

The five stages of isolation

by SHERALYN ROMAN

With apologies to Elisabeth Kubler Ross, I write today echoing what I'm sure are the feelings of many amongst us, an acknowledgement that we're all currently experiencing the five stages of isolation. Those of us that are doing our part; unlike the 'bunch of yahoos' protesting over their right to get a haircut (a haircut!) have by now, probably experienced every one of these stages. There's a good chance we'll cycle through them at least one or two more times over the course of this pandemic. The only thing that might help us is that one defining characteristic of humanity - our sense of hope. As humans, we have hope. In this case, hope that a better and brighter future is ahead and that our sense of optimism will make the best of that future. Hope is what sustains us until we get there. Meanwhile, as I'm sure you'll agree, it's the five stages of isolation we're really feeling most right now.

Kubler Ross originally wrote about what she termed 'the five stages of grief' as they related to individuals facing terminal illness. Later it became the model for what we experience after the passing of a loved one. Since that time it has also been adapted to fit almost any scenario from business to divorce. While generally acknowledged (even by the author herself) as not being completely accurate and certainly not necessarily the linear process originally described, it does provide a simple, easy and relatable framework for discussion about our feelings during difficult times.

Upon the announcement of a new virus circulating around the world, there was Denial. It can't be that bad we thought. It's in another country. It won't impact us. Sadly there are also still some 'covidiot' around who think the entire virus is a hoax. Talk about denial! Next up comes Anger. We saw unfortunate displays of xenophobic behaviour by people around the world and even from people in positions of power like Donald Trump who continually referred to CoVid19 as the 'Chinese virus.' Those of us more rational folks then transitioned into Bargaining, making deals with our government leaders to willingly and in the spirit of cooperation curtail our civil liberties for the greater good. We're staying at home, we're physical distancing and doing our part to prevent the spread of this horrible illness. What began as 14 days of isolation has now stretched over six weeks and we're staring down the prospect of many more weeks still to come before life even begins to resemble some sense of normalcy. Many are struggling with what that 'new normal' will even look like. I think it's safe to say many of us are now in the Depression stage. That feeling that the future is uncertain, we're cooped up in our homes, we're missing the opportunities to be with loved ones or to simply hop in the car and take in one of the many lovely scenic destinations that surround us. Many are without work and budgets are being stretched and significant hardships endured. Who can blame us for feeling overwhelmed and depressed? Finally, there is Acceptance. We're adapting to our new reality. We are video conferencing for work or facetimeing our loved ones. We're organizing drive by parades for birthdays, placing signs on front lawns announcing good news and even taking part in a tribute to a brave local teenager and his family so that they know they are not alone in their struggles. We are starting to accept a sense of what the 'new normal' might look like and finding ways to make it work. They aren't perfect but human beings are resilient and we have hope. It's this hope that will continue to push us forward.

My hope for us now is that each of these stages we've experienced were not undertaken in vain. Anecdotally, on those few occasions I have left the house, I am seeing more and more cars on the road. This concerns me. I deny what I'm seeing as telling signs of people disobeying physical and social distancing orders, and deny that people would be so selfish. Protestors who march at Queens Park demanding their 'right' to get a haircut push me back into the anger stage. What right do these people have to compromise the health and safety of us all? Why is your 'right' to a haircut more important than my right to live? Or that of my mother or perhaps a family member who is immune compromised. I read something interesting the other day where the author posed this question: If you're ok with going out, with the concept of developing herd immunity and also desperate to get your hair done - you decide which one of your family members should die. Who is it going to be? Then go tell that person you're ok with them dying for the sake of looking good. Me? I'm ok with continuing to bargain away my personal freedoms for the sake of the greater good and I'm pretty certain most of you are the same. I'm ok to keep fighting the depression by focussing on the good. More family time with those we're isolating with, more dinners together, more conversations or catching up on movies we wanted to watch when we 'have time.' Books that were waiting to be read are now being read, long walks to enjoy nature are now being taken (albeit safely) and a resurgence of baking, sewing and people doing good things for others in the spirit of 'we're all in this together' have taken over. I'll

accept that. I continue to have hope and hope that most of you do too.