

# Who is really at fault?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

For over a year now, Peel Region has been mostly locked away from the world.

We've been shut down, prevented from being together with family and many of us are afraid to so much as cross the threshold of our homes for a simple trip to the grocery store. With new variants running rampant in Peel and not enough vaccines to administer to our population, we are continually asked to trust in the government. We are asked to trust that vaccines will soon arrive and to trust that our overrun health care system will care for us IF we fall victim to COVID.

Over 3 weeks ago we were told we were a hotspot and that vaccines were coming. Just days ago we were told the government would look at paid sick days and that a list of closed workplaces would be published. Where is the follow through? Where is the commitment? We're frustrated, tired, bitter and angry and now a 13-year-old girl is dead. How much is too much? What's the breaking point at which point we all just shout, 'enough is enough'?

How has the tragic passing of Emily Victoria Viegas become the tipping point? I think there are lots of reasons. Her father is an essential worker. A hero that we aren't treating like a hero in his time of greatest need. He was a person who went to work day in and day out and was 'essential' for us?for whatever it was that we ordered online perhaps?but far more importantly essential to his family for both his love and his income support.

However, because of this, he brought home COVID. He didn't get sick, but his wife and daughter did. Was his workplace one of those that should have been shuttered? Was he one of our front-line heroes who should have been eligible for sick pay, if only such a thing existed? Should HE be the person who is being criticized in some online forums for not seeking care for his daughter sooner than he did? I have so many questions but whether he could have provided better care is not one of them. Why vilify a man who has already lost so much? Why hold Emily's father accountable for the systemic injustices that surely contributed to her death?

A moment of silence in the legislature is a gesture 'voting in paid sick days, hinted at just days ago in Ford's 'tearful' apology would have been a much more meaningful one. Voting against them for the 21st time is just insulting.

More than 21 years ago, we decided my perfectly healthy three-month-old son could finally be left safely with a babysitter (my mother-in-law) while we popped across the street (not far away) to wish a Happy New Year to our neighbours (our first time out of the house in 3 months). We were gone less than an hour when she called to tell us he seemed to be coughing. We went home, watched his temperature climb and within another hour drove to the hospital where he was diagnosed with pneumonia.

Yes 'it was that fast and no there was NO warning he was that ill. COVID is about a million times worse than pneumonia we are told. He wasn't a 13-year-old, trying to possibly put a brave face on how she was feeling so as not to worry her already worried father. He wasn't possibly a very scared 13-year-old girl who didn't want to admit how bad she was feeling because she was already worried about her own mother in hospital with COVID. There were no systemic barriers for us and we weren't in the middle of a pandemic. No one judged us for 'not recognizing sooner' that our son was ill. On top of all the feelings we are already having, what saddens me most is that COVID is revealing all of the ugliness of human nature as keyboard warriors on social media turn on the father to hold him accountable.

Yet the good side of so many in Peel Region has also been revealed. Those who have opened their hearts and wallets to support the GoFundMe page set up for Emily's family. Why does it seem that while goodness exists, we have to dig through the trash to find the hidden treasure?

How much is too much is what I now ask? What's our tipping point? Is the death of a 13-year-old girl, surely the victim of the systemic barriers that led to her catching COVID in the first place, the death that will finally galvanize action in Peel? Is her loss the

one that will force Premier Ford to overcome his dislike of Mayor Patrick Brown who has been begging for help virtually from the start enough to send us what this hotspot needs?

Make no mistake, Caledon, we ARE Peel and in the thick of this crisis. We need vaccine access for everyone in Peel. Period. We need companies and the government to step in and do the right thing with paid sick leave. Thankfully, in the meantime, we have Dr. Loh making difficult decisions, but one man alone cannot get us out of this mess. We're tired and bitter and angry and rather than letting loose on the father of one of Canada's youngest COVID victims ? lay the blame squarely where it belongs ? on the government. It didn't have to be this way.