The Western University Archives Project for 2020 (Covid 19 Pandemic Reflection)

 It was just a day or two away from making the spa call. I’d put it off due to some reason that I now can’t recall. It became a desperate issue in a way. I live alone and didn’t have any idea that when I took too long making the appointment to get my toenails clipped and then the lockdown happened that I would be stuck with debilitating toenails.

 I have physical difficulty doing my own clipping of my toes and it was the lost opportunity to get a pedicure that would never happen in the foreseeable future. I called the medical foot clinic but they were closed. I called my previous retired doctor who happens to be a relative to be my back up in case I couldn’t wait any longer. (He said he would do it with his hedge clippers !) I wore socks with sandals as I couldn’t tolerate a closed shoe with such long toenails. Holes in my sock toes revealed the long, crooked nails of my big toes. I cased out the possible openings at local spas and on the very first day of the soft re opening of such a place, months later, I called and was given an appointment. I went gladly, wearing a mask and answering all the necessary questions so I could be admitted. It was all carefully done and I only noticed one problem with my service. The person attending me was trying her best. However, I noticed her paper mask was below her nose and slipped when she spoke. Other than that, it went ok and I was pleased I felt I could walk again in my shoes and also display my toes in sandals in warm weather. It had been upsetting my peace of mind to a greater extent than you might imagine. It was a bizarre problem but was getting me down.

Through the lockdown I remained on my own but had thoughtful neighbours calling and checking in. I missed my family. My sister and her family were being extra careful for health reasons as my sister is vulnerable due to a suppressed immune system. My younger brother was working locally and would drive by frequently for a quick hello from the yard. My sister-in-law also waved from across the street or said hello from the roadway. I dropped by my older brother’s porch when we were relaxing the lockdown rules. He has health issues too and had made it back to Canada from his Florida retreat just before the border closing. Finally I also had a porch visit at my sister’s place. I wore my mask during these porch visits.

 My son was eking out the time in his one room bachelor apartment in Toronto, working on line managing the crisis of his workplace. His sweet bulldog was his only companion. My son was very careful and only went out to get groceries and to walk his dog. He had items delivered. With the development of the race issue protests and upheaval from across the border and here in Canada this also ratcheted up the stress and anxiety of my son’s work and he was the one dealing with it. He had walked into the job thinking it would be fun and artsy and then it turned deep, dark and challenging, to say the least. He adapted to the challenge but some days he would be in tears, totally frustrated. He is thirty seven. I worried. I convinced him it was ok to come home for a break and work from here. He is here now. It seems to be helping. There is more space, it is quiet, he gets his meals, I am doing his laundry, the dog loves going for walks down to the park and his online co workers delight in seeing him transformed, happy to be once more in his childhood surroundings. He is laughing and joking again while working online. His hair has grown long and wavy as he is avoiding going out to get it cut so this is making his online coworkers tease him a bit on Zoom calls. He manages a comedy theatre in Toronto and its affiliate theatre in Chicago. I must say it is nice having him here. When he goes back to Toronto he will look for a more spacious apartment outside the city where rents are more reasonable.

As for me, I haven’t had to change too much of my lifestyle except for the usual appointments and shopping outings. I miss going to the library, theatre, church events and services and meeting up with my retired friends for a visit at coffee shops or restaurants. I miss going to the greenhouse to buy plants. I bought my spring plants from a pop up plant sale in a bank parking lot. I have gone to a drive through for takeout food and paid with plastic rather than my usual cash payment. I wear my mask (in the car) when approaching the worker through the takeout window. If any of the places I try to go to have a lineup of any sort or too many cars in the parking lot I just don’t go there. This has happened at the grocery store, a greenhouse and at drive through restaurants. I seemed to save a bit of money this way. At this point I haven’t tried on line shopping as I support local retail and I can often get along on what I already have stored away in my little house. When I get the chance I will stock up again on essentials in case there is another lockdown this fall and winter. I have relied on some of the parental teaching I had from my late mother and learned to fix things up, wear it out, do without and get a grip.

