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Local Biz
Magazine

Spring 2021

Publisher/Creative Director Antoine Elhashem
Editor-in-Chief Wendy Chiavalon
Art Director Mychol Scully
Regular Columnists
Julie Antoinette, Sue-Ann Bavinka, Malachi Brown, Linda Calder, Wendy Lee, Tara Richardson, Bianca Schaefer, Afeefa Malik, Josie Myers, Nicole Forrester

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President Antoine Elhashem
General Manager Kim Dobie
Advertising Consultant Carolyn Burtch
Production Coordinator Wendy Chiavalon
Legal Jerry Herszkopf Law Firm

Mailing address
205-1691 Pickering Parkway
Pickering, ON L1V 5L9

To contact us
416.926.9588 or 905.231.9722
www.thelocalbizmagazine.ca

For comments, questions and advertising inquiries
inquiries@inspiredcreative.ca

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From the
Publisher

Spring is in the air! Yes! I can't speak for everyone out there, but I for one am looking forward to a new season. With another COVID lockdown currently in place, and the frigid temperatures outside (it's February right now as I'm writing this), the warmer weather, longer daylight hours, and just being able to step outside without having to put on so many layers is very appealing.

For nature lovers out there, specifically bird lovers, it also means the outdoors are coming alive. This issue we have a feature article for bird enthusiasts about Durham's bird watching community. *Song in the Air: The Durham Bird Watching Scene* written by Sam Burton will introduce you to the concept of bird watching (aka birding), the areas in Durham Region where you can observe birds in their natural habitats, and offer suggestions for how you (and your kids too!) can get started birding. Check it out on page 11.

In other news, I would like to introduce everyone to our new teen columnist. Afeefa Malik is a grade 10 student and will be writing for *Tweens, Teens & In-Between*, offering a fresh perspective on issues important to young people today. I hope you will head on over to page 23 and check out what she has to say. Don't forget to also catch up on what our other regular columnists are up to.

I hope you enjoy reading the Spring 2021 issue of the magazine. Feel free to share your thoughts on it with us; we look forward to hearing from our readers. You can always connect with us through our website www.thelocalbizmagazine.ca and [Facebook page](#).

Happy Spring!

Antoine Elhashem

Publisher

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From the Editor

As we enter into the Spring of 2021, it may not seem like much has changed since 2020. As I write this, we're in lockdown again. We've been advised to stay at home. Many kids are doing virtual learning – not by choice. To say things have been stressful is an understatement! Many people continue to struggle in 2021 as the pandemic drags on. Perhaps, what is alarming, yet not surprising, is the toll COVID-19 has had on mental health. A recent survey conducted by *Statistics Canada* reported participants experiencing at least one symptom of anxiety and over half of participants reporting that their mental health has worsened since the onset of physical distancing. Taking care of your mental health is very important. This issue, writer Tara Richardson shares what you can do to safeguard your mental health in her article, *10 Ways to Protect Your Mental Health During A Pandemic* on page 6.

Guess what else protects your mental health? Avoiding emotionally charged, political conversations. This is of course, my personal opinion and not scientific fact, but it makes a lot of sense if you think about it. In a perfect world, I would surround myself with people with like-minded views, but that's just not realistic. There's bound to be family members and friends who feel just as strongly about their views as I do about mine, and this is where tensions can arise. In such instances when avoidance is not possible, arming yourself with strategies to deal with individuals whose views don't align with yours is very helpful. Writer Phylcia Davis shows how you can have those important tough conversations while remaining civil. Her article, *Finding Common Ground in a Polarized World* is a must-read on page 16.

As always, I hope you enjoy reading the Spring 2021 issue of *The Local Biz Magazine*. If you would like to pitch a story, or write for us, you can reach me at editor@thelocalbizmagazine.ca

Wendy Chiavalon
Editor-in-Chief

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10 Ways to Protect Your Mental Health During A Pandemic

by Tara Richardson



At the time of writing this article we are well into the second wave of COVID-19. I don't know about you, but I feel like 'wave' is not an accurate word to describe this pandemic. (Perhaps tsunami is more accurate?!) The good news is that despite the chaos it will not last forever and that vaccines will be immensely helpful so that we are protected against the virus, but one question remains: Will our mental health survive?

According to a recent survey by *Statistics Canada*, most participants reported experiencing at least one symptom of anxiety and over half of the participants report that their mental health has worsened since the onset of physical distancing. These are not necessarily individuals who had psychiatric diagnoses prior to the pandemic. It will be interesting when future research

explores the potential correlation between the onset of COVID-19 and new psychiatric diagnoses. In my work with people who had mental health challenges prior to the pandemic, it does seem like these challenges have been amplified for many individuals.

If you think of what COVID-19 has taken from us it makes sense that people may be feeling depressed, anxious, hopeless, and overwhelmed. The list of stressors is both long and heavy: lack of connection to loved ones, limited social interactions amongst friends and co-workers, stress related to being laid off from work, unpredictability of finances, health anxiety, to name a few. Personally, I have been incredibly lucky in the midst of the pandemic. I am deemed an essential worker so I did not have to worry about financial burden if I was to be off work; I'm a single household so I was able to spend time visiting with my parents; I have technology to stay connected to loved ones whom I couldn't see in person. Yet, in spite of how lucky I am, I still struggled with the parts that felt "unlucky". I worry about working in a hospital setting, contracting COVID-19 and bringing it to my parents; I am deeply disappointed that I could not see my family in the U.S.; that I couldn't cuddle my nieces and nephew for Christmas. However, I need to focus on the positives despite the much more blatantly obvious negatives.

That being said, it's hard to stay positive in the midst of a pandemic. I am sure anyone reading this can relate. I certainly do not mean that you become a Pollyanna, sticking your head in the

sand to avoid any negative reality while telling the world that COVID-19 is an absolute blessing. Let's be real, the pandemic is a soul-sucking black hole of negativity. You may not be able to avoid the hole all the time but over time maybe it will morph into a small puddle that is easier to jump over. Here are ten ways to stay even a little more positive during the pandemic. (Tested by yours truly!)

1. Stop denying reality. Stop thinking that things "should" be different and start accepting this situation. Acceptance does not mean you love the situation, but by not accepting it you are just going to stay angry, indignant, and miserable. And just because you accept the situation once does not mean you will not get sucked into negativity again. When you notice yourself becoming negative or thinking how things "should" be different, try using a technique from Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to "turn the mind". Essentially, it is just reminding yourself to accept the situation instead of struggling against it. For example, let's say you're driving home from work and you come to a road closed sign. Do you get angry at the sign for interrupting your drive? Do you sit at the sign and think about how unfair it is to have to go a different route? Sure, you may do that but not for long because you accept that this is simply a reality and you want to get home. Problem solving can be a much more productive approach than denying reality.

