

NEWS&VIEWS



Illustration by: Olivia WallerFolioart

MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



Good and bad times give us wisdom we can carry forward

A friend and I always have our ‘annual lunch’ over the Christmas-New Year period. It’s the only time that we actually make a plan to see each other. This year, we added a new friend and, because of the surge in Covid, we replaced our lunch with a conference call. All of us have admitted to having Zoom fatigue, so we didn’t need to see each other on screen to enjoy the company.

We spent much of the hour catching up on the details of our lives – some good, some not so good. We laughed a lot – all open, frank, and honest – even noting how ridiculous we had sometimes been in certain situations. As we talked, one question lingered in my mind, so I asked each of us to answer it: what have we learned about ourselves during the pandemic that we will use to make the upcoming year and years better?

The new friend stated confidently the lesson she had learned in a succinct phrase: “Let go and let God take control.” I sensed that this has become a reassuring mantra for her. Having grown up in a fundamentalist Christian world, I know this language, I know this mindset. This is her way of dealing with the deaths, the uncertainty, and her lack of control during the pandemic.

My second friend noted that we had all gone through ‘universal trauma’. This was her lesson. She continued by quoting other two- and three-word phrases – most adding more adjectives before the word trauma or substituting

another word for trauma. It seemed that these sound-bite descriptions soothed her. They help her categorise her feelings and connect them to a larger universal feeling she believes exists. Her words were all rational, logical and measured, but her tone of voice revealed something different: frustration, even anger. She wants her life to return ‘to what it used to be’ before the pandemic. Since our conversation, I find myself wondering, why the focus on this ‘before’? I didn’t hear her say what she had learned that would be useful for the future.

I started explaining what I had learned by saying that I felt very lucky. When I was growing up, my parents repeatedly and firmly told me and my siblings that we had to always learn the wisdom of life’s good times and bad times and then carry that wisdom into the future. That wisdom is the key to making things better. I explained that I learned so much from other people about being flexible and not letting my fears overwhelm me. The pandemic prompted me to take long walk-and-talks with friends to stay in touch. Others I know began meeting friends and neighbours regularly – far more often than before, but outside and socially distanced – or began shopping for friends who felt especially vulnerable. It seems likely that this behavior will carry forward, to the future ‘after’.

Even when people we knew died of Covid, friends and I didn’t let it cause us to shut ourselves away in worry, sadness, anger, or worry. We mourned and then continued to live – definitely not in the same way we had in the past, but in often different ways that remain filled with camaraderie, care, laughter and mutual respect. I was surprised when, at the end of our chat, my friends suggested that these words would be our mutual resolution for 2022, but each living and sharing it in their own way. “We will be carrying the wisdom forward,” one said. As we chuckled in agreement, I thought my parents and my grandparents would be pleased.