



This bear was among a minority in Bobcaygeon sporting a mask. Photo: Nancy Payne.

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The reopening mantra: Do the right thing and let the rest go

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The only behaviour I can control is my own.

Never has that felt more true than right now, as summer lures us out of isolation back into a world where we're still trying to figure out what's safe, what's considerate, and what we can live with. ([This article](#) by *Advocate* writer Kirk Winter is an excellent starting place.)

A Saturday afternoon in Bobcaygeon made me realize just how differently we all see those three things.



NANCY PAYNE, ASSOCIATE EDITOR.

I wanted to refresh my memory about some interesting spots in and around the village for a story for the August issue of the *Advocate* magazine.

I parked in some shade and walked over to one of our area's great patios, at Kawartha Coffee Company. Although patrons were sitting well apart, there were still far more people in my immediate area than I'd encountered at one time in months, so I took my Americano to go.

Back on the busy street, the only person I saw wearing a mask was a grocery store employee on her break. Okay — we're outside, so no big deal if everyone keeps away from others, I thought.

Instead, people breezed by me as if COVID-19 didn't exist, wandered right up

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behind me and chatted away while they waited for a walk signal, and stood elbow to elbow with apparently unrelated couples and family groups to watch boats being locked through.

Were they local residents who know there are very few coronavirus cases in our area and were taking what they felt was a calculated risk? Were they visitors relaxing a little too much away from the city and its unenviable infection rate? No way to know. What I did know was how tense I was getting.

It was a huge relief to walk into the Boyd Museum, where I signed the guest book with the requested name and phone number for contact-tracing purposes. The two people on duty wore masks, kept their distance and even sanitized the door handle behind me.

Afterward, at the Italian Hot Table restaurant, I was asked, in the nicest possible way, to stay back from the person ordering. The owners were cheerful; the plastic barrier between us reassuring.

My last stop was the Bobcaygeon Bakery. As I turned to leave with my box of treats, one of the young staffers called out from behind the plastic-guarded counter. “Thanks for wearing a mask!”

Her words hammered away inside my head. Did the fact that she thanked me mean most customers *weren't* wearing a mask? If so, how much stress were they unthinkingly adding to her day? The bakery, restaurant and museum had all done such a good job of protecting customers' safety, but surely we clients had

a responsibility, too?

I found a shady spot at River View Park and perched on one of the big landscape rocks. I wanted to focus on my sandwich and strawberry-rhubarb square, but kept getting distracted by the group of 15 or so people in what I'd guess to be their early 20s hanging out in the picnic shelter — eating, laughing, swimming, jostling, yelling. Doing all the things from the *Before Times*.

My heart pleaded, “Please don't get sick. Please don't get sick,” but of course worrying on their behalf was pointless. And then something finally clicked into place. Sure, I was astonished by their behaviour, as I had been by the crowds around the lock, but the only sensible option for me was to look away and let it go.

I had to remind myself that others' behaviour didn't affect me, give a mental shrug and go back to my meal and my book. I had made my choice; they had made theirs. End of story.

The people taking up the whole sidewalk downtown and standing uncomfortably close to strangers, the people not wearing masks inside establishments that are doing their best to protect customers — I can't do anything about them.

For the sake of the servers and cashiers, I sure wish I could, but I can't. Letting it go isn't defeatist; it's the best way to lower my stress level in a situation I can't change. The only other choice is to be in a state of constant judgy agitation, which does nothing to improve anything.

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That's not how I want to approach the world. That's not how I want to see other people. That's not who I want to be.

Because after all, the only behaviour I can control is my own.

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