

Opinion | Bobcaygeon's battle with Covid-19 draws the eyes of the nation

Mary Riley

My little village of Bobcaygeon was immortalized in the Tragically Hip song. Now, all of Canada is watching its valiant battle against one of the worst pandemics the world has ever seen.

The death toll at Pinecrest Nursing Home continues to rise. Family members of residents must visit through the windows. National media has descended to cover the devastation left by an unseen enemy.

Bobcaygeon is suffering. It's a social town, even in winter when those of us who aren't snowbirds celebrate Christmas, Family Day and March break. We gather in coffee shops, grocery stores, restaurants and share news of our daily lives.

Now it's a ghost town. You can feel the pall of anguish even when you're playing by the rules and staying home. Only social media is helping to relieve the isolation and pain; highlighting small messages of kindness and support.

I have only been to my grocery store (which is asking health screening questions before allowing you in) and my pharmacy three times in three weeks. Cashiers have plexiglas shields around them. Pharmacy staff wearing face shields open the door and hand you your meds. No one is allowed inside. They are doing an outstanding job as you can imagine how inundated they are with calls for prescriptions and advice.

People are scared and anxious, more so in a town of mainly senior residents. It's like an apocalypse. How does this disease travel? How do you catch it from someone who is not displaying any signs of illness? Is it living on the can of soup I picked up at the store?

There is no greater fear than that of the unknown, which is why public health officials are pleading with people to stay home. Covid-19 strikes out of the blue and can kill quickly. People with underlying serious health issues like my hubby wouldn't stand a chance, which is why I have been so rigorously staying home, precautions I took back in February before the virus really took hold. But no age group is immune.

You just have no way of knowing who is walking around infected and spreading it to others.

I have heard from friends who know snowbirds who completely disregarded the quarantine directive upon coming back to Canada, blithely going around as if there were no problem. I myself let loose on some I knew who thought it was fine to be out walking, telling them to get back into their house and stay there. They told me it was fine for them to be out walking. It wasn't.

The feds should have enacted the Quarantine Act right away instead of asking people

"nicely" to stay in their homes for 14 days upon returning to Canada. Quarantine is necessary to ensure returning snowbirds are not infected. Florida in particular did nothing to help contain the spread and they are now paying the price. But the officials are telling us to stay home are doing so because it is the only way to stop the spread and those who ignore the rules are displaying the ultimate in selfishness.

The deaths at Pinecrest are showing us the devastation of this illness, especially in long term care homes. High-risk patients are isolated. Their families are not allowed near them, even in what could be their final moments.

That is no way for anyone to die.

So please, stay home and don't put others at risk. Take this seriously if you haven't yet. Bobcaygeon is going through its darkest days, but we have a community made stronger by its people, especially the medical, emergency and service providers who are risking their own health to fight this pandemic by caring for the rest of us.

We will get through this together and be stronger for it because as Canadians, that is who we are. But we need to realize that not following the advice of public health and government officials at this crucial time endangers the lives of others.

And dishonours those we have already lost.

Mary Riley is a former reporter with Kawartha Lakes This Week and a resident of Bobcaygeon.