

RESISTANCE

In March 2020, the year of perfect vision, the lens of the pandemic was all that mattered, I was terrified but also relieved to have a real distraction so that I didn't have to face my daily struggle with writing. As lockdown loomed I was happy to disappear.

Word was out there was a run on toilet paper, I knew our stream of commodities wouldn't last forever but, "unavailable" was a rare adjective in my life. I ran to Safeway, my least favourite store, but it was big enough to stay apart from other customers, and I stuffed my shopping cart. Outside I tripped, the cart toppled over, and I landed face down looking like a crow in my all-black clothing. I lay laughing on top of the gigantic cushion of toilet paper, no one noticed, they were so busy rushing into Safeway for toilet paper themselves.

My personal challenge was to make each roll last a week, I stacked the empty ones on the counter, the wobbly tower was my calendar until I lost track of it. Shock had elasticized time, it could stretch and stretch in slow motion, then suddenly snap back and hit me in the face. Though the construction cranes never stopped—this is Vancouver—most stores, banks, the shoemakers, were closed. I fixed my leather bag strap with duct tape but it didn't work on my

down jacket which had ripped when I'd tripped so when the white feathers poked their heads out I just coloured them in with the black sharpie I carried around.

My body was porous, soft as butter, melting, my brain too, mostly I was apathetic and stunned, without motivation or frustration, in a delicious state of malaise. The collective nightmare was also a collective joke, I giggled whenever I saw people in masks, where was the costume party everyone was going to? As the world slowed down to a pace I could handle I settled in and focused on resisting writing about it. Sometimes I gave myself Netflix assignments to watch, sometimes I took my computer outside to watch so I could get fresh air at the same time.

My neighbours, Palestinian refugees, received news of the virus with remarkable equanimity; they knew to survive disaster it helps to conserve energy. Their family was even more confined to their tiny apartment and everyone caught covid but luckily they all recovered. The drumbeat of warnings was that the older we were the more vulnerable we were, if our hospitals got too crowded, doctors would have to choose who to let die. In case I was unconscious when an ambulance picked me up I wanted tattooed across my chest, "Please Save Me. I'm not ready to leave the people I love." But how would that have made me different from anyone else?

The highlight of each day was to go out every evening at seven to bang on pots and pans to relay thanks to frontline workers. Most of us on the block had been in the house much of the day and were now squinting at each other in the fading light to see who was still around. Our clanging sounded like a medieval dirge, a lament for the dead. We pleaded our resistance to the virus, "fuck off, please, fuck off."

One day as I walked along a narrow sidewalk someone suddenly appeared and coughed in my face, it was totally unconscious and his face crumpled in shame. After each scare I lived in fourteen-day increments, the length of time it took for the virus to make itself known, so that healthcare workers could contact-trace, repeated to myself like a mantra all the places I'd been to.

I began to wear a beaklike mask everywhere. Hidden, it was fun to chew gum with my mouth open. The main streets were unusually lively, in our no-eye-contact city

we were now openly looking at each other, I blatantly shunned anyone not in a mask and danced by anyone in one. With everyone it was a negotiation about how to share public space, I thought about Bill 21 in Quebec and who it was keeping at home.

I was raised in a culture that encouraged everyone to question, argue, even with God. Beginning with my parents, I've spent a lifetime resisting authority figures as much as possible, an instinct I've kept well-honed. But I paid ungrudging attention to health officials as they shared the latest scientific information—at first all surfaces were deemed hostile, I disinfected my computer, scrubbed my groceries afraid they would kill me.

Once we learned people's breathing was far more lethal than surfaces, I stuck to the deserted side streets for my daily walks. Kitsilano was flooded with flowers blooming their hearts out and with hardly any traffic it felt like the 60s when I first arrived. The birds chirped loudly and the sun shone brightly, I wondered if I'd already died and was in some Disney version of heaven.

It was hard to wrap my head around living in paradise with the backdrop of staggering statistics, the mounting numbers of the diseased and the dead all over the world. If I let myself forget I felt guilty and then felt guilty for feeling guilty. The emotions that broke through my lethargy were intense, even joy, surely a form of resistance to the horror of what was happening? I wanted a reset on death—the ultimate in cancel culture—a communal shift in the perception of life to make knowing about death more bearable.

After lockdown was lifted the shadows remained. Every few months I'd drop by Kitsilano Barbershop and then upbraid myself, was this haircut worth dying for? At the library I'd be anxious that the book I'd come to check out might check me out. I became a fair-weather friend, seeing people only when it was mild enough for outdoor visits, within walkable distances, always with my bladder in mind. On a soft summer day Martha and I visited Barbara in her backyard, we took turns peeing in secluded spots in the bushes so we could stay longer, it was liberating and I offered my visitors similar facilities.

The media was full of stories of terrible loss, disruption, hardship, suffering. I was lucky to live in BC with a

government that took public health care seriously and I mostly liked staying at home so my daily life didn't change that much. But I hadn't seen my kids or grandkids for several months and the planned reunion, all of them coming to Vancouver to see my sister and me, had to be cancelled because the border was closed. I brought old cardboard boxes onto the porch to flatten them for recycling and stomped and stomped, forgetting the crashing would shake the old building and everyone else living in it. I was crushed, mad.

Never had I imagined not being able to see my family nor that the country they were living in would now have the highest mortality rate in the world. I was terrified but talking with my kids and hearing the strength with which they protected their kids grounded me. I watched the news to see what they were surrounded by, there were temporary morgues parked outside a hospital in New York City and bodies were being lowered into a mass grave. Though I knew this happened in pandemics I instantly thought of the Holocaust whose images had been burned into my Jewish brain at a very young age.

The Black Lives Matter demonstration in June 2020 was the only public event I wanted to go to. I made a sign that said, "Reimagine the Police." Millions all over the world were resisting all forms of racism, including anti-Asian racism in Vancouver, and I wanted to stand in solidarity with them. Singing, laughing, even loud talking were now known to spread the virus, I was scared to bus down to the rally, grateful for those braver than me, the turnout was huge.

In the new year it took me thirteen drafts to write a note to a friend who was facing MAID. With the jolts of more friends dying, for all kinds of reasons (my dear Margaret), I began to focus more and more on upcoming birthdays. It took me several drafts to write birthday greetings too.

In May 2021, 215 unmarked graves of children of the former Kamloops Residential School were found. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission estimated there are thousands more such graves across Canada. The television was on in the living room, the radio was on in the kitchen, and I paced from room to room trying to absorb everything.

At the annual Women's Memorial March on February 14, 2022 in Vancouver thousands witnessed the toppling of the statue of Gassy Jack. It was done with great care. At the end of February when Putin invaded Ukraine I went to a rally to honour the resistance of the Ukrainian people. I wore a mask and stayed on the edge of the massive crowd but felt safer and more hopeful there than if I'd stayed at home.

With the advent of the vaccine my kids and grandkids, who I hadn't seen in years, have been able to fly through the hoops of international travel to visit again. We fall into one another's arms. Throughout the pandemic our family has been Zooming every Sunday, it's magic, the love and warmth come through.

We continue.