2. Control what you can. This pandemic is so frustrating because it depends on so many people following restrictions, physically distancing, mask-wearing, handwashing...and despite all these measures we still may contract the virus. It seems very unfair but do your part and hope others do too. You may be feeling like you don't have any control over the situation – not just in contracting the virus but in terms of what will happen next with work, finances, social situations, life in general. It may be helpful to focus on what you do have control over. You can control many aspects of your life: how you respond to emotions, how you spend your day, what you choose to focus on, etc. Alternatively, maybe this is the time where you let go of your need for control and live in the present moment instead.

3. Practice self-compassion. I don't know about you, but I've seen a lot of people online claiming how wonderful the pandemic has been in propelling them to go after their dreams and start a business, or become super healthy, or whatever other amazing accomplishment they've achieved... I think that is fantastic. Absolutely fantastic and I am so happy for them. I am also happy for others who have accomplished nothing other than watching *Netflix* in yesterday's pyjamas with their spoon in the *Ben & Jerry's*. You are surviving and that is amazing too. I know you may not feel like you are doing amazing and feel down on yourself especially comparing yourself to the endless barrage of



#thankspandemic on your social media accounts. First, don't always believe social media. People are struggling more than they let on. Secondly, practice some good ol' self-compassion. According to Kristin Neff, researcher of self-compassion and author of various self-compassion books, there are three components of self-compassion: Mindfulness (being aware of how you're feeling), Common Humanity (understanding that you are not alone) and Self-Kindness (being as kind to yourself as you would be to a dear friend). Validate how hard this pandemic has been for you and for many others, that you are feeling sad or burnt out and that's okay, then behave in a way that shows kindness to yourself.

4. **Practice self-care.** Self-care looks different for everyone but is vital to anyone. It can be helpful to create a schedule for yourself (even if you are home alone all day) to help structure your day and include self-care activities throughout your schedule. There are different types of self-care that you may benefit from:

Emotional – Connecting and processing our emotions. Examples include talking to a friend, journaling, expressing emotions through art.

Physical – Taking care of your body to promote better physical well-being. Examples include hiking or other forms of activity, staying hydrated and balanced eating.

Social – Nurturing our relationships with others. Examples include calling mom regularly, scheduling Facetime visits with friends, and Zoom dates.

Spiritual – Nurturing your relationship with yourself. Examples include meditation, prayer, nature, self-reflection.

5. **Be mindful of your news consumption.** Sure, the news is important. No denying that. However, it is so important to consume news in a way that is healthy for you, especially if it is causing you to panic or your blood pressure to rise. Some recommendations: Do not start and end your day with the news. Unwind with an audiobook or TV show instead. Do not watch the news as you eat your meals. Enjoy your food and watch it later. Finally, consume news from accurate sources. (No, Facebook does not count as an accurate source.)
6. **Stay connected (as best as you can).** Physical distancing does not mean you have to be disconnected. You may have to work harder at staying connected, but it is certainly not impossible. You can: plan Zoom calls with your office mates at lunch, join Facebook groups, enjoy book clubs or games

nights over Zoom with your friends, Facetime your nephews, send snail mail to loved ones. It's time to get creative here!

7. **Cultivate positive emotions.** Just because we are socially distanced and times are uncertain does not mean that we have lost the ability to experience positive emotions! One enormously powerful positive emotion is gratitude. Practicing gratitude has a multitude of benefits for both your emotional and physical health. I do not mean the obligatory gratitude practice you have where every day is a version of the same list. (I'm grateful for my cat. I'm grateful for my car. I'm grateful for the sun.) Now, if this list works for you then stick with it but for more bang for your gratitude buck try a practice where you write down why you are feeling grateful for that experience or person, what's surprising or new about this, and how it has impacted you. Being a little more specific can help you to avoid simply 'going through the motions' and could feel more genuine.
8. **Give back.** Feeling purposeful in life and like we have meaning contributes more to our well-being than many of us realize. For a lot of us this may be achieved through the work that we do or volunteering in the community. And right now, both outlets may be negatively affected by the pandemic. Many people are laid off and community support programs are not currently operating. Circling back to #2, you may not have control over your "usual" job or volunteer life but if you branch out and search for opportunities you will likely find there is something you can do. Planting flowers downtown to brighten the streets. Knitting blankets for the folks at long-term care homes. Dropping off hygiene supplies at local shelters. Remember, simple acts of kindness go a long way for others and bolsters your own feeling good about yourself knowing you are making a difference.
9. **Challenge your thoughts.** Take a page from Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and learn how to challenge and change negative automatic thoughts. Thoughts are more influential than you can imagine and will negatively impact your emotions and actions if the cycle is not broken. CBT helps you to identify any cognitive distortions (thinking traps) such as mind-reading and over-generalizing and then work to create a more balanced thought to replace the original thought, usually through what is called a thought record. The thought record includes space for the thought, the associated emotion, evidence that supports the thought, evidence against this thought, and room to create a more balanced (but believable) thought. For example, I may be thinking, *'This pandemic is never going to end, I'm going to succumb to depression and wind up in the hospital.'* I would go through the evidence for (I have been in hospital for depression in the past) and evidence against (I have a support system, I have been resilient many times in the past during high stress time, I'm on medication that works for me) and come out with a more balanced statement like, *'Although I feel like I will end up in the hospital from this pandemic, I have survived other stressful experience without needing that level of support.'* CBT is certainly not an easy process but with time, persistence, and a good therapist it can be immensely helpful for symptoms of anxiety and depression.



10. **Reach out for help.** You are not weak for needing mental health support. In fact, you are courageous for reaching out despite the stigma that unfortunately still lingers in our society today. We all need help sometimes and there is no shame in recognizing that this is true for you. Please reach out to your local mental health services and take advantage of government supports in place like *Wellness Together Canada*.

I know that the pandemic has brought with it challenges that we never anticipated facing, and it can feel overwhelming and exhausting to consider how far we still must go to fully recover from it. And yet, while I would not wish a pandemic on any generations to come, I do recognize that it has also made us stronger than we would ever have predicted being. I am inspired by all of us and our drive to persevere and stay resilient in times of hardship. Remind yourself that resiliency is the norm not the exception. Together we will get through this.

Tara Richardson is a wellness blogger, whose personal experience with mental illness has inspired her to dedicate her life to helping others heal and live a full, flourishing life.

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Song in the Air: The Durham Bird Watching Scene

by Sam Burton

Everyone has had more than a difficult time stopping to smell the roses these days. With a worldwide pandemic casting gloom and doom over every social event, finding the colour and joy in a moment is more precious now than ever.

In fact, it may be one of the most important times in our lives to make the time to bring ourselves into the present moment and to recognize the small beauty around us—or to even open up our ears to a bird's song.

