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Last fall when Anna Isaacs asked me about doing this service, I said yes believing I would use the time to talk about one of the causes I'm passionate about: the environment and democracy. And I began to prepare accordingly. But then in March fate threw us all a big curve ball, and like many of you, I found my energy focus changed drastically. I found myself thinking about different things. First, about survival, as in how will we eat if we can't go out to buy groceries? And then later, once panic had subsided, how can we use this crisis to rebuild a better world? 'We didn't ask for a great reset in the form of a pandemic, but we've got ourselves one anyway. . . . [now] we aren't just stopping coronavirus. We're building a new world after the pandemic is over. Restoring the status quo shouldn't be our goal ... We have to create a new system.'" (Eric Holthaus)

So what I've been considering since March is what could the new system – a more humane system – look like and what do we need to do to get there.



According to moral philosopher Toby Ord, the period we are inhabiting is a critical moment in the history of humanity.

Kim Stanley Robinson, maintains we've already been living in a historic moment for a while now. She says, "For the past few decades, we've been called upon to act, and have been acting in a way that will be scrutinized by our descendants. Now we feel it. The shift has to do with the concentration and intensity of what's happening. September 11th was a single day, and everyone felt the shock of it, but our daily habits didn't shift, except at airports; the President even urged us to keep shopping. This crisis is different. It's a biological threat, and it's global. Everyone has to change together to deal with it. That's really history. "

So as I see it, we are standing in the portal right now between our old world and a brave new world. We don't yet know what the new world will look like or what our place will be in it. We are living in an extraordinary time, one that people will still be writing about decades from now. And I hope they will say we did a good job of navigating it, not that we royally messed it up!

Writing about what is happening now, Arundhati Roy says: "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."

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What the world needs now...

"The world as we knew it pre-Covid is just what got us into this predicament in the first place.

There are times when civilization gets to make a choice as to what path to take in order to progress. This is one of those occasions.

Should the citizens of Canada choose to take this moment to pursue equitability... the pandemic may have saved us."

- Glen Pearson, former MP and co-Director of the London Food Bank

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For many, this has been a time of anxiety

- Lost work, lost pay cheques
- Loss of physical contact
- Physical distance from loved ones
- Separation from our communities
- Changed routines
- Home schooling
- Sick friends

For many of us, the pandemic has been a time of anxiety. Not only are people worried about getting sick, but they may have lost a job, lost a business, lost income. Their normal routines have been hugely disrupted, they can't hug or even see some of the people who are dearest to them. If they are lucky enough to be working, they may be in jobs that expose them to the virus, or be working from home while simultaneously trying to care for or home school their children. They may have friends or family members who are sick. And all of us have been unsettled to some degree by observing some world leaders' ineffectual responses to the virus.

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My own life changed incredibly quickly into something I would have had difficulty imagining mere weeks earlier. As a high risk elder, I self isolated early. I no longer go shopping, and that means my life has lost a lot of the spontaneity I love, as in "What shall we have for dinner tonight?" And with restaurants closed, a lack of planning on my part can't be remedied by a last minute decision to eat out. I miss being face to face with people I care about -- my church community, my choir, my knitting buddies, my friends. Our plans to spend much of the summer camping on and exploring the Gulf Islands have vaporized. And hardest of all, I have no idea when I'll be able to see my beloved grandsons again.

After two months of self isolation, we've begun to talk and plan about going back to living our lives the way we used to. But realistically, I don't expect to ever go back to that life. As a high risk elder, I need to avoid getting the virus. Until there is a vaccine, an effective treatment, or herd immunity, it will not be safe for me to return to "normal."

I've pretty much gone through the whole gamut of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's stages of grief: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, acceptance. Gone back and forth a few times!

But I'm just one individual. Many other people are in similar boats. And for society as a whole, our civilization – however much nostalgia we have for the pre-pandemic world, however much we long to go back, there will be no going back to that old world.

