

Transcript of Interview with Carol De Rose by Angelica Ramos

Interviewee: Carol de Rose

Interviewer: Angelica De Rose

Date: 06/14/2023

Location (Interviewee): Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Abstract: In this interview, Carol De Rose discusses a variety of topics regarding COVID-19, including how her day to day life was affected in the onset of the pandemic in 2020 and then describes how this has changed three years later in 2023. She also shares her experience with being a federal government employee and a mother during the pandemic. At the end of the interview, Carol describes what she hopes the future will look like in a post-pandemic world and talks about what she wants historians to learn about from the experiences of those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Angelica Ramos 00:04

Hello.

Carol De Rose 00:06

Hi.

Angelica Ramos 00:06

Could you please start by telling me your full name, the date, the time and your location?

Carol De Rose 00:12

It is 4:36. I can never do things in order. My name is Carol De Rose. I am in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Did I miss anything? Date. June 14, 2023.

Angelica Ramos 00:28

Perfect. And do you consent to having this interview recorded, digitally uploaded and publicly released under Creative Commons License Attribution Noncommercial Sharealike?

Carol De Rose 00:42

Absolutely.

Angelica Ramos 00:45

Can I just start by asking you to introduce yourself to anyone who might find themselves listening to this? What would you want them to know about you?

Carol De Rose 00:52

Woah... I was thinking about that before the interview. It's just like which of my adjectives do I give? Um, me it's not an issue of pronouns. It's an issue of adjectives. So I am an ageing white cis female. Uh, feminist, bisexual, currently employed with the federal government, woman. [laughs] I'm a recovering alcoholic. I've been sober for... oof, getting close to 30 years. I'm an ex-smoker and so, so grateful for that. Ex-cat owner. I no longer have any pets or plants because it's enough trouble looking after me. I am disabled. I have mobility issues due to osteoarthritis and other conditions not yet diagnosed because no doctors really seem to care about chronic pain they don't understand. Yeah, I think that's probably enough.

Angelica Ramos 02:10

Would you tell me a bit about your day to day and what that was looking like in a pre-pandemic world?

Carol De Rose 02:18

Sure, In the pre-pandemic world, I would commute to and from work daily, during the week it is... oof, probably on a good day, I spend about an hour and a half in transit. I take public transit, and the public transit in this city is not grand. They put in light rail, which was supposed to solve all of that, and in fact, did a really bad job with it, so... When I got to work, I would open my computer as one does and hit the ground running. I work for the federal government, Department of Health. And I work in a directorate that, at that time, was working in regulatory review reform. Shortly into the pandemic, that changed, and they did a reorg, so we're now doing vaccines, which made things very, very busy during the pandemic. I'm an EA for a director in the federal government. He is now actually, before the pandemic, it was a she. She was very busy. And I really liked working with her. She was a good boss. But you know, it's really hard for me to explain what an EA does. Like I handle calendars, I answer questions, I answer a million questions every day about government processes and rules and regulations, and this is internally. This isn't externally with the public. This is just telling people who work for the government what they need to do to get what they want or to get something done. That's about it. Usually, by the time I got home, I was so tired, I kind of collapsed on the couch and either watched TV or read. I was a voracious reader pre-pandemic. It's one of the things I lost. Talk to friends. Go to 12-step meetings once or twice a week. And other than that, I live a very quiet life. Live then and still do.

Angelica Ramos 04:44

Would you tell me a little bit about your experiences with health and healthcare infrastructure before the

Carol De Rose 04:51

Let's see... pre-pandemic... The health care system in- in Canada is what people like to refer to as socialized, which means it's paid for through our taxes rather than directly. And this means that it's available to everyone, roughly equally. I mean, if you have enough money, you can sidestep that and go private clinics and stuff, but I have never had that kind of money, never will. And so I mean, I had a family doctor off and on. There's a family doctor shortage right now in my province, but I think across Canada, it's not very lucrative. And it's a very expensive education. I had a psychiatrist; that changed

during the pandemic. I saw him roughly three times- three, four times a year just to evaluate if my meds were working. I missed that adjective. I'm mentally ill. [laughs] Um... nothing much else. I mean I don't actually- despite all of the sort of medical stuff that I deal with, most of it is largely under control, either with medication or therapy, and so I don't go to doctors very often. I have had two hip replacements, that's almost 15 years back. And in the later era of the pandemic, finally got my right knee replaced. Left knee is in waiting.