Durham Region contains a plethora of lush wetlands and a vast array of wildlife. It also is the home of an avid and active bird watching scene, both in specific cities and the region as a whole. The following article will introduce you to the concept of bird watching (technically called 'birding' to the seasoned naturalist),

the areas in Durham Region that are most prominent in contribution to their conversation and observation, and finally, offer suggestions for where and how you can begin cultivating this pleasant hobby.

What is 'Birding'?

The term 'bird watching' is a reference to the past time that many naturalists abandon once they have found their way into the rewarding naturalist's world. It is felt by many birding hobbyists to be more than just a past time, but a way to blend in several passions into one giant bright and positive experience. The simple act of observing a bird in nature appeals to the photographer, the casual nature walker, or the individual intentionally set on identifying specific species. You don't have to study up to start birding, nor is there a specific kind of behaviour involved in the act of it. It is an interest that is lifelong for many birding veterans, and it is one full of infinite wonder.

"Many of us have had a lifelong love of nature, but there's usually a point in time that stands out in our memories. This is our spark moment." Ken Keffer writes on *Birds and Blooms* about something many passionate birders refer to as their 'spark bird'—that one curious occurrence that started it all. "While spark moments can happen with all things natural, the concept is especially popular with birders." Ken's first encounter is with an odd-looking duck at a summer camp in the United States. A slate grey creature with bold rusty side stripes struck his interest and dominated his



thoughts for the rest of his experience at the camp. That duck would act as his spark bird.

Some birders are more casual, where others are fervent and even find ways to dedicate their life to the observation and conversation of these colourful feathered beings.

The Durham Region Field Naturalists and the Pickering Naturalists

The largest organization that dedicates itself to monthly birding expeditions in Durham Region is the *Durham Region Field Naturalists* or DRFN. This club was founded in 1955 with 40 people, and now contains over 100. The club seeks to conserve and preserve Durham Region's natural resources and to provide a space for nature lovers to converge. For over fifty years the club has worked to fulfill these duties through the application of field outings, education, and distribution of a handy booklet. The non-profit organization prides itself on the following mantra:

1. To increase the knowledge and appreciation of the flora and fauna in our district.
2. To foster and increase interest in the preservation of our natural resources, i.e., encourage wildlife sanctuaries, etc.
3. To compile natural history records for our district.

4. To provide opportunity for nature lovers to meet, exchange views and observations and to increase the appreciation of the wonders and beauties of the natural world.

Groups meet at least eight times a year with numerous field outings that explore the lush ecosystems of Durham Region. Many of these outings are themed, focusing on a particular element of nature such as Ontario Marshes, butterfly sightings, and of course, birding. Groups make a point to end the year on the theme of a "Christmas Bird Count", travelling to specific areas to take note of different bird species thriving during the colder months.

The pleasant social gatherings have been moved to an online interaction due to COVID-19, but members continue to contribute in order to keep their love of nature and birds alive and well during this difficult time.

The *Pickering Naturalists* follow a similar mantra, but possess a more modern approach via a rich amount of information on their personalized website. Like the DRFN, they are a non-profit organization that seeks to educate its members and encourage a passion for conservation as well as a respect and awe for nature. The *Pickering Naturalists* was founded by Dr. J. Murray Spiers, a professor of Zoology at the *University of Toronto* and resident of Pickering. During his time birding, he met many others who shared his passion for identifying these feathered friends. The club is actively involved in two present-day conversation issues through supporting the *Altona Forest Stewardship Committee*, and the creation of a fundraiser for *Thickson's Woods Land Trust*. The club's interests encompass all over nature's wonders, but leans heavily upon the versatile world of birding.

Just like their counterparts, the *Pickering Naturalists* are currently holding their meetings online due to COVID-19.

For more information about these groups, visit their websites, www.drfn.ca/m/home and www.pickeringnaturalists.org.

How to Get Started!

There are various handbooks and guides online that can easily get you started on the right birding foot. Most advice leans toward joining a local naturalist club such as the *DRFN* or the *Pickering Naturalists*. Once you join, it really doesn't matter whether or not you have previous knowledge of birds or you are fresh from your spark bird. Jody Allair, biologist and director of citizen science and community engagement for *Bird Studies Canada*, asserts this point in an interview with CBC on how anyone can kickstart their birding passion; "You don't need to know all the species, you don't need to study your books or apps. That can come later. Read the introduction to your field guide and get out there and then start trying to identify the different birds."

There also isn't anything wrong with not knowing exactly what goes into the art of bird identification. Like any new skill, the more you work that muscle, the stronger it will get. Allair suggests looking at the colour of the birds' plumage, their behaviour, and make a note of it. If you are technologically inclined, there is an app for that! The *Merlin Bird ID App* will guide you down the path of bird identification step-by-step. And identification does not have to look or sound like a biologist—likening the bird to a TV or movie character is entirely acceptable,

and will even help the image stay in your mind for when you identify another species down the road.

Equipment requirements will be dependent upon the weather and the intensity of your birding intention. Most birders bring binoculars with magnification and view, specifically 8 X 40 so you can spot birds from a farther distance. Be sure to bring your guide with you, whether it is an app on your phone or a physical book. A journal will help you record your findings. Birding is an exceptional opportunity for a photographer to hone in on their skill as well. But Allair suggests not to get too hung up on the concept of equipment—one need not be limited by materials that require a high financial cost. Simply, get out there and follow the song.

And this is literally what is suggested when you first start birding. Be sure not to make too much noise, as birds are naturally frightened by loud sounds. Attend a meeting at a naturalist's club with experienced birders, all of whom are more than willing to share their knowledge and skills with you. Start by following the sound of a calling bird, and you could get lucky and lead yourself into a mixed flock.

But it is important to assert that birding means different things to different enthusiasts—the point of it is pleasure, so follow the path that most suits your lifestyle and interest level.

Birding With Your Kids

Due to the many restrictions because of COVID, parents have had to become more creative in finding ways to entertain and spend time with their kids. Many have expanded their children's worlds by introducing them to the vivid and stimulating surroundings of nature. Participating in physical activity not only helps the body, but also soothes the brain by increasing the presence of serotonin and dopamine. While being exposed to these benefits, children also learn to interact with wildlife. Birding is the perfect opportunity to bring in concepts of empathy and a respect for wildlife at an early age. Parents can spark their children's interest by using inquiring questions about a bird's particular habits, its appearance, its sound, and where it appears. This can be done in the presence of the bird, or image matching games that will also work their memory muscles.

Challenge kids to be a detective to solve the mystery of the bird, or to practice being quiet and sneaking up on the bird, but from a respectful distance. Buy them binoculars and show them how to use them, talking to them about the power of dressing in earth colours to camouflage themselves. During the colder months, exploring might be challenging, so constructing a bird feeder to hang on a balcony or near the front window will encourage more stealth observation.