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But even in the midst of this, I'm forced to admit how privileged I am. Even if I had to stay just as I am for the rest of my life, I am still enormously so much better off than most people on the planet. In fact, going through this experience has deepened my awareness of how many problems I've had that were really not that big in the scope of things.

I'm retired, so I don't have to worry about losing my job. My retirement income is fairly secure, so I'm not worried about paying my rent. So far, my kids are both healthy and employed, and my grandsons seem to be dealing pretty well with home schooling. I am so blessed to be living in this province, in this city, where I enjoy a mild climate and beautiful surroundings. My home is in a comfortable building with kind, caring neighbours. I am a member of several sustaining communities. I get to do volunteer work that is meaningful for me. I am not sick, and don't know anyone else who is. I'm hugely aware of the privilege all this gives me.



So, the bottom line for me is that while I'm grieving the loss of some aspects of my former life, I'm also grateful for new things I've discovered and for many things that are supporting me through this profound change. And aware that my privilege means I have an obligation to use my privilege in any way I can do help make this crisis into an opportunity for positive change.


I don't really WANT to go back to normal. For one thing, "normal" is needing 4.8 planets if everyone consumed as much as the average person in Canada. Normal is racialized inequality and millions of underpaid, under-supported essential workers. Normal is an underfunded healthcare and education system. Normal is a crisis. (Greenpeace)

One of the things we've learned so far from this pandemic is how much more quickly society can change than many of us would have believed a few short months ago. As Kim Stanley Robinson says, "What felt impossible has become thinkable. The spring of 2020 is suggestive of how much, and how quickly, we can change as a civilization."

So rather than going back to the old life, I am anticipating moving forward into a new kind of life. My own life will be different and I also believe that the pandemic has given human society a chance to refashion the world into something better than it was before. I believe how we choose to act now will determine how the world looks in the future.

What would I/we have missed without Covid?

- Tutoring my grandsons
- Regular connection with old friends
- Virtual events and creativity!
- Return to home cooking and eating
- Sourdough starter
- 7 pm cheering
- Covid jokes
- Awareness of how privileged we are to be living through such a momentous time



WATDOONETWORK.COM
Stonehenge will livestream its summer solstice celebration for the first time ever

In fact, the pandemic has brought some silver linings along with its clouds. I was at a Zoom meeting last week with a group I belong to, and we were asked to check in with how we were faring during the pandemic. Somewhat to my surprise, I found myself saying, “I’m actually happy. Yes, I’ve been anxious, fearful, lonely, and sad at times, especially at the beginning of the crisis. But now, most of the time I’m actually mostly happy.”

Without the pandemic, we would have missed a lot. If I had to go back to December, there are many things I would miss about today. We got pulled into our grandsons’ home schooling, and are loving the regular contact this gives us with them. We have renewed a lot of old friendships, as we checked in with people to see how they were faring. I’ve been blown away by the creativity people are showing in finding ways to connect when they can’t visit face to face: virtual choirs, singalongs, webinars. I always wanted to experience Summer Solstice at Stonehenge – this year it is going to be livestreamed, so I can do it! I’ve quite enjoyed getting back to cooking and eating at home – even joined the legions who have cultivated their own sourdough starter. The 7pm pot banging to thank essential workers has become a connecting ritual in our neighbourhood. I’ve appreciated all the newly minted Covid jokes. But the biggest gift has been the awareness of how lucky we are to be alive at this extraordinary time, to see it unfold, and to have the power to affect how it unfolds. As Ann Mortiffee and Frances Litman said in a recent webinar they offered, “It’s such a gift to be alive in this time. It’s a renaissance! We are in a magical time.”



I think a good place to start changing is by envisioning what you would like to change. If we want to maximize the positive consequences of the pandemic I believe we must move mindfully through this portal. We need to look both for the possibilities and also for the potential pitfalls. We need to be careful not to drag our knapsacks full of familiar gear through the portal with us, just because the old gear comforts us. We first need to visualize how we want the new world to look, because we can't create what we can't first conceive of. I can see many possibilities for how the new world might function better than the old one.

