, but the supply has been very stop-start here, and I'm not sure how the vaccine supplies are being managed re people getting the second jab. I think it will be May before we start to receive serious quantities of vaccines, and who knows what shape we'll be in then? President Bolsonaro has taken 3 states to the supreme court in an attempt to **prevent** their governors from imposing lockdowns. I just struggle to see how thousands of avoidable deaths is going to translate into a good strategy for him when it comes to re-election next year. Gio has known of several people who have died from it in her wider circle of contacts, the **eldest** of whom was 42.*

Like America at its worst, Brazil is now tallying well over 3,000 Covid deaths per day, and we see more photos of hastily dug mass graves. The Brazil Variant, as it's called, seems to be particularly devastating, and how sad that young people are dying in their droves. Over 1,000 people **per day** are dying in Sao Paolo city alone. And my young brother is in the thick of it. I wish Wee Bro and Gio could

get out of there, but they're stuck, responsible for the care of her elderly father, and thus forced to mingle with his carers who travel to work on public transport each day. I worry for them and curse their stupid leader who seemingly doesn't care how many of his own population he allows to die.

And our own trusty leader, Prime Minister Trudeau? Well, yes, there have been inefficiencies and errors along the way; confusion over masks at the beginning, and whether or not to wear them, and of course, we don't have our own vaccine or safety equipment production facilities, which hampers our efforts, BUT, it seems that Justin Trudeau TRIES to do his best. His financial aid package was effective and brought in speedily. It certainly helped our family. He and his cabinet model proper safety behaviour (though some other politicians, of all parties, didn't by going on vacation abroad!) with mask wearing and physical distancing, and most of all he makes regular announcements and does his best to encourage, and to give the impression that we're all working as a team. All of that is, I think, important. I think he's done a good job overall.

As for our provincial leaders? We are extremely fortunate to have Dr Bonnie Henry as our medical leader, and to have John Horgan as our Premier; he has the smarts to know when to step back and leave it up to Bonnie Henry to run the show, but then support with financial measures and just keeping the province running as best he can.

To sum up? Some other countries may be ahead of us in vaccine roll out, but overall, I count myself fortunate to live where we do. I feel that proper safety measures are in place to protect us all, the medical system is still functioning (as evidenced by my hip surgery) and the financial aid package will hopefully keep the majority going until recovery happens. Mind you, the government will be announcing the details of their Recovery Budget in just 2 weeks time. We'll see what that contains!

#### Email voices:

##### M – Beaconsfield, England

*The Surgeon is not sure what he will find in my knee as the MRI doesn't show it all. But it may not go ahead as Covid is causing huge problems in getting theatres for him to operate in. No nurses either.*

##### J – Stratford-on-Avon, England

*You may have heard about the concerns of the craven Europeans over the Astra Zeneca jab? Well, J went for her first jab on Saturday and found herself surrounded by youngsters in the waiting area. They all lived locally and had put their names down on a reserve list and it turned out that they'd been called in because large numbers of people had cancelled their vaccination appointments. The reason given was that the French, Germans and other Europeans were worried about the vaccine's safety so they had also decided not to go ahead with it. Mark my words, that decision will come back to bite them on the bum when they are trying to board a flight to Alicante without a vaccination certificate....*

**TUESDAY 30<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2021**

Canadian deaths: 22,921      World-wide deaths: 2,809,224

The numbers are rising again across Canada, and yes, in BC too. The Third Wave is official. So the hoped for easing of restrictions has been put back at least another 3 weeks.

Dear Husband, morosely gazing into his beer, states it well: *“In some ways it feels as if now is the hardest part because there’s nothing. We’re in limbo. Limbo because we can’t go anywhere or do anything. Limbo because not much is happening. (There’s not even any real news on TV each night, apart from the usual communal weep-along that the CBC seems to specialise in). Limbo because there’s no point in making plans. You make plans and then cancel them. Making plans may be an enjoyable activity but that’s all it is. We know they’re not going to happen. This time last year it was novel and exciting. Last fall it was tense and stressful. Now it’s just boring and nothing. I’m not depressed or unhappy, but we’ve slipped into a state of drifting. Of floating. Of nothing. We’ve come to accept that this is it for the foreseeable future. Next week will be the same as this week. The week after that will be the same again. Nothing will change. Our horizons have been narrowed to ‘what to eat for dinner’ and ‘where to go for the daily walk’. Yes, the vaccines are rolling out but it’ll be months before it’ll make a difference. Possibly even next year.*

*It’s hit us just as we’ve retired. Everyone says the one thing you should not do is to retire and do nothing. And yet we’ve been forced to retire and do nothing. We don’t have the routine of work. We don’t have a purpose. We can’t see anyone or do any of the things we’d planned for our retirement. Yes, we can keep ourselves occupied on a daily basis happily enough, and day to day we’re actually doing very well, after all we’ve been in forced proximity with only each other for a year now and still haven’t murdered each other. But it’s just empty”.*

I think he’s summed up the current situation very well. We personally feel privileged that we have a comfortable home, nice food to eat, hobbies, entertainment and some volunteer work (from home) to keep us occupied, and we enjoy a great relationship. How incredibly fortunate we are. And yet, this lack of stimulation, when we’ve lived lives of such stimulation and change, is hard to deal with.

Co-incidentally, soon after this chat, while browsing the internet, DH comes across this article in The Guardian newspaper, by Richard A Friedman (professor of clinical psychiatry). It appears we are not alone and that what we are experiencing is an actual thing.

*I hit a wall in late February and felt that life had taken on a quality of stultifying sameness. Was it Wednesday or Sunday? I couldn’t really tell: every day of the week felt identical because there was nothing to distinguish them. Like nearly everyone I know, I have settled into a state of dreary uniformity.*

*The pandemic has been a vast uncontrolled experiment – not just in social isolation, which is bad enough, but in the deprivation of novelty. Overnight we were stripped of our ability to roam around our world the way we usually do. Gone were the chance encounters with other people and the experience of new things and places: no travel, no adventures, no restaurants, no theatres, no crowds. We weren’t just quarantined from Covid: we were cut off from the ubiquitous stimulation of the unfamiliar and new.*

*Early last fall, I was so bored being stuck at home that I went out to buy an air conditioner (it was still pretty hot), and spent an inordinate amount of time in a real store with real people talking about the mechanics of air conditioners. When I returned home, I was nearly ecstatic.*

*I hate shopping, so it got me thinking about why an experience I usually find boring and unpleasant could be exhilarating. In a word, novelty. That trip to the store and exposure to strangers was a welcome jolt of newness. I had assumed I was in the doldrums because I missed my friends (I did). But apparently I was starved of the excitement of the unexpected and unpredictable.*

*Being deprived of novelty doesn't just make us bored; it is actually bad for our brain, and for learning and memory.*

