

## Back to reality

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Remember in those heady early days of COVID-19 when we were all scared? We had no idea what was happening, numbers were high and reports were coming from all over the world about how the illness was impacting countries like China, Italy and Spain. Remember how we all rallied and agreed to stay home for what we thought would be a week or two? How we sent ?Prayers for Italy? on facebook? Communities painted rocks with inspiring messages and dropped them in local parks and playgrounds, we hung inspiring messages from our windows, clapped for first responders and inventive parents created online and neighbourhood scavenger hunts to keep kids occupied. Good times. We were ?all in this together? presenting a united front in the fight against a global pandemic. Now? Now apparently we cannot even agree to don a mask for the sake of our neighbours, never mind our own health. A mask! Really folks? You're telling me you can't wear a mask for the greater good of us all? Is it because we're on what feels like day 4,342? Where has all the community spirit and camaraderie gone?

First and foremost let's address the elephant in the room because if I read one more comment from some ?expert? who googled the term hypoxia one day, while home alone and bored, I'm going to lose my mind. Hypoxia, for those who may not have heard the word before, means ?a condition in which the body or a region of the body is deprived of adequate oxygen supply at the tissue level.? That's not ?feeling claustrophobic? or ?short of breath,? it's about your actual oxygen saturation levels. Some of the more common causes of hypoxia include a chronic heart condition, COPD, asthma and pneumonia OR living at a high altitude. Try as I might, I was unable to uncover ANY evidence that wearing a mask, for those not suffering from one of the above conditions (or who is currently living half way up Mt. Everest) would cause hypoxia in an otherwise healthy individual. I suppose for those folks who require further proof however, we could also just look to our local hospital frontline workers ? you know, people like nurses and doctors who wear masks ALL DAY LONG and who don't seem to be dropping dead of hypoxia at alarming rates. You know who might drop dead from you not wearing a mask and protecting yourself and those around you? It could be your grandmother or your favourite uncle, your parents, or even, as we are seeing more and more of lately, your younger friends. Does wearing a mask take some getting used to? Sure. It's unfamiliar, it's been pretty hot out lately and for a while there, masks were hard to come by. I'd suggest mandated seatbelt use also took some getting used to back in the day but now you wouldn't dream of travelling in a car without buckling up first. The government ?infringed? on our civil rights back then and we pretty much all complied and look how many lives have been saved ever since. This is really no different. You don't wear a seatbelt sitting at the dining room table or on a patio ? just while in cars. Now you're being asked to wear a mask ? just while in indoor spaces. It's not hard. It will save lives. What exactly is the issue?

Many years ago, (1996 to be exact) a woman named Gwen Jacob fought for the right to go topless in public. She was hot, took off her shirt, was charged with public indecency then fought the charge and won. To this day however, you don't see many people (of either sex) going topless in grocery stores, restaurants and malls and that's because most often there is a policy in place that states: ?no shirt, no shoes, no service.? My civil liberties guarantee me the right to go topless should I wish to (I don't nor does anyone else want me to) but many businesses prohibit this primarily for health and sanitary reasons. It's the same with masks. I bring this up merely to remind people - just because something is a ?right? doesn't make it right. Being asked to put on a mask is just part of the social contract we sign when we become mature adults willing to put on a shirt and shoes to receive service, or wear a seatbelt in the car to prevent death. It's not to avoid the fine, it's because we know it will potentially save the lives of everyone in the car. Not always ? but mostly. It's the same with masks. They won't always save lives, but they will mostly save lives. Your civil liberties don't trump mine and you're not going to die of hypoxia. It's mandatory now ? show your community spirit and wear a damn mask.

\*Of course we fully understand and support that the current by-law allows exclusions for those with a chronic health condition, who require special assistance of some kind or for children under the age of two.