

AURICLE



In the summer of 2021, ten Local Listeners set out to gather stories from their neighbours in Alberta Ave.

Stories of moments that influenced wellbeing - moments of joy, of grief, of connection, of despair. Some banal, some profound, all meaningful.

This little book contains a smattering of the “to be continued” stories displayed during Knowsy Fest on the windows of 118th Avenue. They offer a glimpse of what it means to be well, or not well, in Alberta Avenue.

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#stillhere

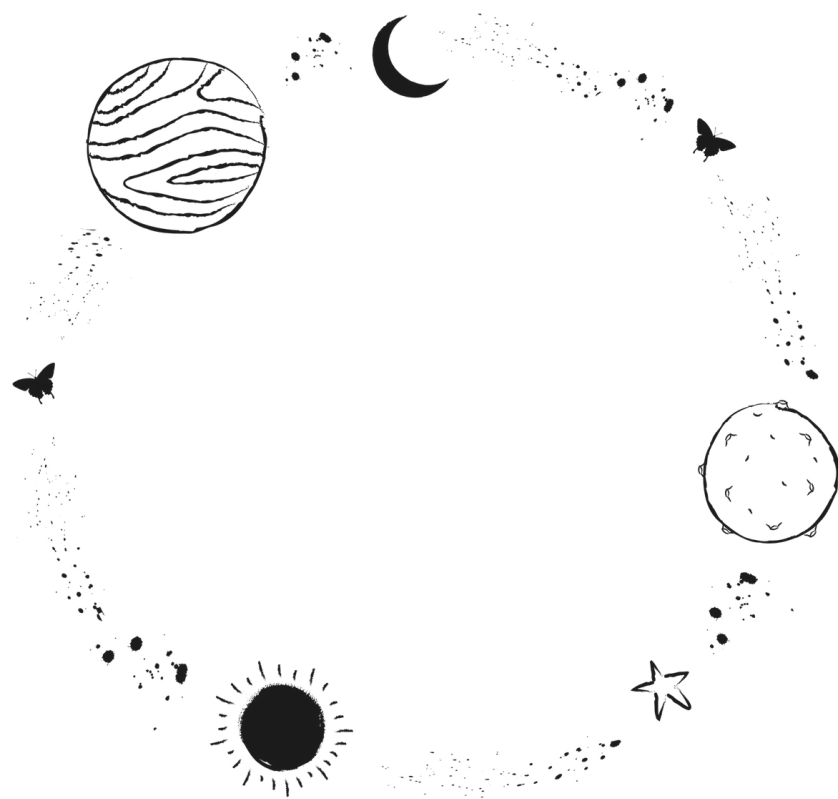
As a neighbour, living here in the community, we've had -- all within the span of, I want to say, three weeks -- three very close families to us move away from the neighbourhood. I would say these are our safe people. These are people we'd run into on the street all the time. These are people who had kids, my kids could have playdates with just last minute. People who, I'd say really, some of them welcomed us into the neighbourhood, some of us we got to welcome into the neighbourhood, but especially through COVID, people we could just count on people who you always felt safe with, and to have that many people leave within that shorter span of time was really hard for our family.

And so how it affected our wellbeing, I think, if you lose a bit of your sense of home, your sense of place, which you realize is tied into people and those relationships. A little bit of, maybe even a sense of safety is tied into those relationships, familiarity.

But, then I had an experience where a neighbour contacted me - we have a Whatsapp group, and she contacted that group, just asking anyone else on our street, because we still have some good friends left on our street. She heard a woman in distress and just asked if anyone else was hearing it and if they'd want to go investigate together and so, I was available, and it was like 10 at night.

So, we were able to go outside and the situation had resolved, it wasn't anything critical or emergency related. And then me and this person ended up just having an hour long conversation about both grieving the moving away- because some of them were mutual friends. So being able to grieve that loss together, but also kind of dream together about the future, what was still left. Maybe what was still possible. So yeah, you know, and it's 10:10 at night, and you're having that conversation and it's drizzling outside and it felt good.

-From present, active, generous, fun-loving



Alberta Ave, cracks on the outside, problems are visible

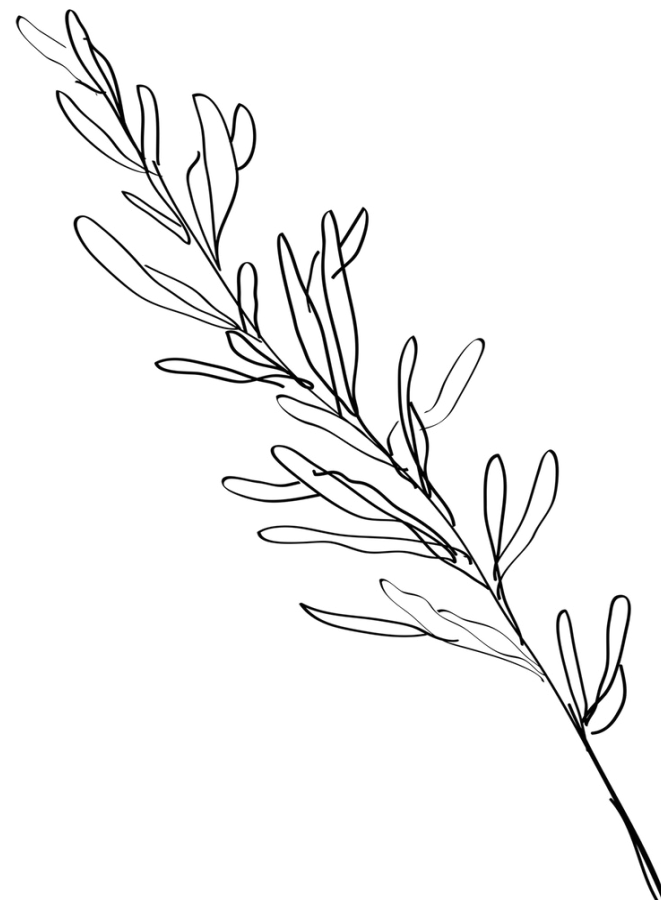
I think for me – I mean, there are many things, but often my best and worst times in Alberta Ave are when I’m walking my dogs. And it’s sort of the time when I consciously think about where I live and what happens in this neighbourhood. But, this particular time was about a month ago, and I heard a man yelling. And, you know, as a woman anywhere, when you hear a man yelling and it sounds angry, you kinda take pause. But