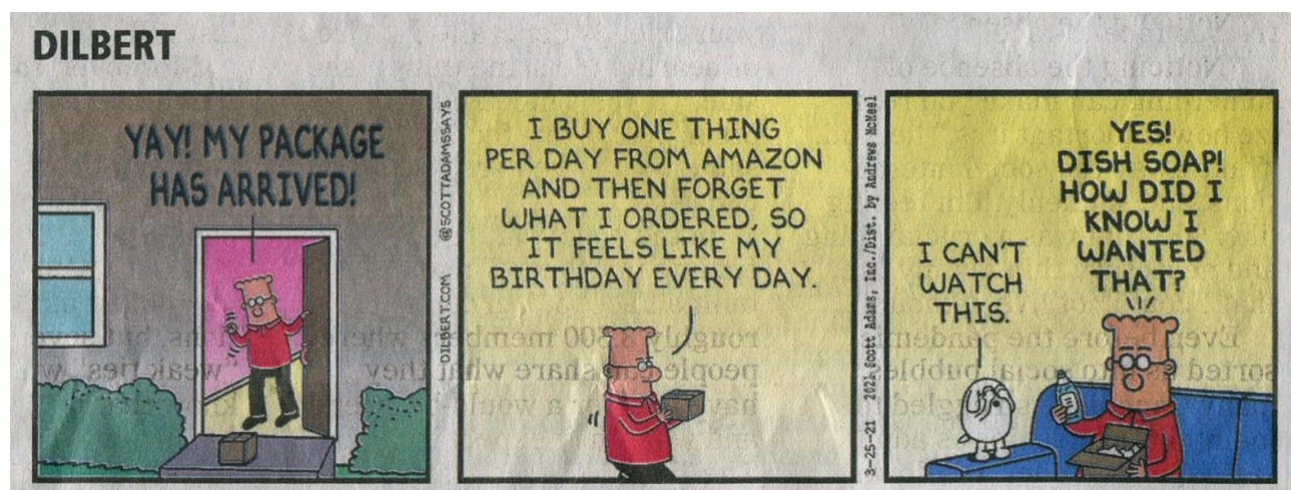
*Humans evolved over millions of years to detect novel rewards and dangers in the environment – which conferred a big survival advantage in an unpredictable world. When we have a novel experience, we get a surge of dopamine in our reward pathway, which tells our brain something like: this is an important experience – remember it! That is why novelty, learning and memory are linked. We are more likely to learn in situations where there is a certain amount of novelty. It is also why getting young people back to the classroom is so important. Virtual learning is largely devoid of the spontaneous and unexpected experiences that happen in a classroom, and which help enhance cognition.*

*For young people, exposure to novelty is especially important because their neural circuits are being sculpted and are particularly sensitive to the effects of experience. This so-called critical period of learning is a finite opportunity; after a certain period of time, the window shuts, and it is much harder to make up for lost learning.*

*The pandemic year has shown us that novelty is critical to our overall wellbeing, from learning and memory to brain development and the feeling of being vividly alive. We can't live without it.*

Reading this article makes us feel better. It's not just us. We're not being spoiled brats. Lack of stimulation is an actual thing that's affecting our brains. So now we face the challenge....what on earth can we do to provide novelty and mental stimulation after over a year of the pandemic, much of it spent in lockdown??

Luckily the sun is shining and spring is springing. At almost 9 weeks of the 12 stipulated for recovery after the surgery, my hip is almost ready to be declared ready for full action again. Think I'll take my cup of tea outside and think about how to bring something novel into our lives.....



SUNDAY 4th April 2021

EASTER SUNDAY

Canadian deaths: 23,062

World-wide deaths: 2,866,007

Yesterday I had the excitement of my first outing to Thrifty's in over 2 months. The words 'excitement' and 'Thrifty's' don't usually appear in the same sentence, but after 2 months at home with Covid restrictions, and recovering from the surgery, this will be my first foray to the stores and seeing 'people' in a long while. And I have the extra excitement of preparing for Easter: As we're allowed to gather outside (at a distance), we've invited the girls over for an Easter Egg hunt in the front yard, with tea and cake. And this of course means buying chocolate eggs and cake ingredients. Fun, fun!

Except it's not fun. Not in the least. 2 months later and nothing has changed.....there is a long, long line up to get into the store and people are still tense. My head space is in the clouds somewhere, focussed on chocolate and the novelty of browsing in a store (yes, even a grocery store!), and I am only brought sharply into focus by a woman shouting at me. In my dreamy state, I was completely unaware that I had entered an aisle *in the wrong direction*. And this woman (Early 50's?) decided that she was the one whose duty it was to unequivocally put me right. She yells at me, and snidely points to the arrows on the floor. And yells some more. She is really, really angry with me. I am so shocked that I genuinely don't know whether to burst into tears or to unleash a torrent of abuse at her. The swear words are on the tip of my tongue, but I manage to somehow control them and merely retort with a sarcastic remark thanking her for her helpfulness in pointing out my error. Then I dash off and out of the store, shaking. Nothing has changed after 1 year of this pandemic. People are still tense, and shopping is still a horrendous experience. Even writing about it now, I note my heart is beating. Crazy. Dear Husband nods sympathetically as he's been doing the grocery shopping for the past few months....."yes, it's always like that. Why do you think I often come back without some of the things on the list? It's just not worth looking for them".



To cheer myself up, I focus on making the Easter cake. I even decide to make home-made lemon curd: The recipe book says "so easy a 5 year old could do it!". After watching me going through the various stages of it for half an hour, DH sardonically asks "Is this the same 5 year old that supposedly puts IKEA furniture together?". Whatever, this 61 year old manages it, and we have a lovely couple of hours sitting in the sunshine (thank you Lord) with the kids, eating cake and hunting eggs and catching up. It is a real treat and I am thankful.

If the shopping experience hasn't changed, one thing that *has* changed is the nature of the virus. The Third Wave, with its raft of virus variants, is becoming even more scary. The case numbers are steadily rising and tragically, it is young people that are now dying. Many areas of the country now have higher case numbers than they did in the peak of the Second Wave. With vaccines being rolled out, and better understanding of Covid treatment, this isn't what we were expecting at all. In the race between the virus and the vaccines, the virus is currently winning, and so across the country, restrictions that had been eased are now being put back in place. BC has imposed a '3 week circuit breaker' of restrictions. A few of us can still meet outside, but that's it. Part of me feels that this is interminable and will just never end, but the resolutely optimistic part feels that we're in for a rough ride for the next month or 2, but then, once more people get vaccinated, we *will* come out of it. A CBC news item pointed to the UK as a good example to follow; they now have over 50% of their population vaccinated, and their Covid case numbers have dramatically fallen. Canada has 15% of its population vaccinated. We just need to buckle down and get on with it. Our only way out is the vaccine. To state the obvious, this is now really urgent.



**WEDNESDAY 7th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,167      World-wide deaths: 2,892,282

The case numbers continue to rise, and today it is announced that for the past 5 days, BC has seen its highest new case numbers (over 1,000 a day) since the pandemic first began. More worryingly, it is the variants of concern that are on the fastest rise, and they are predicted to ultimately completely take over from the 'wild' original virus we've been dealing with so far.

The 3 main variants of concern are:

1. The B.1.1.7 (UK) strain, which accounts for most of the variant cases in BC thus far
2. The South African strain (not many cases here so far)
3. The P.1 (Brazil) strain (case numbers in BC doubled from 379 to 737 over the weekend)

And it is this last strain, the Brazilian one, that is causing real concern. Already the intensive care units are filling up with it, fast, and young people with it are now more likely to end up in critical care.

So what is it about this strain that makes it so deadly? Well, the thing is sneaky and has apparently developed some 17 useful mutations, including 3 on the spike protein that helps it to bind to our cells when we become infected. And some mutations which interfere with the ability of our antibodies (produced from a previous Covid infection, or from a vaccination) to recognise and deal with the variant form. A study from Manaus in Brazil showed that 42% of recent cases had previously been infected. They should have been protected by the antibodies in their immune system, but they weren't.

