To shake or not to shake: Social landscape changes

Pandemic will impact how we relate to one another publicly

BRUCE DEACHMAN

Jim Davies doesn’t like handshakes, and avoids them when possible. The Carleton University professor of cognitive science believes this pandemic may help draw an end to the ritual.

“For a very long time, I have wanted to stop shaking peoples’ hands,” he says, “but it always felt extraordinarily socially awkward to say, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t shake hands.’ There’s a strong cultural force that as soon as you meet someone, you stick out your hand.

“But now, I’m expecting that this will be a great opportunity for me to actually implement it, because now people get it. People understand that handshaking is a vector for disease, where they didn’t really feel it before. I feel that, from now on, I will, without a lot of social cost, be able to say, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t shake hands.’ Handshakes may be just the tip of the iceberg when gauging how our social lives, both personally and professionally, might be changed by COVID-19. Interactions with family, friends and colleagues may take on a fresh new look, as many of the behaviours we are forced or encouraged to adopt during the pandemic could carry over once we’re through the worst of it.

Will sidewalk conversations with neighbours continue at a distance? When will we feel comfortable enough to go to a Bluesfest concert, or will the newly found joy we’ve discovered in jigsaw puzzles and homemade cocktails supplant the need to go out?

David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data and Carleton professor of political management, agrees that changes imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic may alter our social landscape, although he, for one, doesn’t believe the handshake is at risk.

“I think that with acquaintances, business relationships or people we just meet, the question that lingers is are those norms that existed before — like the handshake — going to continue? I don’t see how that goes away. I think it’s so engrained into our culture that it would require a lingering fear about this virus.”

And that, Coletto explains, is the unknowable variable: the length of time before a vaccine or treatment allows people to return to life without fearing COVID-19.

Particularly in relationships with people we’re not that close to, such as business colleagues and other acquaintances, Coletto says “we may see this transition period where there’s this hesitation, and an understanding or re-learning about our social networks’ comfort with those physical types of interactions.”

SEE SOCIALIZING ON A2

Party time: 73 years wed, clear of COVID-19

JOANNE LAUCIUS

Mervyn Tripp is 101. His wife Emily is 97.

On Sunday, their family celebrated two milestones with a party that included a drive-by parade of well-wishers. The first milestone was the couple’s 73rd anniversary. The second was that Emily had been cleared of COVID-19.

Emily was isolated about a month ago after she tested positive. It was one of the few times the couple had been apart. Ever the pragmatist, Mervyn could see the necessity of being separated, but he’s glad they’re back together.

“She was something special,” he said of meeting his fun-loving future wife after he volunteered to drive a group to a church conference in Cornwall. Mervyn was 22, Emily was 18.

Mervyn was a third-generation farmer near Fitzroy Harbour. Emily Davis lived only a short distance away in Woodlawn.

SEE ANNIVERSARY ON A4

Trust the Pros at Fence-All

We’ve been serving Ottawa since 1976

Fences | Decks | Railings | Gates
There are people everywhere, traffic is almost back to normal, and already we're lowering our guard. It's almost like we forgot March. And I want to scream.

COLUMNIST BRITTIE FELLERIN
SEE A7

CONTACT THE CITIZEN
Switchboard: 613-828-9100
Toll-free: 1-800-267-6100

Home Delivery and Subscriptions: 613-596-1950
1-800-267-6100
www.ottawacitizen.com

Announcements@ottawacitizen.com
Obituaries@ottawacitizen.com
 Classifieds@ottawacitizen.com

Newroom: 613-596-3664
City: Drake Fenton, 613-726-5877
Email@postmedia.com

ePaper: epapersupport@ottawacitizen.com or 613-596-1950

Letters to the Editor: letters@ottawacitizen.com

Arts/Life: Alison Mah, 613-596-3666,

Sports: Bill Pierce, 416-947-2270,

Editor: Peter Hum, 613-726-5934,

The Ottawa Citizen is a member of the National Newspaper Council, which is an independent ethical organization established to deal with editorial concerns.

INDEX
BIRTHS, DEATHS NP11
CLASSIFIED NP10
COMICS A11
FINANCIAL POST NP6-7
KEN KEN NP10
NP in the Citizen NP1-5
OPINION A7

Puzzles A10
SPORTS NP9-10
TELEVISION NP12

THE NUMBERS
Ottawa, as of 2 p.m. Saturday
5 New deaths
233 Total deaths
9 New confirmed cases
1,896 Total cases
38 Residents currently hospitalized with COVID-19
20 Ongoing outbreaks in institutions, including hospitals, long-term care homes and retirement homes

Ontario, as of 4 p.m. Saturday
25 New deaths
2,073 Total deaths
460 New confirmed cases
25,500 Total cases

Generally speaking, since only a small fraction of all the people who show COVID-19 symptoms are tested, the number of confirmed cases understates the actual number of infections.

A weekly look back at some offbeat or interesting stories that have appeared in the Citizen over its 175-year history. Today a

THAT WAS THEN

A two-metre separation from others is unlikely to gain traction post-pandemic, suggests David Colette, CEO of Abacus Data.

More digital contacts seen following exposure to apps

SOCIALIZING FROM A2

David Colette

Jim Davies

that on a regular basis,” he notes, “because while it was a good placeholder, it was nowhere near what the live experience would be like.”

New habits are only likely to stick in a post-COVID world, notes Colette, if they’re deemed at least as good as whatever they’re replacing. Flying across the country for a meeting may be replaced by Zoom, for example, but maintaining a six-foot distance while chatting with neighbours is unlikely to gain traction. “I see us fighting the instinct to actually get close to people when we talk to them. I think there are other norms that are becoming distant now, so in a way, we’re distorting ourselves not because we really want to do that, if it makes that conversation easier, but because of the norm now to do so for our safety.”

At the same time, Colette expects the pandemic will accelerate trends already in motion, such as online shopping and alternate forms of dining, while mass entertainment such as concerts and sporting events face a possible double whammy, as our initial reluctance to put ourselves in crowded situations may be exacerbated bywhatever activities we’ve adopted in recent months.

A recent poll by Abacus Data found that more than two-thirds of Canadians believe it will take six months or more after distancing restrictions are lifted before they’ll feel comfortable attending a significant festival or large venue concert.

“Once we are not afraid, we might be comfortable going back to them,” Colette says. “But just because we’re comfortable going back doesn’t mean we haven’t replaced them with something else.”

He wonders, too, if participation in recreational sports, especially those requiring close contact — rugby, hockey or football, say — will suffer. “I think that until there’s treatment, there’s going to be some hesitation. How do you have football, when every play starts with everybody kind of head to head? We’ve been talking about what consumers will feel comfortable doing,” he adds, “but what are players and artists and artists and actors going to feel comfortable doing? It’s hard to say how this will go, and I don’t think any amount of research right now can predict how we’re going to settle back into a normal kind of behaviour.”

How the pandemic plays out, says Davies, will determine to what degree our social lives change.

“Let’s develop a vaccine and this coronavirus in some sense goes away, I wouldn’t be surprised if things went back to normal until there was another scare.”

“No, if there’s a lingering problem, if it hangs on or mutates, or people can get reinfected, then I think there’s a higher probability of long-term change. There might be some proportion of people who just will not go see a play anymore, or go to the movies or a busier restaurant. Like ever again.”

SHE WAS NOT GUILTY

Mrs. Luttrell had been born a free woman. She was not guilty.

Mrs. Luttrell, who had been the subject of much speculation, had been charged with the murder of her husband. She was found guilty by a jury and sentenced to death. She appealed her case, and was found not guilty by a higher court. She was released from prison and returned to her home.

B. Deacon