Birding is also a wonderful opportunity to deepen your relationship with your child, and for your child to interact socially at a safe distance. The world now more than ever requires compassion and a commitment to conservation, so starting off young with positive encouragement will only make our planet a healthier place to live—for us and our children.

Best Locations for Birding in Durham Region

Birding is a year-round passion, extending from your front yard to all the way across Durham Region. Different species are likely to congregate during specific seasons. John Stirrat of the *Pickering Naturalists* notes which species of bird are likely to coordinate with both the season and their location. "Spring brings about north-bound migrants that pass through, looking for northerly areas to settle. Some will stay in the summer and linger for our viewing pleasure. Fall brings the southbound migrants returning to their winter home, such as many species of duck, gully and sparrows." While it's not always possible to guarantee that certain species will occur in a particular area, the list below shows which areas you can find certain birds.

Rouge Marsh – Herons, egrets, waterfowl – spring through fall

Petticoat Creek – Land birds – best during spring migration

Frenchman's Bay – Waterfowl – best in spring/fall

Hydro Marsh – Waterfowl, herons

Corner Marsh – Waterfowl – best in spring/fall

Rotary Park/Duffins Creek – Waterfowl – best in spring/fall winter gulls fall – shorebirds fall – shorebirds winter – gulls

Carruthers Creek Marsh – Waterfowl – best in spring/fall

Altona Forest – Land birds – best during spring migration

Greenwood Conservation Area – Land birds – spring/summer breeders

Glen Major area – Land birds – spring/summer breeders

Cranberry Marsh – Waterfowl spring thru fall, fall hawk watch, possible turkeys.

Lynde Shores – Woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches.

Cranberry Marsh – waterfowl spring thru fall, fall hawk watch, possible turkeys

There really isn't a single way to start birding. If you love and respect nature, going forward into this rewarding experience feels as if it has always been waiting for you. Let go of any expectations, and let yourself soar.

Sam Burton is a writer in the GTA with a focus on creative fiction but with an affinity for local and broader investigative journalism. Currently residing in Pickering, her striving goal in writing is to create a genuine connection with readers, whether it be through real-world events or those crafted from her own musings. Her photography portfolio can be found on instagram [@typhoidandswans](https://www.instagram.com/typhoidandswans).



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Finding Common Ground in a Polarized World

by Phylcia Davis

We live in very polarized world. In the last few years, our conversations and interactions with people – whether it be family, friends, work colleagues, acquaintances or complete strangers – can go from 0 to 100 very quickly! It seems we are having a difficult time engaging with one another thoughtfully and with kindness.

So, my questions are: *Can we actually find some common ground with folks with vastly different views than ours? Should we engage with people whose views we believe are abhorrent and harmful or who align themselves with people who views are harmful?*

Currently, our discourse with one another is framed as “us” vs. “them.” Coming into a conversation with an adversarial mindset is not productive nor healthy and often never leaves opportunity to find some common ground. Also, what is not helping us have good and healthy conversations is social media. According to a survey conducted by the *Ryerson Social Media Lab* at the *Ted Rogers School of Business* at *Ryerson University* based on a survey of 1,500 Canadian adults (18+), “Facebook remains the most popular social media platform in Canada as 83% of Canadian adults report having a Facebook account, followed by messaging

apps (65%), YouTube (64%) and Instagram (51%).” Social media is a powerful tool that is used to stay connected with friends and family but platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Snapchat, etc., have demonstrated that these are not the spaces to have nuanced conversations on the issues that matter to us. I have seen innocuous posts that devolve into dumpster fires in the comments sections.

So, what does it really mean to find common ground?

I work in the non-profit sector, and engage with people from many diverse backgrounds in collaborating on projects, initiatives and developing programs. In addition, I do community work and work with people with very different experiences and perspectives than mine. My purpose for finding common ground is to move agendas forward, build trust and relationships, and create solidarity in order to make our communities better.

Most of us do not go out seeking conflict, but what I do know is that it is important to have tough conversations and engage with people who we don’t agree with. For some people, leaving a conversation in a rage works them. Being upset is valid but it is not productive if you leave it at that. So, if you are willing to find some common ground, here are some insights that I practice that I would like to share:

Be a good listener

Honestly, we are not good listeners. Instead of hearing each other and actively listening to what is being said, we are so focused on interjecting and interrupting just so that we can get our point across. I have witnessed this countless times, where people were

so quick to get their point out and not fully listen to what has just been said. If you have a habit of doing this: **STOP!** Fully listen to the person, whether you agree with them or not, so that no assumptions or misinterpretations are made.

Make space to understand

For me, to understand someone’s point of view – especially viewpoints that I don’t align with – I ask specific questions. I am a naturally inquisitive person so asking questions is my way of having a better understanding of things. Questions such as, where did you learn that from? Why do you feel this way? Have you looked into this (or that)? Asking questions helps to have a better understanding of where the person is coming from but also helps to show empathy without judgement.

Be introspective and reflect

This step is especially important if the conversation you’ve had with the person has resulted in anger and hurt feelings (on both sides). When I start to feel that I am getting upset, I usually take a step back and remove myself from the conversation – which I verbally say to the person. Thinking about the interaction, I ask myself could I have done or said things differently? Were there assumptions or generalizations being made? Should I have reacted another way? Reflection is critical if you want to move on to step 4.

Re-engage with the person (if it helps)

Once you have taken the opportunity to reflect on the conversation (hopefully, with a cool head), re-engage with the person. See if you can come to some common ground to what led to the disagreement, and as mentioned earlier, be a good listener and make space to understand. But if you still find yourself in conflict, then it is best to temporarily disengage. At least you tried. 😊

There is a series on YouTube called *Middle Ground*. Produced by a group of millennials, the premise of the show is for two groups of people who have opposing views to come together and explore whether they can empathetically find middle ground. There are no limitations to what they discuss: progressive Christians vs. conservative Christians, socialists vs. capitalists, birth parents vs. adoptees, Trump supporters vs. Biden supporters, protestors vs. law enforcement – the list goes on. It usually begins with friendly greetings among the individuals and then the two groups are separated on opposite ends of the room and are asked a series of prompts. Depending on their perspectives, they will come to the middle of the room and have a discussion with one another based on the prompt. Sometimes, the discussions among the two groups are insightful and hopeful while others can leave you feeling discouraged and disheartened as some folks don’t seem (or at least try) to understand another person’s point of view or lived experience. Though the show does have an “us” vs. “them” framework and sometimes the individuals don’t always find common ground, the big takeaway is that they are able to dialogue with one another with the hope of leaving with a better understanding of each other’s point of view.