Angelica Ramos 06:42

Do you remember when you first heard about the pandemic?

Carol De Rose 06:46

I do. I think we started hearing about it at Health Canada in the winter, so it's 2019, 2020. Some of the people I work with are MDS. Some of them are reviewers at that time- at that time, were reviewers who were working and evaluating clinical trials and whether they were safe and reasonable to go forward. So there was some talk about it. We weren't calling it a pandemic yet. We were just calling it the virus. One of the doctors that I worked with was quite dismissive. He's not really anything. But my director, who is not a medical professional, was watching, I guess, the political stuff more carefully and seeing that something was up. So by, I would say late February, she was already talking about the possibility that we might get sent home and not be allowed to come back and forth to the office. She at that time, didn't think it would be very long. But she was definitely preparing to deal with that and help her employees get through it. So I don't watch a lot of news. It's one of the things I do to protect my mental health. So I wasn't getting it that way. I was getting it more through just sort of random chat at work.

Angelica Ramos 08:28

Tell me a story about your life during the pandemic. What was your day to day looking like then?

Carol De Rose 08:36

I think in the early days after we got sent home, I was in this euphoric state of getting to sleep longer and not have to commute. I was getting roughly three hours a day extra. It just- it felt amazing. I got interested in cooking, many of us did in the early days. Work was odd because I- how to put this? People in my area- so basically, administration had never been allowed to telework, and they would, No, you couldn't possibly do your job, unless you're here to run around and get things for people. So there was some adjustment there. But mostly, it was infrastructure that was the issue because the government was not prepared to have all of us working from home. So they did funny things like, you know, you can only log into the network or in through the VPN during certain hours of the day, and they prioritize what our levels of responsibility were and who could do what when. Because I worked for a director, I could go in pretty much all day. But that was not the situation with everyone. Um, other than the- the not commuting, and initially, my life didn't change a whole lot. I do- I don't drive. So I have a friend I've been grocery shopping with for years. She comes to pick me up and we go off to the stores, and she brings me home. So I don't have to do that on the bus. And so that didn't change much. We weren't

wearing masks yet. My eldest progeny, at some point fairly early on, started to get very, very worried and sent me some homemade masks, which were absolutely frickin' gorgeous. So I was styling for a while in those. But otherwise, I was not paying a lot of attention to the pandemic other than what I was hearing from work. And what I was hearing from work was that it was far more serious than anyone had initially thought and that it would- it would be a little bit more than two weeks that we were working from home. [coughs] Sorry. So I started to get comfortable with that. And I am an introvert, so not going out into the world is not a hardship for me. I have friends who did not find it so. But I'm quite comfy in my little cooking.

Angelica Ramos 11:38

You had mentioned a little earlier that your job role kind of switched a little bit with the pandemic, can you talk a little bit about what that was like?