just as I’d paused with my dog, a woman who was gardening across the street said to me, “Honey? Honey? Come over on this side of the street. Come over on this side of the street. You’ll be good.” So I stopped and chatted with her, and she was like, “Yeah, I don’t know what that guy was doing, but I’d prefer you stay on this side of the street, so I don’t have to worry about you.”

And as I walked after that, like, it just made me feel held and cared for by a stranger, right? In ways that is beautiful, and I kept walking, and then this young man, very high, very flamboyant, Indigenous, beautiful, I’m going to be assuming gay man, if not resplendently swishy human being, stopped and was like, “Can I pet your dogs?”

And he was talking about visiting from up north, and how much he LOVED the neighbourhood, and we're so FRIENDLY, and he was loving up my dogs, and he went on his way. And I think that's sort of in a nutshell what I love about this community, is that: there are problems, to be sure, and they are very visible problems. We can see them, we can hear them, and sometimes we experience them ourselves. But I have never gone for a dog walk without people talking to me, or laughing with me, or loving up my dogs. And I think that the people in this community, when given the opportunity, do take care of each other, and do want to take care of each other in a way that I have never experienced in other neighbourhoods.

- From activist, feminist, intellectual, empathetic



The body under the blanket

I was driving down 95 street, on my way to pick my son up from gymnastics camp, excited to hear how his day went. Near the intersection of 95 street and 111 Ave, I saw some emergency response vehicles parked against the curb, lights flashing. At first, I thought there was an accident, but the street and intersection was clear. Then, I thought someone must be in trouble - I've noticed more and more people slumped over in bus shelters, passed out on benches, and sprawled out in the neighbourhood parks in recent months, totally out of their minds on drugs.

As I got closer, I could see the firemen and paramedics standing around, and on the pavement of the convenience store parking lot, covered with a dirty blanket, too small to cover their bare feet, was someone. It was clear that the emergency responders were called a bit too late, and could no longer do anything to help - just waiting for the police or coroner to arrive, I guess. That's the first time I've seen a dead body around here, even though it's been getting worse and worse over the past 5 years, and I knew it was only a matter of time, and I know it likely won't be the last one I see.

I carry on to pick up my son, and half-heartedly listen to how his day went, all the while thinking about what kind of neighbourhood I'm bringing him up in. I've been here in Alberta Avenue since 2004. My wife and I bought an old character home to fix up together, and make it our own. We helped out with the neighbourhood festivals, and volunteered at the Carrot, and patrolled the area trying to deal with the crime, all the while hoping that the revitalization of the area would happen, that the streetscape improvements would have an effect, that new businesses and younger families would move in and make the area a better place. To date, it hasn't really happened. There's been a bit of and improvement, but not much.

The constant petty theft, vandalism, open drug use, street gang presence, homeless encampments, sirens, late night screaming and alcohol-fueled arguments out on the street, needles, and human excrement in the alley.....it wears you down and makes things seem hopeless. It makes you want to give up and get out. I feel weary, let down, defeated, and ashamed for trying to make this neighbourhood my home, for buying in to the revitalization hype, for putting so much time and effort into restoring this old house, when in the end we'll likely be cutting our losses and starting over somewhere else, somewhere far more suitable for raising a family. The body under the sheet has started the ball rolling, and we will be leaving.

- From professional engineer, scientist, renovator, restorer, builder

#praytoallthegods

As I approached my 50th birthday, I began bleeding very heavily. And I thought that it was perimenopausal flooding, which I'd read about. But the bleeding became so excessive, that at one point, I had to call 911 and go to the hospital, and they had to do blood transfusions. It wasn't any kind of normal bleeding. And it turned out I had a 15 centimeter tumor, which they told me was leiomyosarcoma, which is a very deadly form of cancer. And I went home from that experience, having been told really bluntly, and almost rudely, "You have cancer," and kind of contemplated that. I had already been doing a practice of counting 10 things I'm grateful for on my fingers every night. But this really amped that up, I also became began calling out to a higher power or the holy host, the heavenly host.