Social justice: the pandemic has shone a huge spotlight on inequalities in our society

- We need to appropriately compensate essential workers
- Guaranteed basic income
- Focus on marginalized people
- Prioritize people's rights over corporate rights

Environment

- An opportunity to build a sustainable energy infrastructure, creating good jobs
- Less traffic and noise, make space again for the nature that sustains us all
- Do development and extraction in a way that prioritizes respect for the natural environment

Healthcare – we are blessed living in this province and this country with decent single-payer health insurance, but it's not perfect

- Sick leave for all
- Work ethic that does not coerce or reward people into coming to work sick
- Increase food security, local self sufficiency for essential goods
- Fix elder care

Education – pandemic has shown us new possibilities in education, dedicated teachers have found new ways to educate our kids, let's take the best of both systems.

Home based work has proven feasible for many workers. As someone who was a home based worker for the last 15 years of my paid career, I can attest to how much more effective I was when I didn't have to commute to an office every day.

That may look like an ambitious list, but I'm dreaming big! Because as musician Emily Elbert says, "The world we are emerging into is the world we are creating now."

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I don't expect this to be easy! One of the challenges is that in a crisis, the powerful often try to seize more power – as some already have this time around, with the Trump Department of Justice looking at suspending constitutional rights.

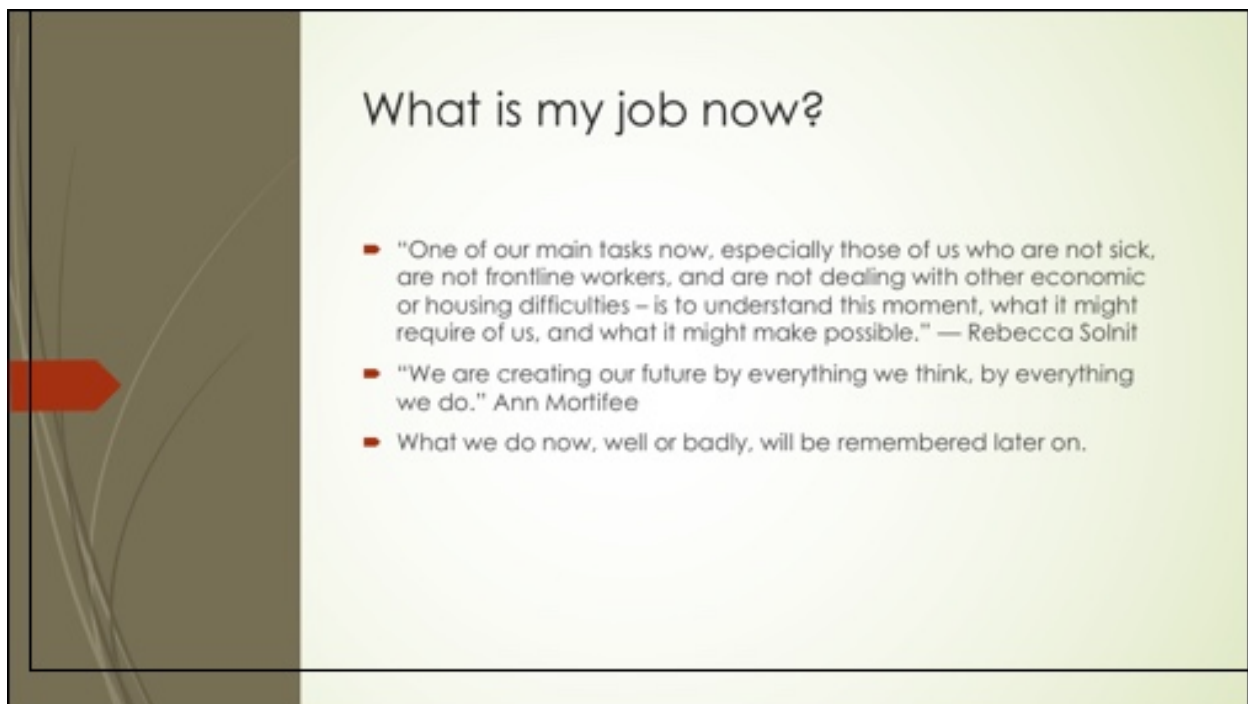
We'll also need to find the energy to facilitate change in the directions we want to go. This can be especially challenging when our psyches are already dealing with adjusting to revolutionary change. Rebecca Solnit has observed, "As the pandemic upended our lives, people around me

