

2021 Holiday Letter

We'll long remember 2021. The COVID pandemic was very much a part of our lives. We were able to see very few friends in person. Travel was almost impossible. For much of the year our cottage was off limits – the Curve Lake First Nation, where our cottage is located, decided to limit access to those whose primary address is on the reserve. But we did visit friends and relatives virtually, and we did continue with our 3rd Age courses at Ryerson and the University of Toronto.

Health proved to be a major concern this year. The year began with time in the hospital to take care of my “organized” pneumonia, with signs of growing heart problems. By September I was back in hospital for the third time. The resulting open heart surgery provided a quadruple bypass and replacement of the aortic valve. The operation only lasted 5 hours, but I remained incoherent for several days. Mira was forced to watch all of this unfold. It was hard on both of us. We welcomed the support provided by friends, specifically the Borodins, the Weirs and Paul & Jonathan (the care food packages were much appreciated). I'm improving, but not yet 100%. It seems that when you reach your 80's, health issues can loom large.

Through all of this, I lead a LIFE course at Ryerson on “Search for Meaning.” It consisted of six two hour Zoom sessions and had participants discussing what does it all mean from a wide variety of perspectives (see <http://fabian.ca/LIFEmeaning>). Mira was one of the founders of the Canadian Association of Women in Construction and continued to work with CAWIC during the year. Mira is also an active member of two book clubs. When not focused on health issues, we stayed reasonably busy. My urban planning concerns are coming to the fore again as more and more tall buildings are going up in our immediate downtown neighbourhood.

Pandemic politics and just plain politics loomed large during much of 2021. Canada made some losing wagers on COVID vaccines and it was well into the year before vaccination was widely available (with early vaccine availability being one advantage of having passed the age of 75). The US seemed to do a better job of providing vaccines to Americans as soon as possible. But the US anti-VAX voices continued to grow more strident after the January 6th near insurrection in the US capital. That near insurrection seemed to only widen the growing political and social divide within the US.

The US and Canada prided themselves on equality of their treatment for all (white) men. But then women recognized that they had never been treated equally, and blacks came to a similar recognition, as did the indigenous in both Canada and the US. The demands for change have become more and more strident. All of which challenged the white man's role as members of the dominant social class.

As citizens of both Canada and the US, we're concerned about the growing divide and increasing tension in both countries. Add in the new threats we're facing from fires, floods and droughts. Add in a global economy that has demonstrated its vulnerability to cyber and physical attack. Add in growing tensions between countries in the world. It's no longer unreasonable to ask if the US and Canada will survive as democratic nation states with unified social values accepted by the vast majority of their citizens.

2022 will be an interesting year. Will the pandemic fade in significance? Will we find unified social values that are broadly accepted? Will we find effective ways to cope with fire, flood and drought? There are multiple reasons for pessimism. There's also a growing recognition that some fundamental changes will be required if we are to survive. I temper my pessimism with some hopeful signs. 2022 may turn out to be a critical year in our collective history.