My spirituality ended up being like a Varanasi cab drivers dashboard, where I would call out to anyone I could think of whether it was Guanyin, or Jesus, or Mary, or Buddha, or Anansi, the spider God, I just wanted someone to hear me and help me. And that, combined with my gratitude practice of before sleep counting on all my fingers and thumbs the things I was grateful for, turned into a wellbeing practice that got me through that very dark time. It ended up not being cancer, but for three months, they were insisting it was and I don't know that I'll ever believe that this prayer and gratitude didn't have something to do with it. Maybe I did have cancer, and I cured it with this, or the heavenly host cured it.

Maybe I never had it at all. So the gratitude practice, I just start with my pinky finger, I have my hands in prayer position. And I fold each finger as I give a gratitude.

I might start with being grateful for the Clean Air we have in Canada, or that I have enough food to eat. They sound like small things. But of course, they're fundamental. And it might be something specific. I'm grateful for my friend who lives near me and brings me gifts. The spiritual practice, I had a little candle and a little candle holder that looks like a lotus. And I just lit a candle and looked at it and said, "Help me. I'm receptive and I'm open and I'm vulnerable. And I want to live and help me through this."

And often, I would have tears stream down my cheeks. And everyone remarked how amazing and strong I was and how I went through this so gracefully. And I agree. And I don't know how it came to me to do it that way. But it has stayed with me - this calm belief that there's a whole bunch of the universe that wants me to exist and that created me for some reason.

And so my spiritual or wellbeing practice really is one of gratitude and vulnerability. And it got rid of so much anxiety or worry that it also gave me the idea that when I do die, I'll just be absorbed into that great energy and become part of that universal heavenly host. So, I'm afraid now I've got a lump in my breast. And I cry sometimes, but I still throw myself back into the gratitude and appealing to the spirits or the universe to just help guide me through it.

- From feminist, kind, funny, creative, eccentric, active

Two epidemics

Well, normally, during healthy times, I work as sound tech for concerts, but things got very quiet during COVID. And I actually quite enjoy my work, usually. And I missed it. And I was afraid my skills were deteriorating and I wouldn't know how to get back to work again, if and when the epidemic ended.

Fortunately, someone in the neighbourhood asked me to start helping them with porch concerts. And since then that's become quite a phenomenon, little outdoor concerts to make up for the shows we're not having. And in this case, it was someone who lives on 107 Ave near the Chinese shopping center, in in the poorest part of a poor neighbourhood. But she had porch concerts and her neighbours would come and people who knew her would come from across town even and sit out on the lawn and across the street. And we'd do little concerts, and everybody

would try to keep two meters apart. And it was fun. It was a lot of fun. And it got to be a regular institution. She did one every Sunday, all last summer. And she's done most of the Sundays of this summer, and we were mostly lucky with the weather.

But I particularly remember one porch concert and there was the usual gang of neighbours and fans. And, in fact, sitting down in front were a couple of neighbours who looked in a bit of rough shape a man and a woman, and they they looked poor and I spotted the guy as looking a little bit scary, because he's got a couple of teardrop tattoos on his face and look out for that one. But I was mostly paying attention to the concert and running the mix from an iPad, so I could be out where the audience was. And suddenly the scary looking guy got up and left at almost a run to a house on the corner, and came back with a Naloxone kit. Because the woman he'd been sitting next to was just nodded right out. And I think, Uh, I hope this guy knows what

he's doing. And he appears to be quite practiced in the use of Naloxone. And so I joined him next to the woman. Meanwhile, the musicians on the porch have caught on to what's going on. As it happened, it was right in the middle of a song of hers, which was specifically about living in her poor neighbourhood and someone breaking into her house to steal things while she was home and her having to talk the person into putting down her stuff and going away peacefully. Anyway, it was a song about the neighbourhood.

So the guy is prepping a syringe with Naloxone. And I've got the iPad in one hand making sure that people can still hear and talking to them. And I got the other hand, I got two fingers on the neck of a woman who's out, feeling for a pulse. And I think I can feel one, but I'm not too sure. And he hits her in one thigh right through the sweat pants with a shot of Naloxone. And then we wait for a couple minutes and I can feel the pulse now. And I say that, and he's lifted and says "uhhhh" and then he hits her in the

other side with another shot. Meanwhile, of course, an audience member has called 911. And there's an ambulance on the way and we're getting people to clear the street and make way ambulance coming through very soon. And then the woman who's just received two shots of Naloxone gets up and kind of shakes herself and the man who'd been with her. They walk off down the street, he's kind of holding her by the shoulders. He says, "I'm gonna take her home, I think she'll be okay." So we call the ambulance again and tell them that the patient has walked off so there's no need for them. And then after a few minutes of decompression, we got back to the concert and we finished it out. So I I felt good about being able to do my favourite work in spite of the epidemic. But that's the neighbourhood.

-From grumpy, optimistic, angry/angrily optimistic

People are more interesting than you think

I really like walking around, I realized that I actually like it more than I thought: going out and doing stuff by myself, spending time by myself, listening to music, taking the bus and stuff. And the people are pretty nice. There's been some people who I've talked to on the bus, or I've stopped, who are really interesting. And it's fun.