This has very serious implications, the obvious one being that *the vaccine we currently have may not work. If this is the case, we are back to square one.* Except worse, as these variants are also more deadly and more likely to lead to a severe outcome, especially in younger people.

No wonder the authorities are putting us all back into lockdown, though they are clearly loathe to do so: both the Ontario and Manitoban premiers announced yesterday that these lockdowns are for "one last time", seemingly trying not to depress people. Obviously we need to keep on with the vaccinations and speed them up as fast as possible, but if the Brazil variant can get past the vaccine? Then what???

Back in October, I wrote about planning a trip to Portugal for this June with Wee Bro and Gio, and then also joining up with J and A from the UK. Back in October, I optimistically wrote in this journal: "*Surely we'll have a vaccine and be safe by then????*". Oh, little did we know. With the case numbers still on the rise and these new variants on the prowl, we're not going anywhere, especially not internationally. But we *are* going stir crazy, and we think back to our delightful little trip to Whistler last July, and decide to try and again enjoy the beauties of our own province this summer, desperately hoping we'll still be able to travel within province by late July. In a flash of inspiration it occurs to us that this is probably a good year to visit the stunning big ticket draws of our province in the Rockies, whilst the foreign tourists can't get here, so I've booked some self check-in AirBnB's (ie no need to actually see anyone) and we're crossing our fingers. We're clearly not the only ones thinking this though – the whole of BC seems to have had the same thought, and it is nigh impossible to find accommodations at this stage, but I manage it. Mind you, when I check out accommodations on the island, I discover that *every single property* is booked solid, from the end of May to mid September. And the prices are higher too.

We are all facing these new variants which could wreck everything, but we're all still hoping!



**FRIDAY 9th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,251      World-wide deaths: 2,930,608

I received this email in my inbox this morning:

*Dear BC Resident,*

*We would like to invite you to participate in the BC COVID-19 SPEAK Round 2 Survey. You were among the 400,000 British Columbians that participated in the first survey in May 2020 known as **BC COVID-19 SPEAK: Your story, Our future**. This new survey will help us examine one year into the pandemic how British Columbians have been affected and how their experiences may inform recovery and re-opening.*

*Some of the key highlights from the first round of the SPEAK survey included:*

- Families with children were struggling the most and had significant concerns about their child's overall well-being with school closures and significantly reduced social connections.*
- Young adults were disproportionately affected by the pandemic in relation to employment, financial insecurity and disruption to significant development and life goals.*
- Societal impacts have not been distributed equitably during the pandemic and are compounded for those already experiencing the most stress and with the least resources.*

*We hope you will lend your voice to this important survey to help further our understanding on the priorities for British Columbians as we seek to recover from the pandemic.*

*And finally, thank you for your continued efforts to help protect yourself and all British Columbians during COVID-19.*

*Sincerely,*

**Dr. Réka Gustafson MD FRCPC**

*Vice President, Public Health and Wellness, Provincial Health Services Authority & Deputy Provincial Health Officer of British Columbia*

Those 3 highlighted results of the first survey are not in any way surprising; one of the things that the pandemic has truly highlighted are the failures in our current system (poor care of the elderly, lack of Family Doctors, poverty and childcare issues) and my fervent hope and prayers are that post Covid, governments will change things to help redress this. But both Dear Husband and I sit down and dutifully complete the questionnaire; it seems a little enough thing to do if it helps improve long term quality of life for the most vulnerable. And besides, what else are we busy doing during this time of staying at home, seeing no-one???

The situation in Brazil continues to go from bad to worse; yesterday they had 4,200 deaths. In that one day alone. They are having to exhume bodies in cemeteries and move them over to make space for more bodies, hastily squeezed in. There is footage on television of crews frantically digging, as fast as they can, bodies piled around them, earth flying in every direction. It is a horrendous image. And my concerns for Wee Bro aren't helped any by receiving this email from him.... (below).



## Email voices:

### Wee Bro – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*The Covid situation is downright alarming - not that it hasn't always been. I read that Brazil has been identified with 89 different variants of the virus - of which the P1 is the one causing most concerns currently, 2-3 times more contagious than the original Wuhan version, re-infecting many who have had it before and affecting much younger folk. Given that it is likely to be at least August before the vaccine is rolled out sufficiently here to have a significant impact on cases (and probably into 2022 before everyone who wants one gets one), you can easily see a situation where the virus will have ample opportunity to evolve into something more deadly.*

*Ideally, we'd be cocooning ourselves now, waiting for the vaccine, but in reality this is impossible. For starters we live in a building with 40 apartments, which suggests at least 120 people all using the elevators - mostly respecting others rights to descend alone, but not always - and the elevators are so small, if someone has just been in there, you are going to be breathing the same air they were. Then the streets are very busy. My daily exercise is something akin to one of those Super Mario games from the 90s - dodging and weaving among a mixture of domestic workers sweeping the sidewalk, security guards standing outside a school or condominium, municipal workers trimming vegetation and repairing power lines or digging up the road, delivery boys sitting on their mopeds, salesmen or similar sitting in their cars with the windows wound down waiting for their next appointment or just taking a break, dog-walkers and dog-owners out with herds of canines, carers pushing elderly, mothers pushing buggies and then all the other people exercising along the residential grid of streets that have become the defacto gym, since the gyms closed. Many of the aforementioned are wearing masks, but an equal number are not (90% male). So, obviously the ones without are the ones that get my special attention and require little bursts of energy to give a wider berth. But then you get the occasional cyclist or jogger come up behind you and overtake right next to you with no mask on too, so you need eyes in the back of your head - and all this while trying not to get run over - as the neighborhood is somewhat of a thoroughfare. Still, I think I have this little game down now after 12 months (and only one fall) - and even manage to find stretches where I can remove my mask and gulp down some air in great gasps.*

*Then of course, with Diogo, we have 3 different carers on the go, plus a cleaner, plus a handyman (some of whom arrive by bus), plus doctor's visits. Then we still need to make visits to the supermarket, pharmacy, bank... so all things considered, you kind of feel that when it comes to not getting the virus over any prolonged period of time, the odds are stacked pretty heavily against you.*

### B – Beaconsfield, England

*Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are thought to be generating around 20 billion dollars for each company in comparison to the AZ/Ox not for profit vaccine.*

*The situation in the EU is dire with serious third wave problems in Spain Italy France and Germany, to name but a few. The hospitals in Paris are rumoured to be overwhelmed. The EU COVID surge/third wave is a real worry.*

*Church was open over Easter and seats had to be pre-booked, overflowing into the church hall. I continue to be happy to go to church via YouTube*

### J – Victoria (via Facebook)

*Being in the right age group, I was able to get my first shot! Astra Zeneca. Two weeks till my chances of getting COVID are reduced by more than 70% and my chances of hospitalization reduced by 99-100%! Vaccines are awesome.*

**TUESDAY 13th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,392      World-wide deaths: 2,971,030

Les Leyne, of the Times Colonist newspaper, reported on yesterday's throne speech this morning. Here's what he said about the BC government's attempt to rally our spirits:

*John Horgan and the Lt Governor*



*Those noisy, nightly pot-banging salutes to front-line workers were recalled wistfully in the NDP government's throne speech on Monday. "A year ago, British Columbians would stand on their front lawns and balconies at 7 p.m. to bang pots and pans. This was an extraordinary show of solidarity with those putting themselves at risk to protect the rest of us."*

*That developed spontaneously across most of the province during the first wave of COVID-19. But after two successive surges, during which the number of cases and deaths has grown astronomically and the constraints on daily life have gotten more tiresome, the nightly cheer is a thing of the past. In the throne speech, the government called out to summon again that "same spirit of common purpose."*

*It's needed almost as badly as the vaccine is at this point, because B.C.'s spirit has frayed badly in the past year. Even the optimistic speech had to concede that. "Unfortunately, while the pandemic has brought out best in most people, we have also seen it bring out the worst in some. Hatred and racist actions have been on the rise since COVID-19 began. Anti-Asian hate crimes have increased by Over 700 per cent in Vancouver – in 2020 alone."*

*The speech also noted that people everywhere are experiencing increased anxiety, stress, and depression.*

*The pandemic's impact on homelessness — tattered encampments in parks and public places — prompted additional arguments. And its impact on the concurrent overdose crisis is even more profound. The speech noted 1,800 overdose deaths compared to more than 1,400 COVID-19 deaths since the pandemic began.*

This sense of trying to hold back the tide is now evident across Canada, and in many other countries too. There were riots in both Quebec and in Alberta last night, as people vented their frustration with the lockdowns and the ongoing restrictions. Riots, in our civilised Canada. That doesn't happen too often, so when it happens in 2 provinces on the same night, we know that feelings are running high. I'm not sure that people will wait for those 'months more work', but how will that express itself and can

the politicians keep the lid on things? Both John Horgan and Bonnie Henry are very calm and good at encouraging us all to do the right thing, but I'm sure they're feeling the tension of trying to appease the masses while keeping the virus in control. What a difficult juggling game they have to play.

Luckily, today is glorious weather – totally clear blue sky and some warmth at last, so we shrug off the gloominess and meet up with B and dog for a walk along Dallas Road, downtown. It is absolutely beautiful – the colours are so vibrant and the air so clear - and we feel lucky to live here, in the best place in the world. If you've got to be locked down anywhere, then surely this is the place to do it.



#### Email voices:

##### T – West Vancouver

*Your brother's arm is full of vaccine – kindly and efficiently administered – there was even lots of parking which I was surprised about. He was given Pfizer – it was an MD who administered it at the Recreation Centre and she said that's what we would all get next time too – there are no plans to mix doses.*

*Amazingly, R. was talking to B and L in the UK on Saturday and neither plan to get vaccinated – he is still practising dentistry a couple of days a week in Harley Street – I asked R. why and he said something about mental side-effects. R. said the one thing that would make them get a jab is that they like to travel and without proof of vaccination their plans might be limited!*

**WEDNESDAY 14th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,445      World-wide deaths: 2,984,994

DH and I have been wrestling with our decision on which route to go for having our vaccine. Yes, amazingly there is a choice to be made! Alongside the main government wide system of vaccination, where people are vaccinated at specially created vaccination centres, and everyone is given their appointment as per the official schedule laid out by the provincial health officials, there is now also an added option for the 55 – 65 year old cohort.

Basically, it all comes down to the unfortunate ongoing issues surrounding the Astra Zenica vaccine; first of all the research hadn't been completed on those over 65, so everyone wrongly assumed that meant it was dangerous for the over 65's to have it. Since then they have discovered that 1 or 2 in one million people given the AZ vaccine have gone on to have a rare type of brain blood clot. A couple of folks have even died from it. And as most of those who have had the clot are women under the age of 55, they have now deemed it unsafe for anyone under 55 to have this vaccine. Which only leaves a tiny 10 year gap of those aged 55 – 65 left for whom it is considered 'safe' to have the AZ vaccine!

In addition, the US shovelled a load of its AZ vaccine that it couldn't use as it's close to its 'sell by' date, over the border to Canada. On loan by the way – we will be required to replace it with fresh vaccine once we have some. Be that as it may, we have some AZ vaccine available and only a 10 year age group able to receive it, and the authorities naturally want to get it in arms as quickly as possible. So they have distributed it to pharmacies around the province and those of us aged 55 – 65 have been told we can contact the pharmacies and try and get on their list for a vaccine, right now.

This is of course great news as it speeds up the process and there are an awful lot of us Boomers highly motivated to get the vaccine. DH and I personally don't care which vaccine we get as all vaccines carry risks, but those risks are infinitesimal compared to the risk of catching a Covid variant. Several of our friends and contacts immediately ring round and find availability, and soon my Facebook page is flooded with proud and happy posts of people's arms with plasters on them. My first reaction is to rush and do the same, but then DH pauses and asks "what about the *follow up* vaccine – the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose? If the vaccine is given in some random pharmacy, are those jabs in the official system? Will the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose be administered by the same pharmacy? Will everyone be sent an email to remind them as they would if they were in the main system?"

I hadn't thought of that, so I message one of my friends who's recently had the jab and ask what the pharmacist told her about the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose. She replies that when she asked that question, the pharmacist told her he had no idea, and that she will probably have to source a 2<sup>nd</sup> dose from another pharmacy with AZ supplies when the time is right. Hmm. That sounds a bit vague. So I ask a 2<sup>nd</sup> friend what her experience was, and she replies "*I think there'll be a 2<sup>nd</sup> dose there? But they didn't really say and anyway 1 shot is better than none. I have 2 people going out to work daily living in my household*". (Fair point!). Finally I ask a friend of daughter 2, who is a pharmacist, what her pharmacy is doing about 2<sup>nd</sup> dose follow up. She shrugs her shoulders and lifts her hands in the air. "*I don't know! We were only told we were doing these vaccines last week – we know nothing about it!*".

That's not very comforting and it's beginning to look as if DH is right to have concerns about this. When the time comes, we want to know that we will *automatically* be in the system and will get our 2<sup>nd</sup> dose as a matter of course, at the scheduled time. We don't want to have to go out hunting for it and then trying to get the paperwork to match up. Apart from the hassle and stress of that, we know that having the right paperwork, proving vaccination, is going to be critical in the 'post restrictions' world. Especially if we want to travel. We have already signed up to the BC Health portal system so we can have proof of vaccination on our phones, and we want it on paper too. We want it in any form we can



get it. It is going to be a vital document in our future. So anything that jeopardises that has to be suspect. And yet, and yet....it's there, available. Now.

DH checks the official BC vaccination website on line, to see where they are with their age groups, and discovers that they are now down to 63 year olds. It'll only be a couple of days before we get there anyway. So, after dithering and debating some more, and hoping we won't offend friends by not going the route they chose, we decide to wait. We go online to register our names on the official provincial list. I hope we haven't made the wrong decision, but we see so few people that it seems a low risk to delay it by a week or so..... fingers crossed.