Carol De Rose 11:51

The way we did things changed. Because we- they couldn't send me like running into meetings to chase signatures, which is one of the funny little things that my job entailed. It- what it meant was I had to like text people... [laughs] to annoy them and say, "I've sent you a PDF to sign." Initially, we were all doing the same things, but we had to find different ways to do them. And then we had to find ways that were acceptable to the government, like what kind of a signature is acceptable if we're not talking about a wet signature that is then scanned and turned into a PDF? Why can't I just do it on a PDF? Anyway... [laughs] Government has lots of rules, and it's around accountability. So it makes sense. And it's my job to police some of those rules, so I shouldn't be flippant about it. But the job changed in that I was not in constant personal contact with the people I was working with. The team at that point was about 50 people. And early in the pandemic, I still had another admin working with me with that group. She left on sick leave, and she's not back yet. So I don't know if she's ever coming back. But I've been on my own since- since then. So one of the things that happened was my workload went up because I was now doing two jobs. I tended to work more overtime, which is easy to slide into if one is working from home. It's just like, I don't have to rush to commute home so I can just keep working on this thing. One of my jobs that changed pretty radically is I work with tracking ministerial correspondence that comes in. And that increased exponentially. And I remember that from H1N1. It just went insane. Like people are worried, people are angry, people are scared, people want to know, and there's so much that we can't tell them because it's not happened yet. So it's a lot of again, chasing very, very busy subject matter experts to say, "We have this question. Can you help me answer it?" And then running it up the chain of command for approvals, it coming back down. "No, no, no. You can't say that. It's not real." It's like, you know, it's too real, and that's why we can't say it. That's- that's a common complaint for any of us who... [audio muffles] it gets up to the political level, and they're like, "Woo, we can't promise anything." Okay. So things go back and forth, back and forth and back and forth. And when you're already talking about it in increased volume, it is mind boggling. I was talking to somebody at work today and said- referred to ministerial correspondence as the albatross around my neck because we cannot keep up. And at this point, I'm not sure if that's going to change. I bumped in- I was in the office yesterday and

bumped into one of our subject matter experts. And she was saying that she finds it really disheartening because there is so much distrust of the government and of science at this point that she doesn't even know how to answer some of the- some of the things that come in because they're basically just spouting stuff they've heard on YouTube. And like, how do you discount that? How do you argue them out of that if they're not willing to look at... you know, science? [laughs] So- so, I mean, my- my work in some ways, went up with the pandemic, but my time seemed freer when I wasn't at work. Maybe that's the easiest way to put that.

Angelica Ramos 16:19

Can you tell me about any new hobbies that you kind of picked up during the pandemic?

Carol De Rose 16:29

Well, um, yeah, sort of- I mean, I mentioned cooking, I'm not a good cook. I'm like, I've never been a cook. I don't really care that much about food. I like food raw, if at all possible, because it's just easy. So I explored that for a bit. But the other thing that happened during the pandemic was that I was scooting back and forth between Ottawa and Calgary, which is one of our western provinces, and because my eldest and their partner had gone to Calgary to live with my sister by choice. And the conversation had basically been, "Aruna has got more space, we're going to her place." [laughs] So they went there and then Kit wanted me there because they were worried like, I'm old. Kit doesn't see me as particularly healthy. And I- and I keep on saying, you know, the health problems I have are not the kind of health problems that are likely to kill me in a hurry. But- but I adore my- my sister around, so she was quite willing to put me up, too, so I went there, and then I had to come back. There was some discussion with my boss at the time about whether I could work remote from Alberta or not, and it's just like, same internet. [laughs] Different time zone. But it's only two hours. So I mean, I worked what are my regular hours, which are 7:30 to 3:30, but in Ottawa, while I was in Calgary, it looked like I was working 9:30 to 5:30. Not a huge difference still within core. But my sister, Aruna, is a professor and has her own house. There are like- there are a lot of things that are different. I rent, she owns. She decorates, I didn't. She has an absolutely freaking gorgeous house. And it seemed when I would come home, I would like, "Might be nice to have a rug on my floor." [laughs] So- so I started doing weird things like that. Just buying stuff, decorating. And I had so much more money because I wasn't frittering it away at coffee shops and restaurants and movie theaters. The other thing I did with my money was I just gave a lot more of it away during the pandemic because I knew that other people were not in the privileged position I was. Like, my job was not threatened. I was able to work from home. I didn't have to deal with constantly commuting and worrying about getting sick. Yeah, so cooking and actually feathering my nest when I was home, were things that I did. Another change was though, that I stopped being able to read. I've been a reader my whole life, voracious. And I just couldn't concentrate. It was- it was like my brain was done, it was full. And I would start something and think, "Oh, this is great." And then I'd get three or four pages in, and my brain would wander off somewhere. And I still haven't gone back to reading. I did do most of my reading, actually, pre-pandemic on the bus with the train just because I

spent so much of my life there. So I thought that was part of it. But I am now commuting again, at least part of the weekend. Not happening yet. So I missed that.