What about the question of whether we should engage with people whose views we believe are abhorrent and harmful? My position is, when those views are harmful and deny a person’s humanity, dignity, invoke violence onto another person and deny a person’s basic right to live, for me, there is no common ground. Finding common ground with this type of harmful behaviours or sentiments only legitimizes it – which is something I don’t want to do.

Last year, after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the racial reckoning taking place in the US and in Canada, I found myself in conversations with those close to me where it was difficult to find common ground. Some views that were revealed made me cringe and were disheartening and I got quite emotional about what was shared. Even though I left those conversations disappointed (and at times hurt), I learned a lot from those experiences and they have not deterred me from continuing to engage with others thoughtfully and empathetically. Overall, finding common ground is about the investment and the relationship that you have with the person. It is not easy, but I hope what I have shared can help you in your journey to have better, more kinder and thoughtful conversations with those around you. Good luck!

Phylcia Davis is a long-time resident of Scarborough and works in the non-profit sector in Toronto. She sits on several community and resident tables where she’s always trying to find some common ground.



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Usually, our Events calendar is filled with event listings. Unfortunately, this year, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many events have either been postponed or cancelled altogether. Although things are starting to return to some sort of normalcy, there is still a lot of uncertainty in the air. As a result, some events are now taking place virtually instead of in-person. Below, is a listing of events originally planned for the months of April and May in Durham Region. While we are optimistic that these events do continue as planned, we suggest you contact the event organizer directly to determine the status of the event.

In the event that social distancing is still being advised, here is a wonderful link that suggests ways you can keep yourself entertained. This listing includes museum tours, virtual tours, animal fun, educational resources, and more!

Visit www.braininjurycanada.ca/ideas-social-distancing/

April 12 to April 16, 2021

Visual Art Kit: Spring Arts Camp

Creations from the Couch: Spring Art Kit will provide campers and parents a virtual worry-free option to stay at home and explore various activities to keep campers active over the week off from school! Each kit includes access to online instructional videos, printed lesson plans, and all the materials needed to create seven projects for campers aged 4-13! Assistance may be required for some projects for kids aged 4-6 years old. Only 15 kits available!

Pre-registration is available from until Sunday, April 4. Price: \$30 per kit. Clarington

www.vac.ca/marchbreakcamp.html

April 17 to May 23, 2021

Roaring 1920s Drive-Thru Tours

Hop in your jalopy and journey back in time to the Roaring 1920s. Learn about Pickering's toe-tapping music scene and how the dry days of prohibition led to bootlegging. Presented as part of Drama in Durham: War on Whiskey tours through South Durham. After your visit to the museum, download the Temperance & Temptation podcast and self-guided driving tour to visit local micro breweries and learn how the Bluenoses who supported Temperance openly clashed with the bootleggers and moonshiners who defied the movement. Tickets are timed entry and must be purchased in advance. The tour is approximately 35 minutes and costs \$20 plus tax per vehicle.

Pickering
www.pickering.ca/en/discovering/pmv-whats-on.aspx#
 905-633-8401

For events that may have been added after the publication date and other ideas to plan your perfect day in Durham Region, visit www.durhamtourism.ca.

Spring Horoscope

MARCH 2021 to MAY 2021

by Julie Antoinette



Aries (March 21 – April 20)

Remember the scene in the *Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy is travelling along the yellow brick road and meets a fork in the road? It is at this point where she meets the Scarecrow, who supposedly doesn't have a brain. This meeting is very symbolic in the next steps she will take. Sometimes, in life, we are at a crossroads and must choose a path: right or left, backward or forward. Use your brain and choose wisely.

Taurus (April 21 – May 21)

Family matters are at the forefront recently and all other priorities must take second precedence. There are times in life where it is necessary to halt our regular daily routines to attend to interruptions necessitated by other people until they are sorted or well in hand. Step up and do your part – but don't overdo it. Let others enjoy the gift of contribution as well.

Gemini (May 22 – June 21)

You feel a sudden pull toward engaging in creative projects. Whatever that medium may be – painting, music, sewing, crafting – you must give it space to manifest. Your creative energy is burgeoning and seeking expression and it would be wise to allow it.

Cancer (June 22 – July 22)

Burnout has now arrived. But you can't say you weren't warned. Although you felt you could shoulder the burden that has been requested of you and that the result would be worth it, it has taken its toll. Now you must re-direct your energies to replenishing your own reserves or the consequences could be permanent.

Leo (July 23 – August 22)

You are filled with the desire to carry on a family tradition of some sort. History and cultural tradition hold a deep meaning for you. Perhaps shifts taking place in your family at the moment are prompting you to preserve something of the past into the present and bequeath it to future generations. Your descendants will thank you for your dedication.

Virgo (August 23 – September 23)

Be careful of manipulation from a person who is nearby. This person may present themselves in a victimized manner but you can be sure that they are not the victim in this scenario. You must examine your naivete and the reasons why you choose to believe the best intentions in others at all costs – usually your cost. Recognize the red flags. They are always present.

Libra (September 24 – October 23)

Someone has taken the liberty to harass you in the hopes of securing an object of their desiring. They do not understand that one may attract more bees with honey than with vinegar. Do not feel in the least obligated to respond to their approach. It will only reinforce them in this errant behavior and cause you to disrespect yourself.

Scorpio (October 24 – November 22)

They say revenge is a dish best served cold. They also say that he who seeks revenge must dig two graves. Sounds chilly! Be careful to examine the shallow satisfaction that may come from the demise of your enemy. It is transient and vicarious at best and truly unfulfilling. If you could remember a time where the joy of goodwill toward others filled your heart it would be beneficial to engage in this feeling instead.

Sagittarius (November 23 – December 21)

The current world events have forced your need for social interaction to be starved to the point of detriment. You must find a way to circumvent this and to re-engage with others by whatever means possible. Virtual interactions at this time are plentiful. Perhaps you could create an online social group to build mutual support. You will help others in the same boat as yourself.

Capricorn (December 22 – January 19)

Your life often appears as a straight line with little deviation from the norm. Work, home, eat, sleep, rinse and repeat. Someone in passing has a very different experience than yours in terms of their daily routines. Take note of the differences between your lives and how it has shaped your personalities. What if you were to swap places? What benefits do you imagine would take place from that experience?

Aquarius (January 20 – February 19)

You are deeply discouraged at the current state of humanity. The events of the past year have greatly diminished any sense of advancement you thought society was making as a whole. Bear in mind that some leaps forward are often preceded by a step backward and that great change always comes after chaos. It's always darkest just before the dawn.

Pisces (February 20 – March 20)

An ending of an era is nigh in your life. The signs are present all around you. The most painful aspects will come from your resistance to the ending. Conversely, the most beautiful moments will come from your embracing change and letting go. Life is a series of holding on and letting go. You will not stop a river's current, so it is best to avail yourself to its direction.