#### Email voices:

##### Wee Bro – Sao Paolo, Brazil

*Not too much new here. People continue to drop like flies - at least that is the impression Gi gives with her (very extensive) network of friends/acquaintances/contacts; Diogo continues to be a pain in the butt; and Gi and I continue to drink our way through it all. Your reasoning for not getting the vaccine from the pharmacy made perfect sense, by the way. I would have done the same, I think. My current estimate for getting the vaccine is June - the date continues to slide - but am still hopeful it will all work out in the end.*

##### T - West Vancouver

*You are probably going the right route with your choices about how to get vaccinated – I was just talking to M whose son P lives in San Francisco – he was saying that all stops are being pulled out with even veterinarians offering a jab. M had her jab last week and reported a bit of a sore arm but nothing too bad.*

**SATURDAY 17th April 2021**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!!!**

Canadian deaths: 23,591

World-wide deaths: 3,023,429

Back in December, when no-one could celebrate Christmas together with their friends and families, I wrote in this journal about our family decision to postpone the festivities until we could do Christmas 'properly'. Rather than opening presents and celebrating over Zoom, a route which worked well for many, we decided that the whole point of the festivity (apart from celebrating Christ's birth of course!) is the actual being together. In person. I wrote in this journal "*we look forward to Janumas. Or at worst, Februmas. Please God, not Marchmas*". Wrong again! Here we are – APRIMAS!

Of course, we still can't 'do' Christmas properly, all gathered around the fire, playing games, enjoying the sparkly twinkling lights in the dark wintry dusk. Indoor gatherings are still not allowed, but we *are* allowed to gather in our core bubble group of up to 10 people, OUTSIDE. And we have this unusually warm and sunny spell with clear blue skies and temperatures in the mid-twenties. It is a perfect window for a compromise – we will have an outdoor, sunshine Christmas! It will be the first time that the 6 of us (2 daughters and their partners) will have all been together since at least October. In 6 months. When you're a close family, as we are, that is a long time and we all excitedly agree that we can make this work.

Dear Husband fishes the turkey out of the freezer and over 2 days does a hasty defrost and turkey roasting, I get out the tape measure and set up the patio furniture in 3 groups of two chairs, each 7 feet apart from each other to be safe. Umbrellas are set up to keep us cool (that's a first for Christmas in Victoria!), and then I drag out as many Christmas decorations as I can from our lounge to our back deck. Red and green fabric streamers are woven around the railings, baubles hang from any nail or sharp bit I can find and a fake small tree is installed in the middle of it all, with the main Christmas tree fairy plonked grandly on top. The pressies are hauled from under the main Christmas tree, where they have been patiently sitting for 4 months now, and put in the 3 separate Covid safe piles by the respective chairs. The bathroom, and door handles, are disinfected, the food is presented as a cold buffet so people can safely fetch it in pairs, and we're as ready as we're ever going to be for our Covid safe Christmas.

And it is fun!!! It's not exactly *Christmas*, but it is fun and there is much laughter at the exchange of gifts, as frankly most of us have forgotten what we got each other, or what we asked for, and as each present is opened there is genuine surprise and delight. "*I got you that? Really? Well that was good!*". Several pressies cause laughter at the sheer uselessness of them now, such as the thick fleecy pyjama pants I bought the girls to keep them warm (moms seemingly forever paranoid about keeping their offspring warm enough). Still, as DH says, unwrapping his brushed flannel plaid shirts in the 25 degree sunshine, one thing we all know for sure living in Canada, is that winter will come around again and these things will get used. The Christmas chocolates, after 4 months of sitting under the tree near the heater, and having spent the afternoon in the blazing sunshine, are of course a squidgy mess, but none of it matters, because the biggest gift of all is just being together. And laughter. And love.



We may not be allowed to hug yet, or get close, but it is a wonderful and incredibly restorative time. Dog bounds around just bursting with excitement at having the whole family around him, and covers us all in vast amounts of slobber. He is doing our hugging for us.

Christmas in 25 degrees sunshine, in April. Yet another weird thing in a time of Covid weird.

**MONDAY 19th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,667      World-wide deaths: 3,042,947

And so at last, after 5 months of standing in the corner of our lounge, the Christmas Tree can be put away. I'm actually kind of tempted to leave it, there – it's only another 7 months until it can go up again and it is a lot of work taking everything down and putting it all away - but Dear Husband insists that we need to psychologically move on and out of the dark Covid winter time, and into the next phase of summer. And he is right, so we set to it.

It takes us most of the day to carefully put the decorations back in their respective boxes (and after 5 months, I've forgotten where much of it normally goes!), and then clean up the house afterwards. As I vacuum into the dining area, I notice large dust bunnies and piles of dead flies in the corners. As no-one has been in this area of the room for so many months, I'd just assumed it would stay clean. Wrong! Where does all this dust come from?? Yet more visible evidence of the length of time it's been since we've shared a communal meal or social time with friends and family. But the flies and dust have clearly still been regular visitors!

After all the tidying and cleaning, I make a nice cup of tea (of course!) and settle down to read a Maclean's article which takes a hard look at our politicians and their priorities during the pandemic. While the article is a little harsh in some places, there is an absolute core of truth here, and it resonates strongly with the way we feel about some of our politicians. Even today, Doug Ford announces new restrictions for Ontario, and a curfew as if, as the article says, the Covid virus hunts at night, but still, there is no sick pay for workers in factories, so if they *are* sick with Covid, they have to keep on working to pay their rent, and so bring the virus to work, and share it around their co-workers. Ford is full of rhetoric and orders, but no actual economic supports that will help halt the spread of the virus. Jason Kenney too appears more eager to placate the economic factor than the health one. Money, economics and politics still come before health it seems. Curious to see what others in the family think about this, I share this article via email and quickly get responses. Clearly, DH and I are not the only ones it resonates with!

Email voices:

B – Victoria

*That is a good article! J rants about this stuff every day lol, he's got a real hate on for John Horgan for being so cowardly and continuing to just say - and do - whatever he thinks will be most popular, not what's safe or logical. Like how one of his co-workers recently contracted Covid after a) returning to her indoor Spin-cycle class, because that is somehow allowed to re-open (for God's sake why not just ride a bike outdoors??) and b) making several trips back and forth between here and Vancouver purely for social visits. And of course all the people he talks to on the phone who have recently arrived here from other provinces or other countries and somehow skipped the quarantine.*

*At least the grocery stores are letting us bring our re-usable bags again. Fairways wouldn't let us for a while there - at first they let you if you packed your bag on the floor, but there was a point where they decided, somehow, that even that was unsafe, so instead they set up a "bag-packing table" outside. If you wanted to use it, presumably you had to carry your groceries out there individually from the checkouts - coming back in through the other door and walking all through the store again each time - then put them into your bags on this one small table, which you shared with anyone else trying to do the same thing. I think it was one of the weirdest approaches I've yet seen in these pandemic measures. Though I'm sure there were weirder!*

Big Bro – West Vancouver

All politicians will hear about the article even if they do not actually read it. T has been emphatic on avoiding the highest risk areas and steering me away from the gym, hairdresser and meetings. It has just been “essentials”: groceries, hardware, liquor store, and all with a mask at 2 metres (mostly). As for our politicians, they are in a group with other “movers and shakers” for whom the economy is paramount, with the short term ever front and centre. So, we are seeing health playing second fiddle here, but it’s the same with the environment and many social issues. If you borrow to the hilt, never run a surplus and have nothing for a rainy day, then I think you are predisposed to make decisions based on the short term because you cannot “afford” to think otherwise. To compound the problem, and as a policy tool, interest rates are manipulated well below the actual inflation rate, for years on end. So, there is every incentive to borrow and spend and none to save. “Later is a far horizon for a party animal.” Thanks for sharing. I am glad the article appears in a high profile publication.