Angelica Ramos 20:43

I'm curious, beyond COVID-19, in particular, what have been some of the most significant issues on your mind over the last few years?

Carol De Rose 20:54

Woah. Rise of fascism is high on my list. It's really hard to watch how the right wing has gotten further and further right, and how they are further and further emboldened. And it's something that Canadians tend to go, "Oh, well, that happens in America." And it's no, it's happening here, exactly the same. It's happening worldwide. And I think it's going to get worse. I'm- I'm very concerned for some of my friends in the US, but I'm also concerned for friends here because it seems to me that when times are hard, people look for someone or something to blame. And anyone who's different is fair game for that. So that's- that's probably the thing that's- that's highest, I mean, yes, climate change, absolutely. Let's do something. Why are we still wittering about plastic bags? Like could we talk about the packaging and stop telling me to recycle. Could you get the people who do the packaging and make the packaging, who use it, who sell it to stop and do something else? That stuff bugs me a lot. Yeah, that, racial injustice... [laughs] the usual. I am a- yeah, I'm a bleeding heart, always have been. I'm not sure I would describe myself as a social justice warrior because I don't feel like a warrior, more of a worrier.

Angelica Ramos 22:50

What does the word, 'health' mean to you?

Carol De Rose 23:03

It always takes me back to Latin class. The word is 'sani' I think, which encompasses all kinds of health, like mental health and- and physical health. I think, for me, health is being able to live your life in the way that you want to live it and so like- like we all have challenges. But I just hate when my mobility issues start making my decisions for me. Like I can't go out because I can't walk today. I have a friend I go on dog walks with, and she's like, "Is your leg any better?" It's like, "No, honey, it's been weeks like, it's not going to spontaneously get better." I mean, it's certainly about our bodies operating as bodies are supposed to, but I think it's beyond that. It's about being able to be embodied in the world and get around and do what you need to do. I'm not very good at asking for help, so it really bugs me when I need help. So I don't consider myself healthy in those moments. But it, as I said, like, my eldest doesn't think of me as healthy, and I generally think I am because I don't get sick very often. I caught COVID this April, first time, only time so far. And I think part of that is a robust immune system. Also, I didn't have to go out in public much. And I took my vaccinations and, and, and, and like, all the precautions they required. But I just don't get sick very often. And yes, I have chronic conditions. So what? I'm 67 years old, of course, I have chronic condition. So yeah, I think I won't- I won't think of myself as healthy once I start needing help with sort of everyday activities. And that's really how they measure them. Like any

of the times I've had joint replacement, I always, because it's a teaching hospital, I always get these periodic surveys like, are you able to do this now? Can you do this? And that one always makes me laugh because like, can you run for a bus? No, I cannot. And I couldn't before the hip replacement, and I can't now because I have a knee that still needs replaced. After that, maybe. We'll see.

Angelica Ramos 25:58

Can you talk a little bit about what it was like when you found out you had COVID and what that experience was like so far into kind of the shocking time period where COVID was perhaps a lot scarier than maybe it is now?

Carol De Rose 26:19

Well, I mean, that's- that's the thing. It isn't that scary anymore. And I have been vaccinated. So mostly, I was just pissed. [laughs] I was on strike when I tested positive for COVID. And it was like, "Damn, there's no strike- there's no like sick pay when you're on strike. If you don't show up at the line, you don't get paid." So I missed three days at the strike over- and like with a weekend in between, before I tested negative. But yeah, I wasn't particularly scared that I had it; I was just mad. Just like, "You made me go back to the office. You made me..." [laughs] Because I'm pretty sure I caught it at the office, not- not on the strike line. Just in terms of the timing and how long it takes the virus to work its way into being visible. I do feel a bit like I've fallen off some kind of pedestal or I've lost my award for not catching COVID. I don't think there are many of us around who have gone the three years without getting it once. Many people have had it multiple times. So- and I'm lucky. I did feel lucky that it was such a mild case. And I felt lucky that I didn't catch it earlier when it was more virulent.