Written by Julie Antoinette. In this horoscope, she relays intuitive messages of guidance from the collective astrological archetypes. As above, so below.

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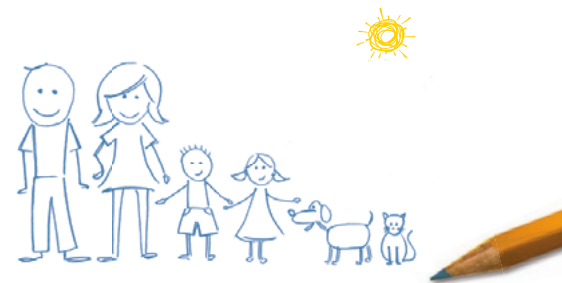
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by Tara Richardson



Soul Searching

2020 is finally behind us. (Cue the fireworks!) It was an exhausting year for many people who were left feeling like the pandemic would never end.

For those of you who are still struggling with feeling hopeful, I would like to introduce you to creating a 'hope kit'. This is a tangible way to access hope when we are not feeling especially positive. Essentially, it is a collection of things that remind you of more hopeful and positive times. Some people prefer a physical box of items while others are attracted more to a digital version saved on your desktop or a USB. Here are some ideas of what to include:

- Cards, notes, and emails that have special meaning
- Photos of good memories from the past, photos of places you want to go
- Photos of loved ones (including animals!)
- Spiritual or religious texts
- Gratitude list
- Poems or stories you find motivating
- A playlist of music that reminds you of brighter times
- Inspiring affirmations or positive quotes
- A list of goals and dreams or a vision board
- Items that distract you (puzzles) or any supplies for hobbies you enjoy
- A list of supporters with contact information
- Sensory objects like fidget spinners
- A journal
- Motivating books
- Candles or other scents that are soothing
- A list of 'Things to look forward to'

Hope can be a fleeting emotion. Being able to cultivate it at any moment is a useful skill to have to increase our overall happiness levels. As the Dalai Lama said, "The very purpose of our life is happiness, which is sustained by hope. We have no guarantee about the future, but we exist in the hope of something better. Hope means keeping going, thinking, 'I can do this.' It brings inner strength, self-confidence, the ability to do what you do honestly, truthfully and transparently."

I wholeheartedly agree with this statement and I believe the key to holding on to hope is in our self-talk. I know that when I start to tell myself "I can't handle this; this is too much" it brings me to a place of feeling helpless and sorry for myself. Switching my mindset to "this is hard, but I've been in hard places before and I can do this" ultimately bring me to a much more hopeful and self-determined state. To stay hopeful means to stay vigilant but I promise that this dedication and persistence will contribute to feeling both happier and healthier.

Tara is a wellness blogger for The Local Biz Magazine who hopes to publish her memoir on finding hope and meaning while living with a mental illness.

Get Fit: Inside & Out

by Bianca Schaefer



Get Ready, Get Set, Go!

Spring in Ontario is unpredictable. Though the official start may be in March, Mother Nature often surprises us with her own timetable and leaves us either endlessly waiting for blossoms or scrambling for summer outfits. This year, why not alter your destiny and create a wellness plan that sets you up even before Mother Nature says "Go"!

Prepare to Be Fit & Fabulous!

We're often inspired to change our fitness routines to adapt to the seasons. Take stock of which activities you'll be doing and make sure you are prepared with everything you need. You like to cycle? Wash up the bike and pump those tires. Love to play tennis? Locate your racquet and get new balls. Looking to try something new like stand-up paddle or kayaking? Sign up for lessons and get new gear. But remember, having proper attire and equipment is only half the battle. The best way to get fit is to define your goal, schedule the time and commit to your plan. Then ease into your fitness regime to avoid injury, be consistent in training and don't forget to have fun along the way!

Bye Bye Lockdown Belly

The belly we thought we lost during the first lockdown is back with a vengeance. The good news is that nothing lasts forever, and thankfully, Mother Nature knows exactly what we need! Incorporating more spring vegetables like asparagus, greens, herbs and sprouts all have an amazing cleansing effect on the body and can help reduce bloating caused by excess sugar, baked goods, convenience and deep-fried foods. Replace caffeine and alcohol with plenty of water which helps flush out toxins. Load up on fibre and probiotics to support your digestive tract for proper elimination of waste and to increase healthy gut bacteria which strengthens your immune system. And finally, consider investing in a juicer to create amazingly nutrient-rich green juices that help increase your energy while cinching your waistline!

Re-evaluate What's Important to You

Spring is a time of new beginnings! And while you may have set some new intentions at the start of the year, now is the perfect time to reflect on how you are doing. Whether you wanted to get fit, lose weight or just improve your overall well-being, taking stock of your progress now can be a great way to stay motivated or even get started! Ask yourself: Are you on track to achieving the goals you've set out for yourself? If yes, be inspired and keep going! If not, don't be discouraged. Sometimes we just need a little help when we feel stuck or don't know what to do. Don't be afraid to ask for assistance or get support. Hiring a coach, talking to a mentor or even upgrading your knowledge or skills are all great ways to build confidence, turbo boost your motivation and fast track your progress.

Bianca Schaefer is a 360 Holistic Health Coach who inspires a global community to take charge of their health through nourishing their body, mind and soul with delicious foods, an active lifestyle and a mindset that believes anything is possible. Find out more about Bianca Schaefer on her personal website, Bianca Schaefer.

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by Afeefa Malik



Tweens, Teens & In-Between

Hello readers! My name is Afeefa, and I am thrilled to announce that I will be your new writer for the *Tweens, Teens and In-Between* column! I am looking forward to talking about current issues from a teen's standpoint!

The New Year has passed and so many eventful things have happened. It is so crazy how much the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives. I got more into gaming during the lockdown because I was able to connect with my friends in a fun way. Games such as *Among Us* got really popular during the summer. You have probably heard of it but in case you haven't, it's an online party game where you and your crewmates are put onto a spaceship and your goal is to complete tasks and eliminate the imposter without getting killed. You can play with anyone across the globe or with a select group of friends.

Online gaming is just one way I adapted during COVID. I didn't really play video games before, but this pandemic has shown me different kinds of hobbies out there such as gaming and even game development! I've also picked up new learning opportunities such as coding!

As people, we've all grown and changed these past months to discover a little bit more about our interests and tastes. You too may have found a new hobby that you would never have thought of doing before the pandemic!

During the ups and downs of the pandemic, it was hard to determine what "normal" felt like. If you played a sport, for a couple of months you couldn't play in a regular team setting, but once things opened up and restrictions were in place, these things became doable again and some sort of "normal" came back in your life. For me, the things I did before this pandemic are so different from what I do now, that sometimes I don't know what "back to normal" even means. Some of us feel lost like we are in this constant cycle of doing the same thing every day. Sometimes it feels like the pandemic will never end. The person you were at the start of this pandemic, may not be the same person you are now. We've all grown up and changed and that's totally okay. We need to remind ourselves that it will get better and that we need to take things one step at a time.

