

# Gwendolyn Way Oral History, 2020/07/29

**Interviewee:** Gwendolyn Way

**Interviewer:** Hope Gresser

**Date:** 07/29/2020

**Location (Interviewee):** Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

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**Transcriber:** Sally Velez

**Abstract:** An interview with Gwendolyn "Gwen" Way regarding her experience living in a retirement home during the pandemic. Gwen discusses the changes made by the residence where she lives to prevent an introduction or spread of the virus, as outbreaks in Long Term Care facilities have been common in Canada, and how it has effected her life within the home and her relationship with the world outside it. She compares and contrasts this lockdown and pandemic with the 19 months she spend in a sanatorium being treated for tuberculosis (TB) many years ago. The fear of the unknown and desperation at the lack of a firm end date are ideas which Gwen returns to repeatedly.

**Hope Gresser 00:00**

So my name is Hope Gresser. I am a master's students in the public history program at the University of Western Ontario. Today I am in Ottawa, Ontario, and the date is the seventh, sorry the 29th of July 2020. Now, if you could say your name and where you are.

**Gwendolyn Way 00:24**

my name is Gwendolyn Way. I'm, I live at Bridlewood Retirement Residence.

**Hope Gresser 00:31**

You don't need to give the address.

**Gwendolyn Way 00:34**

Oh, okay. Ottawa.

**Hope Gresser 00:37**

Ottawa, right. Okay. So you and I have known each other for probably-

**Gwendolyn Way 00:46**

About four years I'd say.

**Hope Gresser 00:48**

About four years. Yeah. When I-

**Gwendolyn Way 00:49**

Yes.

**Hope Gresser 00:49**

Volunteered at the retirement home.

**Gwendolyn Way 00:53**

Yes.

**Hope Gresser 00:53**

So first question. What do you remember about when all of this started? Do you remember when you first heard about the virus? And what did you think about it?

**Gwendolyn Way 01:08**

I'm not quite sure when I first heard, but I think it would be sometime in February.

**Hope Gresser 01:17**

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way 01:17**

Of this year, when it came on the TV, but I can't remember the date. But I'm sure it was February because we had to. They started shutting us down on March the 11th. Quarantine they can't nobody could come in. So I would say maybe the middle of February, but I'm only guessing.

**Hope Gresser 01:42**

Right. So what did you think about it originally? Did you think it was gonna be a big deal? Or did you think it was-?

**Gwendolyn Way 01:51**

No, no, I thought it was going to be in China. And that it would stay in China.

**Hope Gresser 01:57**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 01:57**

I didn't think it would be over here ever. I got quite a surprise when it was.

**Hope Gresser 02:06**

So when they started shutting you down, how did that go?

**Gwendolyn Way 02:14**

Well, I think we were very surprised because I was out having lunch with my brother. And nothing was said. And when we got back, I went to go in, I went to come home. And the door was cold. We had to go through the front door and all the other doors were closed. So we were surprised. And then they told us, asked us questions as we came through the door. And one of them was have you ever been to China? And I said, Are you out of your mind? But they had to ask this question. And they took our temperature. And that was the beginning of quarantine I guess you could say we couldn't have visitors come in. And that was the surprise. Mm.

**Hope Gresser 03:01**

Mm. So how often did your brother come before all of this started?

**Gwendolyn Way 03:19**

My brother only come once a month. So he was coming on, came on March the 11th and thought he was coming the next month. But as the door was closed, and they told us that we couldn't have visitors.

**Hope Gresser 03:38**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 03:39**

Yeah, but, uh now he's come back it's open, yep.

**Hope Gresser 03:44**

So when they started saying you couldn't have visitors were activities inside the residence the same? Or did they start to (inaudible).

**Gwendolyn Way 03:53**

Oh no, they they had to be stopped. We couldn't all get together in the lounge. So most of the activities were stopped. The entertainers couldn't come in. And we couldn't go in a group or anything. We had to, well, stay in our room most of the time.

**Hope Gresser 03:53**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 04:20**

Because they weren't, they didn't like people together. And then they we had been four the table or six then they had two at a table.

**Hope Gresser 04:33**

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way 04:34**

And so it was quiet, you know. you're in you're room, but we could still have a meal downstairs. Our meal, so that's was wonderful. Because I, I wouldn't have liked it if we-like in our rooms all the time.

**Hope Gresser 04:52**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 04:53**

But an awful lot of activities were stopped, you know?

**Hope Gresser 04:57**

Right. Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 04:58**

Yeah.

**Hope Gresser 04:59**

So did, when they started putting two people at a table, did they have to add more tables or more sittings to the meals?

**Gwendolyn Way 05:06**

No, they took away quite a few tables, eh? Well, no, no, because I mean, they separated the tables. So well, what was? I forgot what we're talking about, about the tables.

**Hope Gresser 05:30**

Um, did you-?