B - Abbotsford

That certainly is an interesting article. It puts things into perspective and makes a lot of sense. Yes, the politicians need to stop trying to save face or to relying totally on the idea of herd immunity, and deal quickly to shut down any places where there are rising case numbers.

D is self-isolating - one of her Starbucks people tested positive so all employees who shared any shift are isolating.

The other day I told the lady that I walk with that I'd had my first dose of vaccine, and her response was, "That makes me so sad! Why would you do that?" Even though I know she has very different views from me and we avoid speaking of many issues/politics, I was still taken aback!

M – Victoria, post on Facebook

British Columbia COVID reality check: the guidelines are getting so wishwashy, aren't they? Dr Henry advised this week “You can get together with your bubble of 10 people - masked, distanced and outdoors - but it’s not advised.” Huh? And numbers climbing higher than ever???

And the misinformation about what it means to get the first vax...it really only protects ME from severe COVID...maybe. I can still get the virus, carry the virus, infect others who have been vaxed, (and maybe die of a blood clot). So no change in necessary precautions.

So when invited to go for a walk with someone outside my current bubble of 10, it's my understanding that I should decline. Do you agree?



**TUESDAY 20th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,707      World-wide deaths: 3,050,548

Well, is it the rising case numbers forcing action? or did the politicians read the Maclean's article??! Whatever it is, John Horgan announces new stringent travel restrictions this morning. Thus far we have been *discouraged* from travelling out of our immediate area, but, as from Friday, it will be *enforced*. From now on, we all have to remain in our Regional Health Authority District, and there will be signs erected at the Alberta border to discourage people from entering the province, unless for essential purposes. It has been further outlined that even though our Regional Health Authority District is Island Health and therefore covers the whole island, that does not mean we can travel *around* the island, so for instance, folks from Victoria should not be visiting Tofino. Basically, we all need to stay in reach of home. Which is what most of us have been doing anyway, but now it will be enforced with random checks and fines.



But the weather continues glorious and after our cleaning efforts yesterday, and with the latest gloomy Covid news, DH and I decide we need a day off to enjoy the beauty in our own neighbourhood, and so we spend the afternoon down at the beach, just a few minutes away.



And it is absolutely idyllic. We stroll to the far end where there is hardly anyone, and spend happy relaxed hours watching a couple of otters fighting, watching the seals sunning themselves on the rocks, watching some seagulls harry an eagle, and the herons poking amongst the shallows. I too paddle in the shallows, taking pictures of Geo ducks (which I've never seen feeding before – cool!), and picking up bits of beach glass. The views are magnificent, with snow-capped Mount Baker in the background, the weather is warm and sunny, and we rejoice, yet again, that we live where we do, the best place to be restricted to, ever.



## THURSDAY 22nd April 2021

Canadian deaths: 23,811      World-wide deaths: 3,079,917

Just over a week ago, on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>, I wrote how the vaccination age list had got down to those aged 63. As the lists have consistently been going down a year group each day, we were confident that our turn was only a matter of 2 days away. Wrong footed yet again! By Thursday, the next day, the age did indeed drop to those aged 62 (ie born in 1958), so we were surprised when nothing changed on Friday. Of course nothing happened over the weekend (because getting the population vaccinated as fast as possible in a pandemic clearly isn't a priority, so no-one works on it over a weekend). We actually got up early on Monday morning, thinking that surely the dates would have changed by now and we'd be able to book our time slot, but nothing doing. The list still stuck at those born in 1958 and older. By Tuesday we realised that something was clearly wrong and so decided that maybe we'd better also check out the pharmacy lists after all, just to be on the safe side. But now of course the government has declared that, despite the earlier panic over blood clots, the Astra Zenica vaccine IS safe to those aged between 40 and 55 after all, (!! ) and that cohort has flooded to the pharmacies and now there is no Astra Zenica vaccine left in Victoria either. At all. Anywhere.

So here we are, a week later, very keen to get our vaccine. Any vaccine - we don't care. But there is clearly a hiatus in the supply and so we're left waiting for the next delivery, whenever that may be. The government assures us all that by early May there'll be a million doses per week arriving into the country, but we've been promised this before. It's one of those situations when you'll believe it when you see it. We understand absolutely that it's not their fault if this delivery is delayed and precarious; Trudeau has ordered way more than needed, but things are constantly changing and what seemed like a reliable supply, no longer is. For instance, India was making and supplying large amounts of the Astra Zenica vaccine, but has now announced it won't be delivering it to us any more because of the crisis in its own country, with the new 'double mutant' variant causing horrific death numbers there. It's all understandable, but it's also frustrating.

But we can be patient. We have no choice anyway. DH and I are lucky that we are retired so can limit our exposure to others. We've hardly seen anyone over the past year. We've not been to a restaurant or bar or public place in over a year. We don't go on public transport. We order what we need online if possible, and limit our food shopping to once every few weeks. Apart from my medical appointments with the hip surgery in January, and seeing a few folks outdoors (as with our family Christmas, or on walks), we've seen no-one for over a year. It's lonely. It's difficult. But it is what it is.

And we'll just have to keep on waiting.

Email voices:

### H - Delta

*Were you and DH successful in booking a vaccination appointment? In the lower mainland, I understand there are very limited appointments available. The AstraZeneca bookings are also very hard to get. I'm not sure why BC launched the 40+ vaccinations without a good supply of AZ, and the Moderna shortage is also a current problem.*

**FRIDAY 23rd April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,883      World-wide deaths: 3,098,836

But we don't have to wait long!! Having resigned myself to waiting however long it would take, I received this brief but welcome email message from our friend H in Delta, at 9pm last night:

*During her 1:00 briefing today, Dr BH just said that vaccination bookings will be available tomorrow for age 60+ Yay!! Good luck!*

So planning an early start at the computer, I happily trot off to bed, only to be startled by DH (who was still up and pottering) bursting into our bedroom at 11pm, saying "sorry to drag you out of bed, but the invitation has just arrived! Come and book your appointment now!"

What?? At 11pm at night?! The bizarreness of the whole thing continues to amaze, but whatever, we dash to the computer and find the following email in our inbox:

*BCVaccDoNotReply@hlth.gov.bc.ca*

*10:39 PM (21 minutes ago)*

*You can now book your first dose vaccine appointment.*

*To book, you need your:*

*- Confirmation number R-7Vxxxxxxx*

*- Personal Health Number*

*Booking online is easy and can be completed 24 hours a day. You'll be able to select a location, date and time by visiting [Click Here](#).*

*If you need to make an appointment during your workday, by law you cannot lose your job for taking time off to get vaccinated.*

*Do not book an appointment if you have already received your first dose. You will receive another notification when you are eligible to book your second dose.*

And they're not wrong. Booking turns out to be incredibly easy. We enter our confirmation number, our PHN and then click on 'book here'. Surprisingly there is only 1 centre available for the whole of Victoria – the Victoria Conference Centre downtown, (there was a centre at UVic, but it turns out that was closed after just 1 month of use), so there's not too much dithering over which location to choose. When we click on the options for the dates though, there is no availability whatsoever for any of the dates between now and Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> May, on which day every single time slot is available. This must be the first of the next shipment, and we must be the first to respond to the email to have that choice. So we spoil ourselves and choose mid-morning, at 11am, to give ourselves the comfort of having breakfast first, and time to find somewhere to park downtown. It's all booked in under 5 minutes. We eventually get to bed at around midnight, having spent the previous 55 minutes fizzing with excitement that it's finally our turn next.