worried that they were having trouble focusing and being productive. It was, I suspected, because we were all doing other, more important work. When you're recovering from an illness, pregnant or young and undergoing a growth spurt, you're working all the time, especially when it appears you're doing nothing. Your body is growing, healing, making, transforming and labouring below the threshold of consciousness. As we struggled to learn the science and statistics of this terrible scourge, our psyches were doing something equivalent. We were adjusting to the profound social and economic changes, studying the lessons disasters teach, equipping ourselves for an unanticipated world."

It takes energy to stay well informed during a crisis, and time is at a premium when social distancing makes ordinary tasks take longer than before.

So I think we'll need to be both demanding and patient with ourselves at the same time. We'll need to nourish our bodies with healthy food, restore them with restful sleep, and build stamina and strength through physical movement. We'll need to nourish our souls with the friends and communities that sustain us, in whatever ways we can connect with them. We'll need to find ways of staying informed that don't exhaust or overwhelm us. We'll need to support each other.

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The slide features a light green background with a dark brown vertical bar on the left side. The title "What is my job now?" is centered in a dark grey font. Below the title, there are three bullet points, each preceded by a small red square. The first bullet point is a quote from Rebecca Solnit. The second is a quote from Ann Mortifee. The third is a statement about the lasting impact of current actions. On the left side, within the dark brown bar, there is a faint, stylized illustration of a plant with thin, curved lines. A solid red arrow points to the right, positioned between the dark brown bar and the main text area.

What is my job now?

- "One of our main tasks now, especially those of us who are not sick, are not frontline workers, and are not dealing with other economic or housing difficulties – is to understand this moment, what it might require of us, and what it might make possible." — Rebecca Solnit
- "We are creating our future by everything we think, by everything we do." Ann Mortifee
- What we do now, well or badly, will be remembered later on.

So how do we tackle this? I don't have all the answers, but I believe together we can make positive change happen from this crisis.

First, we need to be aware of what an unprecedented moment this is and understand what it might require of us. As Rebecca Solnit says, “One of our main tasks now, especially those of us who are not sick, and are not frontline workers, and not dealing with other economic or housing difficulties – is to understand this moment, what it might require of us, and what it might make possible.”

Second, we need to acknowledge the power we have to forge a new future. To quote Anne Mortifee, “We are creating our future by everything we think, by everything we do.”

I’ve been trying to be a change agent most of my life., I’ve always thought the changes I wanted would have to be accomplished slowly and painstakingly. I never dreamed that a pandemic would change my world in a way that suddenly made major change seem achievable virtually overnight. But here we are living it.

My job is to do everything in my power to move us in the direction of greater justice, kindness, health. By talking to people, supporting people, writing letters, making phone calls, signing petitions. And by believing it is possible. What I do now, well or badly, will have a huge impact on the future, and will be remembered later on.

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And every one of us has already taken at least the first step on this journey. Give yourself credit for what you have done already!

A shout out to everyone who is trying right now.

Trying to do the right thing. Trying to stay
open. Trying to keep going. Trying to
hold on. Trying to let go. Trying to find
their flow. Trying to stay afloat. Trying to
meet each new day. Trying to find their
balance. Trying to love themselves.

Trying new things and new ways.

I see you. I'm there too. We're in this together.

SC & Co