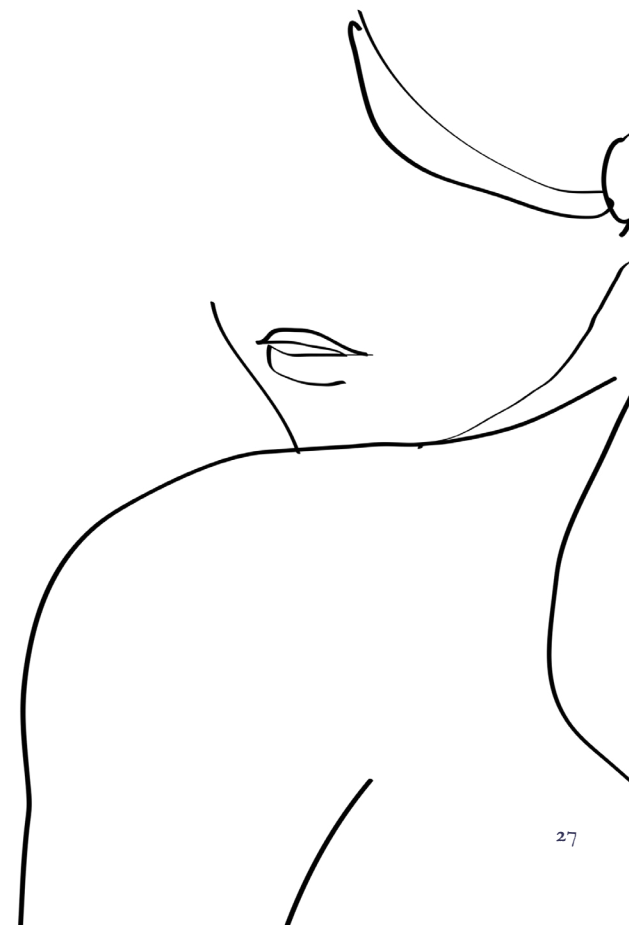
I think it's fun to talk to strangers because well, it's a good reminder that there's just a bunch of random people out in the city just living their lives and doing something completely different from you. And it can give you new knowledge on something, or a new perspective, or just remind you of something you don't think about. They

usually start talking to me-- I sometimes say hi to people, but I don't often go up to people and start conversations because it's usually adults. The guy at the bus stop just walked up and casually just started talking to me. There seems, um, there's quite a few people who look unfriendly or kinda rough, but they just keep to themselves. Like they don't get in your way or anything. They're not rude. They're just doing their own thing. And I haven't really talked to people when I'm walking, like having conversations. I just say hi. Or they say hi. So, people are pretty friendly.

I went to the mall to do some like writing stuff. And hanging out in the food court. The mall's so expensive. I do like buying new, but I don't very much. I'd rather buy shoes new than used. But I'm okay with used clothes. I don't usually find stuff my size, when I'm thrifting for shoes, because the women's stuff is very -- there's not much variety and often they don't fit my foot or are not big enough -- and the men's stuff is usually very worn out.

People don't usually talk to me inside stores, except obviously the employees, employees are nice, I believe. Like today, the woman working on the cash register, complimented me, she said she liked my earrings. And she was really nice. She was asking me if I was going back to school shopping.

-From creative



Water gun fun at the playground

So, a couple weeks ago when it was a heatwave, it was super, super hot out, actually, it was before it was super, super hot, it was maybe 24 degrees. And after we picked [my son] up, we brought him to the playground. And we often go to the playground that is right by the Norwood Family Centre because my son has a whole bunch of friends that live near there. And anyways, this one day we went there, and one of the families that often comes brought a big...one of those big plastic storage tubs, and it was filled with water, and also filled with water guns. And as soon as we saw them, they were like, "Hey, do you guys want a water gun?" And I personally didn't because I didn't want to get wet, I just wanted to read my book. Same with my husband. He didn't want to get wet, he also wanted to read a book.

So our son just got a water gun, and everybody played water guns. And there was one kid who was a little bit older, who was there playing water guns too, and he had this ginormous water gun that a little bit hurt when he would squirt people. So my son did not like going near that person. He just kept saying, "That boy is a baddie." And I was like, "Oh, well just don't go near him. He is not a baddie. He just has a little bit owie of a water gun." And then one of the parents said, "This water gun needs to go away." So then they took that one away, but still, the kids had a solid hour and a half of playing with water guns, and my son did not get into the shooting of other people so much, because he was super interested in spraying different parts of the playground. And then at one point they ran out of water in this ginormous bucket, and a different neighbour that lives right adjacent to the park volunteered to fill it up at their house. So they did that, and they got to keep playing. And it was just a really nice day.

-From kind, artistic, entrepreneur, spiritual, calm

#birth

I guess my story is that we had a baby, which is good and bad. We wanted to have a baby last year, but because of COVID, we decided to wait. And then, I work in health care, so I was really nervous about getting pregnant and having a baby during a pandemic. But, it turned out really good. Other than, like, the sleepless nights.... he was born five weeks ago. And the birth was really good. I thought it was gonna be a disaster in the hospital because you hear all these horror stories, but we can see the hospital from our house. So we just walked there in the morning. And it went smooth and not complicated.

And there was lots of great stuff. And the nurses were wonderful and they didn't seem understaffed or stressed. It felt like when I had my other kids, and it was nice. So it was really nice, which I was worried that it wouldn't be. And then I was really worried about just living life during a

pandemic with a newborn. But even though there's like no mask mandate whenever we go places, people are really good. They put masks on and they stay away from him, which is really nice. So, it's hard lifestyle-wise and wellbeing-wise because you don't sleep, there's no sleep and all of that stuff. But really, it's gone so much smoother than I thought it was going to with everything that's been going on. Maybe we didn't have to wait a year, I guess, because we did anyway. And it's been fun for our kids because they get to be home - because I'm off work - so they get to be home and bonding with him, which has been really nice to watch. And we'll get to explore the community more because I'm home during the day and not at work. Normally we're not around during the day, so we've met more people and we've got to do lots of fun things and even just come to the park, so that's very enjoyable. And he's been a really good baby, which is nice. So you know, it was better than I thought it was. I thought it was gonna be really scary.