The Times Colonist this morning confirms our suspicions, in an article where the politicians 'fess up that yes, they have indeed run out of vaccine in BC, as we suspected. But a new shipment is scheduled to arrive next week, thus we were able to book our appointment. Fingers crossed it actually arrives! The Times Colonist also contains another good article by Jack Knox, entitled "We want Ten Commandments, not Ten Suggestions" where he discusses the vagaries around the new travel restrictions. "We like rules. Not guidelines – rules. .... Turns out that guidelines work best when applied to high school dress codes, not to the end of the world". "People like rules they can understand and that will be enforced when broken, so that no-one gets away with chopping holes in the boat while the others are bailing". He is spot on as always. I hope someone is collecting his pandemic articles.

**MONDAY 26th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 23,997      World-wide deaths: 3,132,466

Even by the standards of this lonely past year, we have had a very quiet weekend. As usual, we've seen no-one, nor have we been anywhere. Not just because of Covid restrictions, but with the weather doing its West Coast rainforest special, and the rain just pouring out of the sky for almost 3 days and nights solid, we can't even go for a walk or work in the garden. I do some knitting. I read a book (Robert Galbraith, aka J.K.Rowling under pseudonym, a very good mystery series). And of course I watch the news.

And what we see coming out of India is beyond horrific. Over the past 15 months, we've experienced so much trauma and devastation on the news, that I'm embarrassed to admit that to some extent I've become somewhat inured to it. But this news reel from India hits me afresh and brings home the true horror of the pandemic, as if it were a new story, all over again.

We're used to the images of the mass graves in Brazil, bodies heaped up, and earth flying, as corpses are hurriedly squeezed in next to each other. We're used to the images from around the world, of the freezer trucks parked outside of hospitals, acting as temporary morgues, as there is no-where else to store the hundreds of corpses. People dying faster than arrangements can be made to dispose of their bodies. But what I'm not used to is the footage of fields of bonfires and piles of ash, as thousands of bodies are thrown on hurriedly made bonfires, and countless corpses are disposed of with no final ceremony or farewell.



The scene looks apocalyptic. It's like something out of a horror movie. Except this horror is real. It's happening to fellow human beings across the world. I watch the television in shock, as if I've been physically hit, and to be honest, this image haunts me long after I'm no longer looking at it.

As if that's not enough, we then see further footage from India that I've personally not seen previously during the pandemic....we see video of people dying in their cars. The hospitals are full – there is nowhere to put the thousands of people arriving at their doors, gasping for breath. Even the ambulances are full. So hundreds of cars line up outside the hospitals, each one containing a person who is dying from Covid and who desperately needs oxygen to breathe. But who of course can't get it, because there simply isn't enough and the hospitals are overwhelmed. It is shocking footage. We are literally watching people die in front of us and we cannot do a darn thing about it.

The head of the World Health Organisation describes the situation in India as '*beyond heartbreaking*,' and the only good aspect to this story is that several countries (eg Germany, the USA, Canada) vow to send immediate aid. Many countries (eg UK and Canada) also ban direct flights from India and Pakistan in an attempt to keep their double mutant variant out, but of course, we are all only safe when the whole world is vaccinated. We are in this together.

The rest of the news continues in similar vein....details of Covid cases around the world and in Canada (of particular note here, a baby dies of Covid in BC, a 13 year old girl dies of it in Ontario, Ontario hospitals are overwhelmed and can't cope with the case numbers).....followed by the story of a fire in a hospital in Iran killing lots of people, a lost submarine is found at the bottom of the ocean in Indonesia, everyone on board (58) dead, and so it goes on, death numbers after death numbers. At the end of the news I feel numb.

And then I get a phone call from my dear and close friend B, in Abbotsford. Her son has kidney failure. He is very, very ill, and will die if he can't get a kidney transplant soon. I'm already shocked from watching the news and reading my emails, and now this....so much death. I don't know how to react, though I do feel sympathy and love, and I just listen as she weeps on the phone. But I feel emotionally numb. I don't know what to say. It seems as if there is intense suffering just everywhere. But she is my friend. I can't help the folks in India, but B is close to home. She is the one I can support and help, even if just by listening, so I'll do that.

But bloody hell, there are times when this is hard.



**WEDNESDAY 28th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 24,106

World-wide deaths: 3,162,930

I receive a surprise and unwelcome phone call today.....the BC Covid Vaccination centre, changing the date of my vaccination.

When I ask why this is happening, she gives the answer as “too many resources”. Huh?! I ask for elucidation and am told they have booked too many people in for their jab on Tuesday and there are not enough people available to *give* the vaccine. Well that’s bad news – that sounds to me like too *few* resources, not too many, and it’s worrying if we want to beat the progress of the variants. We need people vaccinated as fast as possible. We are in a desperate race here, and shortage of vaccination staff is not good news.

Girding my loins for the worst, I ask her when the next available date is, and am staggered when she airily says “oh, the next day. Wednesday. We don’t have any morning appointments left, but there’s plenty of space in the afternoon!”. There’s further phone confusion when I ask about DH, who was also booked for his vaccine, 5 minutes after me, on Tuesday. “Oh”, she replies “It’s ok for him to come on Tuesday. Just not you” ????? Now I’m completely baffled. Eventually I persuade her that it really would be much easier if the 2 of us could travel into town together, rather than on two separate days, and she agrees, and sorts it out for us so that he too is on Wednesday, at the same time as me. She is very pleasant throughout the whole process, but it’s all a bit bumbling and confusing to be honest. Still, we end up with an email bearing our new time and our booking code, so it should work.



We were beginning to wonder if we should have gone the pharmacy route after all, and grabbed one of those special Astra Zenica doses, but an article in Macleans today makes us glad we chose the route we did. The article points out that, now that India is keeping all of the vaccine it is making, to deal with the catastrophe in its own country (another 4,000 + deaths today), Canada is not scheduled to get any more Astra Zenica vaccine any time soon. Will it be in time for the second dose (meant to be a maximum of 16 weeks after the first dose) for those who have just had their AZ vaccine in the recent pharmacy rush? What will they do if they can't get a supply in? Offer a different vaccine for the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose? Will 'mix and match' be less effective? More effective? Everything about this pandemic is a constantly moving target. A logistics nightmare. But we're glad to be in the system and hope that if we do get the Pfizer vaccine next week, that means it will be possible to get the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose within the recommended 16 weeks. No guarantees of course. Just crossed fingers and a bucketload of hope.



**FRIDAY 30th April 2021**

Canadian deaths: 24,203      World-wide deaths: 3,188,190

Browsing on Facebook today, I came across this conversation initiated by our friend, T, who lives in Calgary, Alberta.....

T is at Piegan - Carway Border Crossing

T: Arriving at the border at 5:30 am was ALMOST early enough for a vaccine dose from the Blackfoot.....but it was a grand adventure anyway and we saw this beautiful sunrise while waiting in the lineup



DL: Are you not able to get your second dose here? 😞

T: Up to four months between doses

DL: Crazy!

