

Hello Everyone,

When I look out of my front window and see the beautiful snow-covered mountains, it seems so peaceful and that all is right with the world. I have to shake my head to come back to reality – a harsh reality that does not seem real, but it is.

I remember my parents talking about the Great Depression and World War II, about standing in line to get rations of sugar and other food items. My mother had ration stamps she kept as a memory of the harder times. We too are living in a time when we have little control over this pandemic. We hear of more cases and deaths every day. I have stopped watching the news, except once a day just to get the headlines.

We are living under the same uncertainty that our parents and grandparents did, but it is an uncertainty I have never before experienced. The anxiety that we now live every day: worry about friends and family staying well, the fear when going to the supermarket, people losing their jobs, income worries, the emotional health of everyone quarantined and the aftermath yet to come, and the absence of face-to-face social interaction that is necessary for our mental health. Living alone I am thankful for all the media available, such as Skype, Zoom, FaceTime and Messenger. This keeps me in touch with my social world. I cannot imagine what it was like during WWII when all they had was the radio.

It has been more than a month since I had to cancel the March stove-building trip. It was a difficult decision I made fortunately two days before Guatemala closed its doors to North Americans. At that time there were no COVID-19 cases in Guatemala. Two days after they closed their doors, the first case was identified with exposure to 51 others. Today there are 165 cases with five deaths. It has spread from Guatemala City to Antigua, Patzún, Retalhzeu, Xela, and Solalá'.

The fear is it will spread to the rural areas where there is no medical care and the families will be vulnerable to the disease. Large families live in one room, lacking clean water or water at all to wash hands, etc. They have compromised lungs due to open-fire cooking. I am concerned for these families who have little to no resources or means to fight this virus. The President has quarantined everyone until May, schools are closed as well as restaurants, hotels, and stores. I think he has done everything he can as he is a medical doctor. My staff are staying at home, and I am in touch with them a couple of times a week. Until further notice, all our programs are

suspended. It is my hope that the October 2020 trip will go as planned, yet that remains to be seen.

Some things are planned for the future. Of course, all depends on COVID-19. A concert and celebration of our 16 years in Guatemala is scheduled for July 4, featuring a return of the group West of Mabou. Details will come later when our lives return to "normal." Another event is planned, probably for the fall. Again, details to be determined, so please watch for more information.

I just wanted to say to everyone that our prayers are with you and your loved ones. May you all keep well and safe. I know myself in this pandemic it is easy to focus on the negative aspects of this situation. When I look out of my window and see the mountains, I am reminded my cup is half full. I am appreciating the life I have, my family and many friends, where I live, my health, and the joy the work in Guatemala has given me. I hope this is what stays with me when this is over.

God bless and keep well,

Jan Townsend
Founder, Hearts & Hands Foundation