-From witty, sarcastic, mom, gardener

Neighbourhood friendly fire, community bonding, well knit community

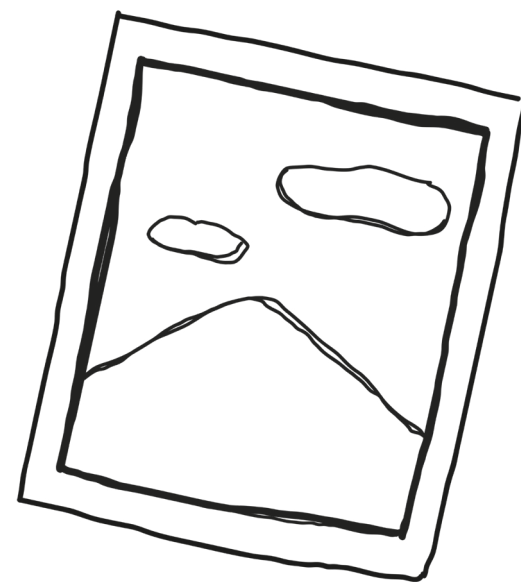
I was notified on social media of a front yard bonfire gathering from a neighbour returning home from the East coast that we know well. So I knew despite the 5 hour drive that we had that evening, I still wanted to prioritize spending some time at the fire with our neighbours. So after work, I got home, packed quickly, waited for my wife and youngest daughter to get home, and when they did the fire had already started. I started to carry out luggage to our minivan and heard the recognizable voice of one of our neighbours (who also is my massage therapist) commenting on our daughter having crossed the street by herself.

That reminded me of a night when we had been chatting with her and our youngest daughter had darted out into traffic, and that same neighbour had grabbed her with lightning quick reflexes before my wife or I thought to. I packed my things in the van, and went over to the fire, my daughter in tow on her balance bike, and joined the group. Three other kids and their mom had just returned from Germany and were roasting marshmallows. And in all there were about 10 adults. My daughter was gliding up and down the street on her balance bike. Each time she'd glide up to the crowd, one of our friends would lead a cheer, getting everyone to give her a thumbs up.

The conversation was lively. People were eager to share their stories of recent events, inserting little loaded political quips, support or criticism of public figures, and current events. It was clearly catching up. Two neighbours approached the crowd, who had hosted a front yard concert 2 nights prior, and were now headed to a community

league for drinks. This got me thinking about public involvement and service, as there was mention of a neighbourhood board. People who were not driving had drinks, and everyone was light and jovial, and happy to spend time with each other. They knew we had to hit the road, so we reluctantly said our farewells, headed to the van, and started to buckle in our child. As we were doing that, the neighbours all lined up down the street, and started to form a queen-waving procession. The buckling of our child delayed the exit, and heckling ensued. And when we finally drove away, there were fond farewells and cheers of affection. Leaving that scene, it's a comfort to know that despite enduring repeated property crimes, people we know and care about know that we're away and look out for us and our things. It's also nice to know that separation through the pandemic has just made us further interested in each other.

-From resourceful, like to laugh/be entertained, charitable, loving



The breakup

It was about 4 months after we bought the house. It happened after about a year of things being difficult between us. We tried having an open relationship and it didn't work super well. It initially worked, but then he met somebody that I didn't really get along with. So, the last year of our relationship was really bumpy. It was a struggle to get what I needed out of the relationship, but also I'd be friends with this person that you were in a relationship with.

It was a part of the year where a lot of the time I was okay, but then sometimes I was really miserable or unhappy. I think I didn't expect it would end in a breakup, but I knew it was going to be a rough period of time if we were to try to make it work and it didn't.

Then, there was a period of time after the breakup where he lived with me in the same house, but he tried to avoid me as much as

possible, and that really sucks because I think I certainly thought that we were going to spend our lives together and now to be around somebody who doesn't want to be around you is really, really difficult. It felt really awkward and uncertain and there was part of me that's like, let's just try to be friends to get through this. And then there was part of me that would get really mad at him. I'm just so angry because he wouldn't like wash dishes after breakfast, or I couldn't do whatever. I just feel like during our relationship that I had lived with were now becoming things that I didn't have to live with anymore and it just pissed me off having to live with them.

Happily, I was able to take a two week vacation at the end of July, so I don't have to spend time with him or spend time in the same house with him. So, that was great he's moved out. A lot of his stuff is still there, but now I'm starting to reorganize the house according to how I want it, I guess. How do you make compromises

in relationships and what do you accept as okay, or how do you split working tasks and whatever? Now, I'm kind of in this position where he's taking some stuff out and I get to clean everything up and able to get it to more where my standards are and know that it's going to stay that way, which is really nice.

And although it's messy, it's my mess, so there's been some good stuff coming out of that from a wellness perspective. There's a sense of being free from the previous year, but also being lonely. Having this house which I can afford is good because I think it would be a huge source of stress for me right now if I couldn't hold onto it and had to sell it and that would just be so down after getting excited about having a house I can afford so I can stay.