**Gwendolyn Way 05:30**

What did you ask me? I forgot.

**Hope Gresser 05:33**

Did they have to have more time for you guys to go downstairs? Or did they just pull the tables apart? And there were more tables?

**Gwendolyn Way 05:42**

Yes, they just put the table apart. And then there were more tables. Yeah.

**Hope Gresser 05:48**

Okay. Did you notice the staff? Was it the same staff the whole way through? Or did people stop working or start working sort of thing during all of this?

**Gwendolyn Way 06:03**

While we had the same staff. And at first, they didn't have the masks son.

**Hope Gresser 06:14**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 06:14**

I can't recall when they had the masks, but it wasn't the first day or something, ya know.

**Hope Gresser 06:20**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 06:22**

Yes. Okay.

**Hope Gresser 06:25**

So next question. How does this compare to any other epidemics, pandemics, or health crises you have lived through or experienced in the past?

**Gwendolyn Way 06:43**

Well, the worst experience I ever had in the past, I think was much worse than this. I had the TB and I had to go into a sanatorium.

**Hope Gresser 06:58**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 06:59**

I was there for about 19 months. And I had pneumothorax, that's sticking a needle between your ribs- worst thing I ever had my life. And I had that for more than a year there. And then I left and had to take it for another year was putting a new pneumothorax, I think, if I'm not mistaken, is putting air somehow, with this needle into your lung that they collapse part of the lung, so it would heal.

**Hope Gresser 07:35**

Wow!

**Gwendolyn Way 07:35**

That's the worst thing that that ever happened to me. This, about the virus was not as half as bad as that.

**Hope Gresser 07:48**

Right, when you were in the sanatorium were the restrictions on what you could do and where you could go and people wearing face masks and things like that, was it worse than this? Or similar?

**Gwendolyn Way 08:05**

Well, it was, it was bad because you were when you first went in, you were in the main pavilion. And you had to stay in bed.

**Hope Gresser 08:15**

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way 08:18**

Because you will really sick. And I had three roommates. They were very nice and some of those people were saying they didn't have TB, but they had TB. But one thing that was better was this, you know something about TB you see.

**Hope Gresser 08:18**

Right. Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 08:42**

And you know, you can get well, I find this virus is rather makes you nervous.

**Hope Gresser 08:50**

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 08:51**

Because you don't know anything about it.

**Hope Gresser 08:54**

Cause I know-

**Gwendolyn Way 08:55**

So in the san we were never nervous about, uh, health because we were there, we knew they were gonna help us get well.

**Hope Gresser 09:05**

Mm. Because I know you and I have talked in the past about the fact that we don't know when all of this is going to end.

**Gwendolyn Way 09:14**

Yeah, that, that is the worst part of this virus. That we don't know really what it is about. I mean, you're breathing and sometimes it may be in your head. You know, makes me nervous? Is if you do have it, does it leave any bad things, you know? Does it leave you with your lungs bad? Or, or your head?

**Hope Gresser 09:38**

Yeah, after effects Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 09:43**

It's the not knowing that makes you nervous.

**Hope Gresser 09:47**

And we're not gonna know for years.

**Gwendolyn Way 09:50**

Oh, I know. but I don't think I'm gonna be around that long. I'm 92. The lord may be calling me!

**Hope Gresser 10:05**

All right. So what does a typical day look like for you now? And how is it different from before everything shut down?

**Gwendolyn Way 10:15**

Like, what is my typical day?

**Hope Gresser 10:18**

Yep.

**Gwendolyn Way 10:19**

Yeah. Well, it's, it's like the- now it's starting to open up. And then we can have the entertainers.

**Hope Gresser 10:30**

Oh! That's good.

**Gwendolyn Way 10:30**

And we can go out. But you know, the some of us are a bit weary. Because where can we go?

**Hope Gresser 10:34**

Thats true.

**Gwendolyn Way 10:34**

You know what I mean?

**Hope Gresser 10:44**

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 10:45**

I don't know what stores are open and what stores aren't open. And so we're kind of, uh, my brother will be coming to see me once a month. But that, you know, they still have to go through all this and ask them questions when they come in and take their temperature and it's getting to be a pain, it really is. But anyway, we have to do it and we realize all of us realize that Bridlewood has to be strict, because we don't want to get the virus.

**Hope Gresser 11:26**

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 11:27**

Yeah. So we may- we don't grumble to the staff. Because the staff has been wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. So we talked among amongst ourselves, but we don't say to the staff that we're fed up, because I'm pretty sure the staff are fed up. Yeah. Okay.

**Hope Gresser 11:49**

Yes. So what are you, what are you doing? I guess you have a lot of free time. What are you doing when you're in your room? When you're not doing the activities that you all usually have?

