

Two and Three-Quarters

By: Lori McIntyre

My worst high school memory is dissecting dead frogs in biology class, but I can tell you that studying a dead language hit the mark. Latin was one of my favourite subjects. First, it helped with my English vocabulary and grammar skills, and second, Miss. Hall was the teacher. She was a middle-aged, petite, precisely groomed, and thin-boned woman. I swear a small gust of wind would make her teeter. She was also a no-nonsense kind of gal who used the refrigerator technique to focus the attention of her teenage pupils. The strategy worked like this: if anyone yawned, the large classroom windows were flung open to increase oxygen to our developing brains, no matter the season or temperature. We sat alphabetically, (my maiden name beginning with an A), so I sat next to the cavernous openings. I scowled at my classmates, who somehow couldn't conceal a fatigue induced yawn, in the middle of February. Despite that frigid consequence, however, Miss. Hall rewarded us with her passion for her beloved subject, offered like exquisite desserts on a platter. I shivered, but I loved it. I still remember many Latin root words, but two facts have remained solidly planted in the forefront of brain:

- *Mea Columba* means, "my dove," (I've called my husband that just once).
- The Romans had a motto: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you shall die." Considering the Romans lived for 25-45 years, letting go of cholesterol levels was a good idea.

Just so you know, this isn't really about Latin class though. It's actually about living. With each passing year (I'm approaching my 60th), I reflect upon how fortunate my generation has been. This recognition blasts into me every November 11th, as I watch or attend Remembrance Day ceremonies. I see it in the eyes of faded military photographs, mostly men who appear weary, sad, and undoubtedly changed. I witnessed it from a senior neighbour who winced every time a low-flying plane flew by, a residual physical response during his service in London when bombs plummeted from the skies. I heard it from my grandfather, whose resolute silence on the subject, despite my questioning, said it all. And I feel it on a scratched compass, and an ancient match box, the only possessions that remained with a family friend during his years of captivity as a prisoner of war. It's all there to remind me, but there's more.

My luck to be born 60 years ago has shaped my life. As I read books and watch television, seeking historical content, I see my fortune. I watch wide-eyed as footage of world wars stream by from the comfort of my recliner chair. I see it in the sepia tinted faces of anxious parents with malnourished and ragged children during the Great Depression, as I graze upon a bowl of fresh fruit with sliced kiwi on top. I track hurricanes, raging forest fires, and tornadoes while

contemplating that the mantle needs dusting. I wince at the smell of freshly laid manure on a nearby field, as toxic chemical explosions obliterate people's homes, businesses, and lives.

Perhaps we should have expected a global pandemic in 2020? Some would even say we were due. It changed our lives dramatically. It changed our lives suddenly. It's not that there hadn't been previous infections, but this virus had a crown on it, and it *was*, and *is*, determined to rule the world.

I've got to admit that between sitting on my recliner and savouring a bowl of fresh fruit, I had sunken into the world of immediate gratification. "Why is my internet so slow or unresponsive?" I'd complain to my service provider. "Can't they get more cashiers in here?" I'd think to myself while standing in line for ten minutes. "What's he waiting for, Christmas?" I'd bellow when the driver ahead of me didn't respond immediately to the advanced green signal. Prior to COVID-19 we expected and got everything we needed, and maybe worse, *wanted*, immediately. After all, wasn't that the reason for inventing Amazon? I mean, shouldn't we go to the doctor, expect a quick diagnosis, and get some sort of magic pill to solve the problem, too, all on the same day?

From my perspective, the answer is NO! At least now.

I've learned a lot of things about viruses, prevention, vaccines, and efficacy, the medical information and jargon that is essential to understanding how to stay alive. However, I also got the memo about *how* to live a life. Our lives on the treadmill stopped with a sharp jerk in 2020. Like the GPS in the car that has to recalculate my wrong turn, I had to recalculate my life. It smacked me in the face while locked down and locked out of life with family and friends. Everything slowed. I could hear the ticking of a clock and the fan on the furnace. I could feel the thumping of my heart, too, reminding me that every human has a finite number of beats, and by golly, I'd better appreciate, show, and tell those who were most important to me.

And so, with a snap of a finger, in the wheeze of a sneeze, a cough, or a sniffle, I stopped living an impatient life. I didn't care if someone cut me off. So what if I had to wait outside the grocery store in the cold now for 20 minutes? And I didn't mind the delay in garbage pickup, either. None of it mattered anymore as the world slowed, almost grinding it to a halt, as an invisible virus with a crown exposed the vulnerability of humankind.

As we continue to wage a war against something I've never seen in my fortunate lifetime, I worry about those I know and love. I look into my friend Judy's twinkling blue eyes, and see a woman who survived the virus, despite doctors predicting the worst, and preparing her family for that outcome. I see people I don't know, smiling with their eyes and voices behind masks in the grocery store. They show their kindness and patience as we stand in line, thanking the exhausted cashier behind the plexiglass. I hear the support from my doctor on the phone, and the reassuring protocols put into effect from my dentist and optometrist when I enter their clinics. I even see it in my young grandchildren, too, who rather than being fearful of the

invisible virus that travels through air, happily don a mask as they climb aboard the school bus loaded with little ones who are doing the same.

The best relief for me came a week ago, as my fretting for those I loved escalated, while our province prepared for its second lockdown. I received a text from my daughter. Included was a picture of our granddaughter, who has lived just a mere two and three-quarters years to date, nestled in bed watching the Disney channel on a Saturday morning. The caption read, “Mom, I just found Lottie watching TV with her mask on. She says her face is cold.” I guess at two and three-quarters little Lottie has determined that is the reason for masking up. Perhaps I don’t have to worry about the wee ones after all, well... maybe a bit.

