

A new way of thinking



By Nate Smelle

Over the past three-plus years, everyone of us has had to learn to adapt our lifestyle in order to do our part in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. From washing our hands and wearing a mask, to locking down and lining up outside the local grocery store in order to stock up on essential supplies, to say we have faced more than our fair share of inconveniences for the sake of our public health would be an enormous understatement. Ripped suddenly from the comforts of our daily routines as we were forced to confront the often terrifying but essentially beautiful reality of our interconnectedness with others and our environment, at first, our mental health suffered as we learned to adjust to the shifting paradigm. For some, this period of adjustment was very painful and longer lasting. For others, myself included, it was initially annoying and then enlightening and inspiring. Many artists and writers I have spoken with since COVID-19 entered our lives have also expressed to me how the influx of extra time and solitude gifted to them by the pandemic inspired them to read, write, and create new things. Some even believe the pandemic has ushered in a new Renaissance. In an article found in the July 20, 2020 edition of The New Yorker, Gianna Pomata, a retired professor at the Institute of the History of Medicine, at Johns Hopkins University explained "How Pandemics Wreak Havoc and Open Minds." Providing insight into the current post-pandemic world that we find ourselves in, she reflected on the aftermath of the bubonic plague that ravaged Europe in the fourteenth century. "What happens after the Black Death, it's like a wind of fresh air coming in, the fresh air of common sense," Pomata said. Acknowledging how the devastation caused by the "Black Death" brought on a "revival of medical science" and artistic expression, she explained how the aftermath of the COVID-19 is likely to unfold in a similar way, "After the Black Death, nothing was the same. What I expect now is something as dramatic is going to happen, not so much in medicine but in economy and culture. Because of danger, there's this wonderful human response, which is to think in a new way." By means of the COVID-19 pandemic and our efforts to subdue its wrath, we have already learned a great deal about ourselves as individuals and as a society. For instance, redefining what is truly essential to us as human beings - the clean air, water, soil, and food that foster a healthy and happy existence - we have in turn discovered the value of eliminating or at least significantly reducing our unnecessary patterns of consumption. On Thursday, May 4, the World Health Organization officially declared that that COVID-19 was now determined to be "an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern." This good news is also a clarion call, demanding that we take time to understand our newfound way of thinking; and, begin employing it as we reshape our post-pandemic world. With so many lessons still to extract from our response to this unprecedented global health emergency and its unfolding story, we will without a doubt be studying the impact of this deadly virus for the rest of our lives. In the meantime, as The Tragically Hip's chief poet and singer/songwriter Gord Downie often belted out while channeling the spirit of the iconic Canadian artist Tom Thomson, "Bring on the brand new Renaissance; 'Cause I think I'm ready."