Oddly enough I didn’t read as much as I usually did. My writing routine was interrupted. Garden videos of cottage gardens, cooking shows by Jamie Oliver and retro film clips Paula Deen kept my interest on face book. My friend kept me entertained with her daily studio singing concerts on face book. Sometimes she also broke down in her online concerts and cried. She is self employed, unable to teach her students in her studio and was anxious about the future. She is older than my son. Later she received some media attention for her concerts and also some financial grant recognition for her contribution to the arts scene. Other artistic friends were sharing their songs, poetry and puppets on face book too. I sent out many positive posts mainly about art, poetry and music. If I came across a good joke reflecting my very old fashioned, prim but quirky sense of humour I shared it as well. It was fun to see who I connected with online and I enjoyed getting their feedback comments. I avoided any dark or disturbing content.

 I only watched two movies on Netflix. Not much else appealed to me in the selection. I watched The Little Prince and Sense and Sensibility. That’s it!

 I managed to write some letters to a local senior’s home as I thought it was the least I could do for someone else. I have been sending a dozen letters a month now for the past year and felt it was a nice way to communicate with some neighbours…even if I don’t know who the Director of Recreation there assigns the letters to because it is nice for some folks to get some mail and a little attention once in awhile. I wrote about the weather or any spring bird or flower I saw in my garden. I wished them well and kept the tone of my letters cheerful. These sessions of letter writing helped me more than I realized. Gratitude for the spectacular changes in weather, birds and flowers and sharing this with others works every time. I also illustrated the letters.

 When watching the news I became anxious but couldn’t turn it off. The political theatre of it all was fascinating as I mainly watched the gloomy biased American version of the news. Later I found the Canadian news to be more rational though not as riveting. I preferred watching Governor Como and Dr. Fauci as they were telling it like it was. Over time I flipped back and forth to the Canadian news. We seemed to be handling the crisis in typical Canadian ways but some horror stories at nursing homes were truly upsetting. We can do better Canada.

 To alleviate anxiety I unearthed a sketchpad and oil pastels which I had stored away for a child’s gift. Using the materials I sketched fifty large drawings and puttered away trying to make effective use of the pastels. Sometimes I displayed my art in a side window for the little girl next door to see from her driveway which is close to my house. This art in isolation seemed to help a great deal. Once restrictions were lifted and we could meet a neighbour but remain distanced I showed my pictures off to another artsy friend on my porch. When my son came home and my tiny bubble expanded I showed them to him. When my little nieces and nephew are allowed to visit I will show them as well as they sent pictures to me of their art work that they did. After this final family Show and Tell I will happily send them off to my senior friends that I write to and hopefully they will enjoy them for awhile. The pictures range from abstracts, words in graphic forms, to flowers, birds, animals and fantasy things like hobbit houses, garden gnomes and fairies.

All through this time up to and including this week my helpful, kind neighbour shopped for me and left my groceries at the door. I ordered a few things like farm eggs and frozen chickens from local farmers. Family dropped off asparagus and garden flowers. Neighbours brought over cat litter, soil for my planters and little treats of baked goods. I drove to the next village to an independent bookstore and purchased some children’s books for gifts using contact free porch pickup method. I left my payment in a plastic baggie in the ice salt bin as directed by the owner of the store. Another neighbour, a recently retired nurse, made sure I had suitable face masks and dropped them by my porch using my system of “put them in the old picnic basket” which is part of my spring porch display along with my fake pansies, squirrel ornament and wooden sign that says “Live Simply”.

During the lockdown I had to face doing income tax by mailing information, emailing and sourcing out necessary paperwork online. Usually I would have done this in person. I also struggled with passwords, verification codes and 800 numbers as I tried to keep up with banking online instead of doing it myself at my local bank. Rather than paying for most things with cash I was asked for debit or credit. This was another learning experience as I prefer to use the cash method. Over time I began to get the hang of it but with some frustration when technology or my experience level was at fault.

Another good neighbour, retired and at least five years older than me, cut my grass and weeded my tall out of control garden. He just showed up and kept my place looking very nice. A young high school student, three doors down from me took my list of yard work in stride and made short work of moving big pots around, raking up yard waste and clearing it away. He was glad to do something physical. He is missing his baseball games and needed something to do rather than just do his on line schoolwork. I also pay well so it was a good deal all round. His younger sister made some custom cards for me and we arranged payment for her new business by using the picnic basket method. I sent the cards to my seniors at the local home. Her entrepreneurial card making business may have dwindled over time as one of my custom orders hasn’t materialized yet. That’s ok. The weather is good and she is on her bike, I suspect it is also her going by rather quickly, dressed as a unicorn and skateboarding. Life as we know it goes on, thankfully.

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