It's tempting to restart my life in a friendly city or have one of those quarter life crisis or whatever, I don't know. Just wipe every part of them out of your life and reinvent yourself. Still he is still popping in to pick up his stuff so this weird thing where I still communicate with him trying to organize things and I still get kind of like, "No, I'm going to take the desk, no you can't even have

it because I bought it with my money." I think probably in the last few weeks I was definitely getting the sense it wasn't going to work out. I think there were times I knew and I think I was waiting, weirdly enough, I think I was waiting on him. I told him how I felt and said, "You know I can't do this anymore where you have this relationship with this particular other person so I need you to break up with them if we're going to be together."

And he made that choice to break up with them, but then I think he regretted it. When I knew that he regretted it and that he would have made a different choice if he had it to do it over - that for me, well I don't know how we come back from that. Definitely it sucks being told that they wouldn't pick you.

That was probably the moment where I knew it wasn't going to go well, but I made my decision about what I wouldn't live with. I don't know, it's still really really confusing, but sometimes I feel like this is good for my wellness because I think in partnership, you make a lot of compromises and you accept things that maybe you wouldn't normally accept if you're just on your own, or

whatever, like you would accept of yourself.

And you think this person has different standards and so we have to make it work and so not having to do that anymore and not having to give up on your preferences I think was the biggest positive thing that came out of this.

I've been trying to make it work for so long, and trying to be friends with a person for so long, and I knew it wasn't going to work and just being able to say: I'm done, I can't be friends with this person, I think you need to break up with them. I just can't I can't do this anymore. I think that helped and that felt really good when I finally admitted that I didn't have to keep trying. I never regretted that decision. I don't know if there's going to be like a moment where it was clear and there were a couple of moments, but I'm still in this like... it's still shitty sometimes, but also good sometimes, though it did weird things to my wellness.

-From cook, outdoorsy, crafty, practical, laid back



Long distance relationships suck

I can tell you why I wear this band. My youngest daughter, she was at Children of Stollery. Basically what happened is her mother, during pregnancy, slipped down a set of steps outside of my place. And when she slipped, she did something wrong with her uterine lining. I can't remember what it was. So, by the time my daughter was born three months after this incident, my daughter was three and a half months preemie. She was born in a very toxic environment. So they had to keep her in the hospital for three days.

I spent every single moment of those three days sitting beside her. She was no bigger than my hand. So I was like, Wow. So that is why I wear this band to this day.

Eight years later, I still have the same band on . So yeah, she's also one of the biggest reasons in my life, I changed the way I did. Because before she was born, I was actually traveling around on the streets of Edmonton, bouncing from couch to couch. And I needed stability in my life. And that was my turning point where I needed my stability. So yeah, she's a big incident in my life for sure. And now she lives in Prince George with her mother. And I have almost zero access to her...

-From generous, reliable, functioning, a problem-solver

Small town in the big city

So when I moved here, several years ago...I'll never forget when we first came and looked at the house, because we walked up and down the street waiting for our real estate agent, and this couple was working in their front yard – so we stopped and asked them a few questions, and they said rather abruptly, “Are you going to live here, or are you just going to rent it out?” And we said, “Well, we kind of thought we would live here.” And it just changed the whole tone of how they spoke. And that was several years ago, and now our street has turned into this little jewel. And there are very many single families.

There's a couple of multi-use complexes, and there is one that's yet to be determined whether they'll ever finish it or not. But the neat thing about it is the people that have

moved in, and how we are like a small town in the big city. Our one little block, in particular, from one end of the block to the other, people genuinely care about people on this block. You can see it when, in the evenings, people are out walking their dogs and other neighbours are out on their steps. And the laughter, and the ease with which we all approach each other. How some of the neighbours' children are very young, and they run up and down the sidewalks, and other neighbours yell across the street, and the kids laugh. And we are truly just a little jewel.

And I think that that is one of the things about our neighbourhood is the connectivity that we have, especially on this street. That when you move here, everyone is welcoming, and when you move here, you need to be prepared to be part of a bigger community.

I have had people I work with say that they can't believe some of the things that we do, or how close we are with our neighbours because they don't even know their neighbours that live next door to them. They might grunt at each other

when they're going to their garages, or backing out down their big long driveways, or things like that. But here, we all talk. And we care about each other, and when someone faces a crisis, our neighbours pull together. And— so that's a really— it's a very nice feeling to have.

One example is--well, we had one of our neighbours fall and hurt himself at work. And it was very serious. And he ended up being off work for a very long period of time. And while he was off, he went through a lot of real soul searching moments because it was a pretty serious injury.

And I will never forget: his wife had gone out with him, and they had bought something that was very heavy. And wherever they bought it from, it got loaded into their van. And he wasn't supposed to lift anything. And when they got here, they realised that it would be too, too much. So she phoned one of our neighbours, and the other neighbour phoned me, and in less than 5 minutes we ran out and helped them pack this heavy thing in. And it wasn't even a thought that we would do it. And it's just those little small acts

of kindness that are the things that make this community what it is.