**Gwendolyn Way 12:00**

Well, I do crossword puzzles. I do word research. I'm always on a project of the Bible. I read the Bible every day. And I've wanted- I'm getting on so I have to do things with the Bible now while I'm around. And I have a- usually have a project, I have one now. I have gone through my concordance and taking

the people's names that I'm interested in the Bible, and who's- who has what sons and daughters and all this.

**Hope Gresser 12:45**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 12:45**

I finished the New Testament that I'm on to the Old. And that takes time. And I talk on the phone a lot and I write letters a lot. I keep busy. I keep my head going, you know, mentally.

**Hope Gresser 13:03**

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 13:03**

Read books, oh I read lots of books. Every night at about nine o'clock I start reading a book, much more than before.

**Hope Gresser 13:13**

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way 13:13**

And I watch the TV only at night. So-

**Hope Gresser 13:19**

I think a lot-

**Gwendolyn Way 13:19**

I keep busy

**Hope Gresser 13:21**

Yep.

**Gwendolyn Way 13:23**

Anything else?

**Hope Gresser 13:26**

Yeah, I was just gonna say I think a lot of people are reading books more.

**Gwendolyn Way 13:30**

Yes.

**Hope Gresser 13:31**

I know the answer to this. But, I haven't- I'm gonna ask you. How are you getting supplies right now? How are you getting things that you need from the outside world?

**Gwendolyn Way** 13:42

Your dear mother is doing it for me. So you better say, you better just say, Well, I don't know, you can say your mother's name? Carol.

**Hope Gresser** 13:54

Yeah, you can say Carol.

**Gwendolyn Way** 13:56

Yeah, she, she does it thank goodness. Because I don't know what we'd do without her.

**Hope Gresser** 14:03

How are-

**Gwendolyn Way** 14:03

So she gets our groceries.

**Hope Gresser** 14:05

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way** 14:05

My groceries. Well, I don't need many groceries, but I need something at the drugstore or something like that.

**Hope Gresser** 14:13

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way** 14:14

So when she goes shopping for her own, she gets something for me.

**Hope Gresser** 14:19

And how are the other residents doing that? Do you know?

**Gwendolyn Way** 14:23

Well, I think a lot of the other residents have- see, I'm the, there's only about two or three of us here that aren't married.

**Hope Gresser** 14:34

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way** 14:34

And so everybody has children. And the sons and daughters go and get the things for their parents.

**Hope Gresser** 14:44

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way** 14:46

That, that's how, you know? They, they get things and then we have a Tuck Shop, which we didn't have before. And you go once or twice or three times a week and you buy things that you may need and you can tell her if you need something.

**Hope Gresser** 15:03

Oh, okay.

**Gwendolyn Way** 15:04

so everybody, they have their relatives to do that, or their friends.

**Hope Gresser** 15:11

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way** 15:12

Mm.

**Hope Gresser** 15:14

Is there anything you miss?

**Gwendolyn Way** 15:18

Oh, I miss going out in the van. We used to go once a week to do our shopping. And we haven't done that since March the 9th when we were closed. So they haven't used the van yet. So I really miss that. And I also wish they didn't have to wear the mask, they'd be wearing the mask. And I find because I'm hard of hearing, I find, when not so much when they're talking to you. But about other things. But at the table for our lunch and supper when I don't like the first meal that we have the first food, I ask, what else do we have? And some of them mumble.

**Hope Gresser** 16:11

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way** 16:12

And you can't hear what they're saying. My partner, a table partner. She's deaf but not as deaf as I am. And she'll say, Gwen, it's meatloaf, or Gwen, It's chicken, I find that it's very difficult to hear the girls telling you what you have to eat.

**Hope Gresser** 16:38

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way** 16:39

That's one of the bad points because they have the masks on and the talking fast.

**Hope Gresser 16:45**

And do the residents have to wear masks at any point? Or is it just the staff?

**Gwendolyn Way 16:49**

at all, um no. Even when Alan and when my relatives come to see me, they come up to my room and they wear a mask. I don't have to wear a mask. But I have, wear a mask if I went up to the store, just down the down across the way.

**Hope Gresser 17:12**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 17:13**

Yep.

**Hope Gresser 17:16**

So what do you think your friends and family and the other residents are feeling about all of this?

**Gwendolyn Way 17:27**

My friends and relatives. My relatives are very pleased that Bridlewood is so strict.

**Hope Gresser 17:39**

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way 17:40**

That they say it's for us, which it is. Their being very strict. And when they kept the people out, not one of us so far knock on wood have had the virus here. And so they are very pleased. And sometimes I grumble I find the first few months were okay, July-uuuh, because you don't know how long that's going on. But you, you have to say to yourself, well just take it today get through today. If you start worrying about how long this is going on, you're gonna land in nut house. So we, we don't worry about tomorrow, we just get through today.

**Hope Gresser 18:26**

Right. And the other residents? I know you said you're grumbling amongst yourself.