If you are having a hard time, reach out to someone you trust. Being open and honest about things is very important. Tell someone how you feel, talk to a friend and check up on others' well-being. Stay connected.

In spite of how crazy 2020 was, as we head into spring 2021, all of the difficulties we faced have shaped us to become who we are. And now, you may be one step closer to finding your identity, and perhaps discovering a new hobby along the way.

Afeefa Malik is a grade 10 student at Grand River Collegiate Institute. She loves to learn new things, code and create games in her free time.

Family Matters

by Josie Myers



As we start 2021, many people hope this year will go smoother than 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on everyone. While children are usually adaptable, they are just as susceptible to stress as adults. For children, the biggest impact of the pandemic has been the interruption in routines, especially those relating to school and extracurricular activities. Children thrive on routine, so maintaining routine is the first tip in helping kids deal with COVID-related stress.

Maintain routine

When it comes to your child's routine, there are a number of things beyond your control, such as the closure of schools, but as much as possible find a way to stick to your routine. For example, if your child is school aged and they have to switch to virtual learning, they can do their school work at the same time of day as they normally would. If you know the school's bell schedule, your child can take breaks and eat lunch at the same time as usual.

Be flexible when necessary

When it becomes necessary to change your child's routine, try and go with the flow as much as possible. If your child sees you freaking out about changes because of COVID they are going to do the same. But if they see you taking it all in stride like it's not a big deal, they will be more likely to adopt an attitude of flexibility.

Use technology to keep in touch

Now that our phones are so "smart" and we use them for everything, sometimes we forget we can still use them to call people. If you use *Facebook Messenger*, you can also have video chats right in Messenger. *Zoom*, a video conferencing software, is also gaining popularity and includes a free option.

Keep your own stress in check

We all know kids are sponges, which means they are greatly affected by our actions. Continue to practice self-care to keep your own stress in check so you are better able to help your kids through this stressful time.

Talk about it

Stress does not have to become another "S" word. It is a perfectly normal feeling whether it's related to COVID or not. If you notice your child is feeling anxious, talk to them, and share some age-appropriate coping strategies. Let them know that feeling stressed is perfectly normal, and that it's important for them to recognize that (with or without your help) and be able to start applying coping strategies. It's also important to talk about what COVID is and why we have to change our usual routines.

With a master's degree in education and a background in Reiki, Josie Myers is an expert teacher and healer at her private practice Josie Myers - Opening and Balancing Life Force Energy. Josie helps moms find peace by supporting and guiding them to make the most of their motherhood journey. Josie lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband and son and her two cats.

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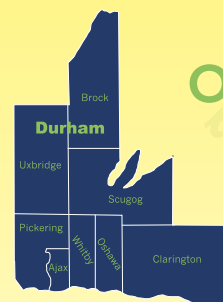
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by Wendy Lee

A Forkful of Healthy



Black Bean Burgers

Last month, I made a batch of what I believe to be the best black bean burgers ever! These black bean burgers have a hearty texture, incredible flavor, and overall ease of preparation. They are not mushy, one of the common problems with homemade black bean burgers. On the other hand, they are not crumbly either. They hold their shape beautifully. They are big, thick, and hearty, and even meat eaters LOVE them. I piled mine high with BBQ sauce, swiss cheese, and grilled pineapple.

INGREDIENTS

2 (14 ounce) cans black beans, drained,
rinsed and patted dry
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
¾ cup finely chopped bell pepper
1 cup finely chopped yellow onion
1 tbsp minced garlic cloves
1 ½ tsp ground cumin
½ tsp chili powder
½ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp smoked paprika
½ cup breadcrumbs
½ cup feta cheese
2 large eggs
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

2 tbsp ketchup, mayo or BBQ sauce
Pinch salt and pepper



DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375F. Spread beans evenly on a parchment paper lined baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes until slightly dried out. The trick is to partially dry out the black beans, so the burgers do not end up with a mushy consistency.
2. Sauté in olive oil, chopped pepper, onion, and garlic over medium heat until peppers and onions are soft, about 5-6 minutes. Gently blot some of the moisture out. Place in a large bowl or in a food processor with remaining ingredients – cumin, chili powder, garlic powder, smoked paprika, breadcrumbs, cheese, eggs, Worcestershire sauce, ketchup, salt and pepper. Stir or pulse everything together, then add black beans. Mash with fork or pulse the mixer, leaving some larger chunks of beans.
3. Form into patties.
4. To bake: place patties on a parchment paper lined baking sheet and bake at 375 for 10 minutes each side.
5. To grill: Place patties on greased aluminum foil and grill 8 minutes each side.
6. Enjoy on a bun, plain, or on a salad.
7. Store leftovers in refrigerator for up to 5 days.

Protein: 20g

Carbs: 25g

Fat: 1g

Wendy is a food blogger, food photographer, writer, lifestyle strategist, self-taught chef and lover of animals. While living in Paris, she mastered the art of a perfect crepe and French cuisine, and also discovered the world of fabulous wines and champagne! Her passion to find healthy alternatives to popular dishes stems from her desire to live a fit and healthy lifestyle while still enjoying food!

FINANCE & REAL ESTATE INSIGHTS

by Nicole Forrester



How Realtors Are Keeping You Safe During the Pandemic

With spring upon us, we face an extremely busy sellers' market. What are the ongoing and evolving measures we are taking within the real estate industry to keep you and your family safe?

Open house ban – The days of cruising around the neighbourhood on the weekend and checking out local open houses are over. Dating back to the first wave and lockdown in April 2020, the mandate to ban open houses across the GTA has been enforced for everyone's safety. There was a period in the summer of 2020 when the ban was rolled back for a short period but it is in place again.

COVID disclosures on every showing – Signed COVID-19 disclosures by every client and agent for each showing keeps you and your family safe and everyone accountable.

PPE worn at all showings – The requirement of wearing a mask at all showings has definitely become the norm. The request for all visitors to use hand sanitizers, wear gloves and shoe coverings are at the discretion of the individual homeowner.

Showing restrictions – Showings are currently restricted to essential only, and consist of up to two buyers and their agent. No children or additional family members. There are also restrictions on using the washrooms and limited touching of surfaces and light switches.

All buyers are to be preapproved for financing prior to showing – Now more than ever, KYC (Know Your Customer) procedures are in full effect. Client in-person showings are on an essential need basis only, and all clients are to be preapproved to limit the showings to serious buyers only.

No overlapping appointments – Pre-pandemic showings could be booked for hour long intervals. Since the pandemic, showing times have been reduced to half an hour and in some cases, fifteen minutes to facilitate more showings. Showings are exclusive with no overlapping clients.