It's the small things like, in the winter, I shovel my neighbour's sidewalk, and I have all the years that I have lived here. I've always shoveled their front sidewalk, just because I'm already out there, and I get up earlier than anyone else in this neighbourhood because of my job. So I just quickly run out and shovel their sidewalk. And sometimes I get a doorbell ring, and I go there, and their kids are standing there with fresh-baked cinnamon buns, or something, and things like that. So it's those kind of little, small things that bring connectivity to a neighbourhood and make you appreciate when you live in a jewel like this.

-From handy, nerdy, outdoorsy, quietly political

We're in this together

Okay, so I had recently been working in healthcare in a rehab setting as an administrative assistant. So, I wasn't directly helping patients, I was scheduling them. Because of the pandemic, some of the resources were needed to be redeployed to help fight the pandemic. So, I was redeployed to an all COVID patient ICU, where all the patients were now instead of being waiting in a waiting area and going with allied health team, they're now being put in isolation rooms. And they had COVID-19 to a such an advanced stage that they were not able to do much in terms of movement or speech, a lot of them were intubated. So, they're being fed through a tube, basically, end stage of life care. So it was quite a shock going from one kind of career to the next so quickly.

That being said, Yeah, there were good days, I got to know a lot of really great people, the staff there, as well as the patients and their family. So there were good days there. My nights I was working part-time at home, or at a big box retailer. So, my days were very different from my nights.

I remember one day in particular, there was a family that had been there for some time watching the mother of their family with end of life care. One day, we knew that she was going to pass away, and there was not much the doctors or nurses could do for her at that stage. And so they decided that they would just kind of let her be... in speaking to the family, they decided to take her off the supports and let her pass away peacefully as they could.

But saying peacefully, it's never something that when someone passes away their family is there for that usually and it's really sad. They scream, they yell, they're mad, they're sad, all those things. So, that was tough to watch, the family get so mad and so sad about their mother passing from the family.

It made me think about how awful it is that this pandemic is still happening. It made me think that there's a lot we can do to stop this from happening to people we know. Wear a mask, all those things, stay six feet apart, sanitize, and get your vaccinations.

So with that in mind, that evening I went to my big box retailer job. And it was a shocking stark contrast to my days, because there are people in my day shift doing everything they could to stop the spread of COVID-19, to fight it. And in my evenings there are people that couldn't be bothered to even put on a mask or stay six feet away from people.

So that was very tough for me some days to watch customers or even staff members that may not care enough to do little tiny things to help fight the pandemic. That was a very stressful time for me. And by no means is COVID-19 over. So it's very difficult to watch some people not take the pandemic as seriously as perhaps they should.

- From professional, free-thinker, kind, thoughtful

Going through tough times

I guess the biggest one is basically, when I started living or staying at the shelter, and now, dealing with this housing provider. Talking to some of the staff here at the community centre, they said, “Well usually, the housing people are pretty good, but the landlord I’m dealing with, it seems to me... like even when I got my income taxes done this year, the person that I talked to said he’s greedy and he’s kicking you when you’re down and I thought, yeah. Cause what’s happening is a few months ago, the Alberta Government, Alberta Works, decided to take away everybody’s core shelter. So all of us, like anybody that’s on welfare lost about \$300 a month.

So, that impacts you, and I thought that probably, that could be more pivotal to my wellbeing than staying in the shelters.

But, I’ve been working very hard to get out of that. And even when I went down, like when I was staying at the Salvation Army, I talked to one of the chaplains one day and he told me that some people, they get into the cycle where they just go from soup kitchen to soup kitchen to eat, and I said, “I don’t want to get into that rut.” Like I want to get out of that.

So, one day, when I was staying at the Salvation Army, they decided to kick me out. They basically just gave me a letter saying, “We’ve assessed your needs, we can’t help you, you have to be out by such and such a date.”

I got all of my stuff out of there. I stayed at the Herb Jamieson for one night, then I stayed at the Hope Mission for a few nights, and then the landlord for the housing, he happened to be there, so I talked to him. He asked me how much I get for benefits and he was like, “Well, if you get there today, we’ll get you a room.” So, I thought, “Okay.” And now, more recently a friend told me about her landlord. It’s a studio 1 bedroom apartment for between 6 and 700 dollars. And I’ve called her about it a few times, I’ve called that landlord twice, left a message. I haven’t heard anything from her. And I’m thinking to myself, “What more can I do?” You know?”

And especially when welfare took away some of my funding... it didn’t help. I even told my landlord, I think it’s affecting my wellbeing, ever since I started staying at the hotel. Most, if not all, of my roommates are addicts. So, I’m dealing with that drama. With their, you know, mental health issues, mental meltdowns, whatever you want to call them. I’ve been dealing with that, and I finally said to my landlord, I said “It’s affecting me. It’s not affecting me in a good way.” And even the one day when I talked to my friend. because she has social work background, and she says, “Yeah, no more

crazy people.” Even one of my neighbours agreed with me that I need a place of my own. I said, “Yeah, a place of my own, where nobody is taking my stuff or stealing my stuff.” Because ever since I’ve been in this house, a few of my roommates have stolen from me. And when I’ve talked to my landlord about it, he just kept saying, “Deal with it; deal with it.” I’m like, “Thanks.”