**Gwendolyn Way 18:33**

we talk amongst ourself, we say, well how long is this gonna last? But um, we're all pleased that Bridlewood is strict because if they weren't strict we might, we might get the virus we don't want the virus. So there. We can take- we can I will take it if we take it one day at a time. And it's best that we talk to each other. Yeah, when

**Hope Gresser 19:05**

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way 19:05**

Because once you speak to each other, you feel better, I think.

**Hope Gresser** 19:09

Yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way** 19:09

We don't, we don't discuss it with the staff. Because the staff are doing their very best to, to help us. So we don't want them to know where I've been discouraged sometimes. But I'm taking it one day at a time. And when it's over, it's over.

**Hope Gresser** 19:29

Yeah, yeah.

**Gwendolyn Way** 19:30

But boy, it, it gets on your nerves at times.

**Hope Gresser** 19:35

Mhm. If you were writing a book about this point in time, about the pandemic, what would you include?

**Gwendolyn Way** 19:51

About the virus? Or what we're doing?

**Hope Gresser** 19:55

About how you're doing.

**Gwendolyn Way** 19:58

How we're doing. Eh...

**Hope Gresser** 20:01

Or about how the virus is affecting other people.

**Gwendolyn Way** 20:06

Well, I think it's affecting us all. But we know that it's for our own good.

**Hope Gresser** 20:17

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way** 20:17

So we just kind of accept it, but we'd feel better if we knew how long which of course we don't. But I think we've kind of got used to it if you know what I mean. By five months, we know, you know?

**Hope Gresser** 20:25

Mhm. Yes.

**Gwendolyn Way 20:36**

But, but, you know, we just, we just carry on. And now the entertainers are back. So that's once a week. So that keeps us busy and also, they have the exercises now and all that.

**Hope Gresser 20:55**

Oh good.

**Gwendolyn Way 20:55**

But everything, you have to mark everything down, like, if you're going to exercise, you have to put your name, they have to know how many are coming to the exercises, and to the other things, so they're opening up very slowly.

**Hope Gresser 21:13**

Well thats good. What sort of entertainers have you, have you had any so far?

**Gwendolyn Way 21:18**

Yes, we've had three. We had one yesterday, but I had the runs so I couldn't go, he's Welsh and he's a wonderful singer. And we had Arleen Crinn last week, no, two weeks ago, I think she's very good. And then the next week we have now every Tuesday, Jimmy, I can't remember his name, he came. And I've missed the see because Alan and Roseanne came one day. And I didn't go to hear Jimmy. And I couldn't go because I had the runs. So I've only seen it once. But I, I, I didn't miss the entertainment at all. Because I was busy in my room.

**Hope Gresser 22:05**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way 22:06**

Uh, you keep busy.

**Hope Gresser 22:07**

Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way 22:08**

I mean, you know, you, you relax and you write letters and all that stuff.

**Hope Gresser 22:17**

So is there anything you'd like to talk about anything you'd like people to know about going through the pandemic?

**Gwendolyn Way 22:30**

Well, I'd like everybody to do what they're supposed to do. And maybe we wouldn't be having this reoccurrence.

**Hope Gresser 22:41**

Right.

**Gwendolyn Way** 22:42

You know, the youngsters I find, are going swimming and they're going to the beach and that they should, they are not paying attention to this, distancing, you know? Then that, and even in the elevator, we're only allowed two, I think if everybody did what they're supposed to do the virus might end sooner or later. But it's not gonna end when you see them in the States on the beach and you see them in Canada on the beach. Everybody is not doing what they're supposed to do. And if they did the virus might stop.

**Hope Gresser** 22:57

Mhm. Mhm.

**Gwendolyn Way** 23:05

What do you think?

**Hope Gresser** 23:34

I think that it would still be happening, but it would be happening a lot less.

**Gwendolyn Way** 23:40

Yes, that's what I'm-

**Hope Gresser** 23:41

And we might be able to get it under control for sure.

**Gwendolyn Way** 23:45

Yes, yes. Yeah. So we'll have to wait and see.

**Hope Gresser** 23:50

Yep only time will tell as they say.

**Gwendolyn Way** 23:57

Yeah.

**Hope Gresser** 23:58

All right. Well, that's all the questions. I have, Gwen.

**Gwendolyn Way** 24:02

Oh, well, gosh, that wasn't bad.

**Hope Gresser** 24:05

No, it went very fast.

**Gwendolyn Way** 24:08

Yeah, and my gosh, you have to send our stuff out all the time?

**Hope Gresser** 24:15

Yep.

**Gwendolyn Way** 24:15

Anytime you have somebody attached to?

**Hope Gresser** 24:18

Yep.

**Gwendolyn Way** 24:19

oh my golly. That's keeping your busy. Well, that was very interesting.