COVID-19 Clauses – There are a number of updated COVID-19 disruption to operation clauses that can be added to your purchase and sale agreement that address the issue of delay to close due to lockdown.

We had a robust year in real estate in 2020 in the GTA. Sales were up +8.4% and we set a new record average price on a home, up +13.5% to \$929, 699 year over year. As demand in the market continues, we strive as professionals to keep you informed, to keep you and your family safe, and to work within the boundaries of our new emerging world so real estate can remain an essential service.

Nicole Forrester is a local Durham & GTA Real Estate Broker with over 17+ years of experience in the financial industry. Trained on Bay Street as an Investment Executive & Professional Financial Planner for one of Canada's largest financial institutions, she has extensive experience negotiating large financial transactions. Nicole's goal is to be a blessing to every person she meets and recognizes that every trade in Real Estate is not just a house... it's a Home. For more information, search Nicole Forrester Real Estate Broker on Social Media.

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by Sue-Ann Bavlnka

Ask Sue-Ann



Dear Sue-Ann:

Life stresses me out all the time. My emotional pattern ranges from anxious, confused and frustrated, which is always followed by exhaustion. I want to know what I can do to hold onto joy and happiness. Also, can I use that to get all that I want from life?

Signed: Always Stressed Out

A. We are blessed as humans to be able to feel the range of emotions that come with living a life. I understand what you are saying when you feel you have gone too long without feelings of joy and happiness. I suggest that you consider what the true meaning of joy is to you. Take a moment and consider how it truly feels so you can learn to invoke the feeling. When you encounter a time when you are feeling blue, take a pause and ask yourself, how is it you really want to feel. If you find the answer is joyful then focus on the emotion of it in your mind. Giving it time will allow you to consume your body, mind and spirit with feelings of joy. It is the same process for happiness. Remember, like anything we are trying to learn in life, it will take practice.

An affirmation that would be helpful is, with each breath that I take I am able to become joyful and see all the joy that exists around me.

When sayings affirmations, say them as often as you can during the day. I pray this helps.

Sue-Ann is a mother of 3 and resides in the Oshawa area. She chooses to utilize her undeniable psychic ability to assist you in resolving all of life's issues. Host and Community Producer of Divine Lane on Rogers Cable 10, Tuesdays at 9 pm. You can find out more and forward your submissions to Sue-Ann at sue-ann@divinelane.com.

The COACH Corner

by Malachi Brown



We Are All in This Together

"Why can't everyone just stay home?" A friend of mine was retelling me a conversation she had with a friend not too long ago. Her friend had a very good, well-paying, upper-management job. Her job allowed her a lot of benefits, including working comfortably from home. She had built a comfortable life based on her lot in life.

So often, where we are in life does not allow us to see or understand that not everyone is as fortunate. For a lot of people, where they are in life is not always in their control. Some are born into a successful family. Some are born in a particular geographical region. Some are born into a particular race. On it goes.

How often do we stop to talk to the down and out person on the street rather than jump to the conclusion they are lazy, or there by choice? How often do we see a person with great wealth and assume they are ruthless or got that way by nefarious means? I've had the opportunity to talk to homeless people, people in jail, people in-between, and even extremely successful people.

On every level, the brokenness is the same, it just looks different. Everyone is looking for the same thing – love and acceptance.

One of the things I hope COVID-19 has brought out in us is our need for each other. I'm reminded of the movie *Titanic*. At the start of the journey, everyone was assigned "their" place. The rich and elite were treated with respect and dignity. The captain and staff had their place and role. The workers had theirs, to satisfy the whims and every need of the first-class passengers. Then there were the "second class" passengers. They were locked away in the lower parts of the ship. They were oblivious to the first-class passengers. The two groups were never to cross paths. Cramped surroundings with limited food or comfort in comparison to opulence and excess upstairs.

However, when disaster struck, all classes were in this together. Survival and working together should have been paramount. We still however saw class and privilege at play. Who would be rescued first?

As we look at the reality of the story from outside, we can clearly see that it didn't matter who you were, they were all in the situation together. If there was to be any chance of survival, they would have been better off working together.

What can we learn from the *Titanic*? First, no one is indestructible. No matter where you happen to be in life, get to know others and their stories. You will be surprised how much you have in common. Secondly, and more importantly, our only chance to survive, to get better and to do better in life is when we all work together and value each other. Remember, we are all in this together.

Malachi Brown, life coach, applies his passion in helping others unlock their full potential, enabling them to live the abundant lives they were created to have.

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The Golden Years

by Linda Calder



On December 31, 2019 we were told about the pandemic. At first, it didn't seem as if it was going to affect us as the government didn't seem concerned. When we moved into 2020, life still seemed to be normal. The new virus didn't seem to have anything to do with Canada.

We didn't appreciate the free and easy lifestyle we were living. Grandparents could pick up their grandkids or have them dropped off as needed. Grandparents usually make great babysitters. Dropping in on a friend for a cup of tea or coffee was part of life for many of us. We all had friends and family we could go to restaurants with at the drop of a hat. Hopping into the car to head out to do some shopping was no problem.

Suddenly things changed. Words like lockdown, social distancing, bubbles, wearing a mask and handwashing became part of our vocabulary. We had to wear masks everywhere we went. Sanitizing our hands became a way of life. Doctors' appointments were done on the phone. For a while, we couldn't go to the dentist, hairdresser or gym. Restaurants were closed for inside dining. Large gatherings were no longer permitted. We began to live in 'bubbles.' Since the beginning of lockdown, my best friend and I have spoken to each other on the phone almost every Wednesday night. Sometimes, wine, cheese and chocolate are part of our call, and although it's not the same as seeing each other in person, it's better than nothing. My biggest disappointment though, is that I couldn't take my son and grandson on a cruise on the Queen Mary 2 from New York to Southampton. (I had booked this cruise a year and a half in advance.)

Many people I know were "done" with 2020, and looked forward to the new year. As I'm writing this though, 2021 doesn't appear to be that different from 2020. The virus continues to spread; the numbers are the highest they've ever been and we're back again in lockdown. However, there is a glimmer of hope. A vaccine has started being administered to people, so we can look forward to a brighter year, and hopefully, getting back to "normal."

I hope we can look forward to a future when things are normal again and we can make plans. I want to think positively. It's springtime now, so I'm going to start as many geraniums as I can from cuttings and start some plants from seeds. One of the first things I want to do when we can see people again is have a Victorian tea in my home so they can enjoy my beautiful plants as well. Let's try to find things that make us feel optimistic. Don't let this virus win!

Linda Calder is a retired teacher. She likes to write and enjoys spending time with her family. She also enjoys going on cruises, taking pictures and scrapbooking.



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