And then the Saturday of Easter weekend one roommate that happens to be a woman assaulted me and threatened me. So, I called the police about it, I filed charges, but of course she’s still roaming the streets. And the night after she was arrested her friends said, “Well they shouldn’t have arrested her; they should have taken her to the Royal Alex.” And I thought to myself, you know what, the police aren’t an ambulance, they’re not EMTs, they’re not going to take her to the Royal Alex. But he said her mood enhancers weren’t working. I said, what mood enhancers? Cause she even admitted, she’s on antidepressants, but she also drinks alcohol, smokes marijuana, and does crystal meth. And I thought when you’re mixing all of that, you’re not going to be stable, you’re not going to be in control.

- From positive, outgoing, handsome

#gratitude

I basically came to Edmonton about 18 years ago. I came up from a place called Valley View. There was basically nothing going for me there. I needed a change of scenery, so I came up here and basically, it was tough at first, living on the streets and bouncing around from friends and families.

After a while it became a regular thing. I didn't really mind it. I've been living the lifestyle, I kind of lost a lot of friends along the way. The original people that I met aren't here today. It is a rough lifestyle, but surprisingly, I'm still here. It took all these years and so here I am 18 years later.

Last month, I found out on May 15th, I was recently diagnosed with stomach cancer. It took those little those words just to realize, like everybody's not on this Earth for very long, so the choices that they make.

But actually, I don't have regrets about the kind of lifestyle I had, seriously, I met a lot of great people that were on the streets, a lot of faithful friends. And of course you have the other people, the weirdos, nuts, and Crazy Ones.... But yeah, even in rough parts, there are really good people.

And hearing those words from the doctor I find actually, I've got to appreciate the experiences I went through and where I am today. The stupid s*** I've done, which was a lot. Sometimes life just has to give a person a slap in the face and a kickin.

Like, "Come on. You can have fun, but you can't have it all the f***** time. When you're ready to get your s***together, like come on. Open your eyes and see what you got. Make the most of it." I still don't talk to my family that much, but I'm slowly getting there, working up to it, trying to figure out how the hell to say, "How's it been going?"

-From stubborn, smart ass, loyal, observant, energetic, friendly

Central family living in Edmonton

Okay, so it didn't really happen to me, but it's something that I've witnessed. I think that's one of the things about Alberta Avenue: you get the opportunity to witness things that you might not necessarily witness living anywhere else in the city. I think that's just part of being in a central neighbourhood.

We live on a street where you see a lot of foot traffic. Alberta Avenue is very walkable. And we just noticed this one lady that we'd see quite often walking down the street. She always has her head down, and she's just walking. She's not really carrying anything. She's just walking. And on the occasion, if we happen to be close, I would say "Hi."

And you just kind of wonder, or at least I did, why is she walking all the time? She walks quite often. I wonder what's going through her mind, right? And one day, and this would probably go on for months, we'd just see her walking up and down the street several times a day, and one day-- and this lady she was, I think she was of Indigenous descent, and one morning I was taking my son to camp, so we're up pretty early. She happened to be sleeping right on the boulevard right in front of our house. So you know how you have your house, and then the sidewalk, and then the boulevard that technically belongs to the city, right? With all the trees. So she was sleeping there, and she had—I saw 3 bags that she was carrying. And it was during the heatwave where it was pretty hot. It looked like she was sleeping.

We got to kind of walk around her to get to our vehicle, and I just said, “Good morning!” You know, and she was like, “Oh, good morning, good morning!” And my son said, “Good morning,” as well, and then we went into the car, and by the time we got back home she wasn’t there any more. And we haven’t seen her in the area since.

And I was just talking with my husband about her, and he’s like, “Oh yeah,” he was like, “I should show you something.” And then—we have a doorbell camera, so he pulled up this footage in the doorbell camera with her, and we saw her lying there, and somebody had come and taken one of her bags, and just walked off, right? They stole from her while she was sleeping. And oh, I don’t remember, I think this was shortly before we had even seen her. She had like 4 bags, and then now she’s, like—when we saw her she had 3 bags, and we saw somebody had stolen from her, and we haven’t seen her since. So we just kind of came to the conclusion that she probably moved, and those were all of her belongings.

And then it just kind of makes you think about all of the belongings we have, and how we consume so much, and how this person, she was walking, I don’t know where she ended up going, and she was able to fit all of her belongings into these bags, and then have somebody steal from her when she was sleeping, and just not knowing where she is now.

I would often think about what her life is like—you know, especially with what has come up about the residential schools, and just dreadful things that have been happening to the Indigenous community historically. It just gave me a chance to think about what their life might be like. It’s hard—I don’t want to say it’s hard, but you know, being a person of colour and then witnessing something happening to another person of colour.

These things that are happening to that community have been things that have happened to my own community, right? It made me just think harder about my place in the world and the lessons, and what I want to teach to my son about being a person of colour in Edmonton, in our community.

Just being mindful of other people's experiences.

And I guess as far as it affecting my wellbeing, it makes me think of what we could do differently. Just even being able to put words and describe the world, how I kind of navigate the world. I think it's becoming more of a common topic now, especially when you start talking to white people, right? It's in their consciousness now, and I kind of get stuck having to answer some questions, or hear them out as far as, you know, wondering what life is like, and how they can do things differently.

And it's like: it's different, 'cause I don't really know what to say, and that's just been the life that we've lived. And you learn to adapt, and you kind of realise how difficult it can be to adapt to going through this world as a person of colour, and in this community too, in Alberta Avenue.

- From extrovert, social, outgoing, critical thinker/
positive, realtor



Stories generously shared by Alberta Ave
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