T: Alberta is vaccinating everyone with one dose before any second doses

DM: No way!! It was that crowded by 5.30? I was there at 6.20 on wed and i was car 40ish

T: We were maybe car 100. Could have gotten Moderna but our first dose was Pfizer and they ran out shortly before our turn

DM: I think there were 100 cars ahead of us. We would have been able to get Moderna but need Pfizer as that's what our first dose was.

T: We got our Pfizer March 10 so we're hoping not to wait four months... congrats on getting your dose ❤️❤️

DM: go on wed! Maybe go down and spend the night in cardston! They have a campground three blocks off the hwy.

T: great idea... we did stay in Cardston but thought leaving the hotel by 5 was early enough! Oops!

LE: we tried that on Wednesday! Got there at 8:40 am. There were at least 200 cars in front of us. Waited 3 hours and then they ran out. Oh well! It was a nice drive. And a lovely gesture from the Blackfeet Nation!

MD: Hey I drove through there today except I kept going to whitefish and got my Johnson and Johnson vaccine down here. Good for you! Was a beautiful day for the drive

At first, I am completely baffled by this conversation. What is going on over there?? It sounds as if our friends are trying to get vaccinated across the border.....so I check out the news and discover that this is an under the radar, but totally legal, thing going on; the Blackfoot Nation across the border in the

USA, have declared that they have now vaccinated 98% of their community and they have plenty of vaccine spare, so they are donating it - completely for free - to Canadians who want it. They have set up a drive through vaccination counter, right on the border (or just feet over it), so that Canadians drive up, are vaccinated through their car window, then do a U-Turn and drive directly back into Alberta again. Isn't that wonderful? A true spirit of co-operation and sharing with neighbours, even across borders, to make everyone safer. There follow various comments on this Facebook thread about how a First World country such as Canada should not need to be on the receiving end of handouts like this, but none the less, clearly the word has got out and Albertans who can, are taking advantage of it, even if it means driving several hours, camping out or staying in hotels, and getting up in the middle of the night to do it!

I'm glad that some Albertans are taking the pandemic seriously; the case numbers continue to soar in our neighbouring province, fuelled no doubt by the many folks there who refuse to wear masks, follow the social protocols, or have a vaccine, citing their civil liberties and freedoms. "We are like Texans" they boldly proclaim on the news "we believe in our rights! We don't have to do what anyone else tells us". The right to be selfish and uncaring towards others. To affect, in very real terms, the lives and health of other Canadians. This makes me so cross and also so sad, and it is hard to watch the story on the CBC news tonight of a young 28 year old woman in Ontario, with 3 young children, and stage 4 cancer of the appendix. She cannot get the surgery she so desperately needs to save her life, because the ICU units at the hospitals are full of Covid cases, and so all surgeries have been cancelled. She's a young mom of just 28, who should be at the front of any queue, but is denied life-saving treatment because of Covid. How can the anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers be comfortable believing that their 'freedoms' mean the deaths of others such as her? Do they genuinely not understand the ramifications of their actions? Or don't they care? I go to bed thinking of this young woman and praying for her. She seemed lovely and her 3 young kids so cute. What a heart breaking tragedy.

**WEDNESDAY 5th May 2021**

Canadian deaths: 24,450      World-wide deaths: 3,255,302

Great excitement!!! Today is THE day!! Our turn to get our first jab and be protected from the Covid virus. WOOT!!!!!!!

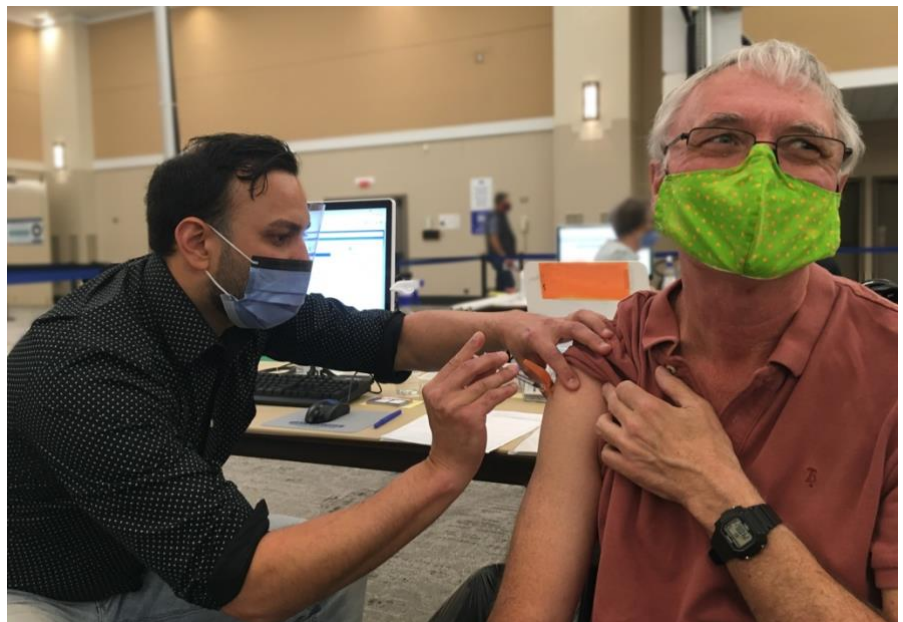
Dear Husband and I set off in good time, clutching the relevant paper work with our booking number on it, and with our Care Cards in our pockets. We drive into town to the Victoria Conference Centre, where all the Victoria vaccinations are happening, feeling really good to be taking this positive step and being on the route to a return to 'normal'. Unbelievably, we pass a small but vociferous group of anti-vaxxer protesters at the junction of Blanshard and Pandora, all waving hand drawn, cardboard placards with ridiculous things on them like "you're giving up control" and "they will take you over". One guy – in his late 40's? – waves a placard right up next to our window as we pass, and we both shake our heads in disbelief. Idiots.



Anyway, I am happy to report that the whole vaccination process takes place smoothly, efficiently and with large doses of friendliness and kindness added into the mix. The parking is well organised and there are folks cheerfully explaining how to access the free parking system that has been set up. There is a greeter as we come up the stairs from the parkade who guides us in the right direction to the reception area, passing signs with Bonnie Henry's famous words on them. Having checked in at the bank of receptionists, we move along the line into the main hall, all waiting spaces carefully marked out by the 'footprint' circles to stand on. But as it happens, there is no line up at all, and we move smoothly into the hall where there are about 40 (?) individual tables set up, each with their health professional ready to administer the vaccine.



Our guy is super friendly and I would guess is a doctor, judging from his manner, language and the way he deals with us. I explain that I'm writing this journal and he agrees to have me photograph him administering the dose to DH, so I can include it. The actual jab is painless and instant. Yes, you can just about feel it, but there's no pain at all. Then we toddle over to the line of chairs that have been set up for the 15 minutes waiting area, and quietly sit, supervised by a nurse who watches over the group and chats to folks to ensure they're ok. Truth be told, we quite enjoy watching the comings and goings as people steadily flow through the system; it's more entertainment than we've had at home for a long time!! The nurse tells us they hope to vaccinate 1,600 people today. Fantastic!



And so we're done. HUZDAH! Hopefully, now that the Pfizer doses are rolling through regularly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> dose won't be too long. Fingers crossed. But we've passed a major milestone. Our first shot of the vaccine. We're on our way to the end of the pandemic! We hope.