Angelica Ramos 27:45

Going back a little bit to the topic of health, what are some things you would like for your own health and the health of those around you? And how do you think that could be attained?

Carol De Rose 28:04

Well, we couldn't... we could get the New Democrats in power instead of the conservatives. It's- I think it's probably the same kind of schism as it is in the US in that, you know, right wing thinks that nobody should get a free ride, and left wing thinks we should all be equal and get opportunities to get the care we need. So here, conservative governments have been chipping away at socialized health care for some time. I would like to be able to make an appointment with my doctor and see them while I'm still sick, if I'm sick, rather than three weeks later. It's like I don't need to see you anymore. I'm better now. And I would like to know that the family doctor I have now I will probably have for at least two or three years. I have seen a real decay in terms of continuity of care, especially for those of us who have different health problems and have like specialists here and there who are dealing with bits of our health. But that's where the GP comes in for me. It's like, that's the person who should see the whole person and how it all works and can say, "Yes, well, that's really great, but that doctor gave you this, that it's interacting with that." Pharmacists often catch it but not always. I would like to see mental health funded

properly. I would like to be able to go to a psychologist without worrying about whether I can afford the next session. And again, I'm in a place of privilege right now. I've got a good job. I've got benefits, but most of my life I was not. And it's one of the reasons it took me so long to get well, to get sober, and to get my depression sorted out, and then to start working on the trauma issues. [short pause] I can't hear you.

Angelica Ramos 30:22

What does the word, 'safety,' mean to you?

Carol De Rose 30:28

That's a loaded question for a woman. [laughs] I would like to be able to go out on the street and not worry about anything, go from here to there, feel like I don't have to look over my shoulder. Also around financial security, it's hard to feel safe when you don't know where the next meal is coming from, or if you can pay your rent. Part of the time when I was raising my kids on my own, I was on welfare, social assistance. And then later they put me on disability, which I think gave me a princely \$200 a month more. None of it was livable. There were just things my kids never got because of that. And I felt that they were unfairly penalized for my disability as well because there came a point when they were teenagers that if they had gotten full time jobs or part time jobs after school to start saving for university, that money would have been clawed back from our check. So... and I took that, went to a tribunal. I lost, of course, because it's in the legislation, but I thought it was worth raising. Like, why is it my children's responsibility to support me and not be able to save for their future? Like, if you want people to get off of social assistance, you have to make it less hard to get off social assistance. Because when I did, I had nothing. I had- I had nothing. I had no benefit. I was working casual for the government the first few years. I had no vacation. I had- I lost my subsidized housing because I was making too much money. That didn't feel safe, that felt terrifying. And I would love to see something like just a guaranteed income for everybody and then spread it around, throw it into health care, start doing really useful things about climate change, like let's- we can't fuss around. We've known about this for over 50 years. I don't feel safe with that. I spent a lot of time paying attention to how the weather has changed, how the seasons have changed, how just the- the plants and animals have changed in my life, and it's alarming. I'm really, in some ways, very grateful that neither of my kids have children. So I can worry about, you know, one generation not more than that. It's selfish, but there's a limit to how much my- my emotions and brain can handle.

Angelica Ramos 33:49

Can you tell me a story about motherhood during the pandemic? Or have your relationship with your children changed because of the pandemic?

Carol De Rose 34:01

Yeah, I would say it changed because of the pandemic. Like I said, I was- I was flying back and forth to Calgary, and I hadn't lived with anyone for a very long time, and suddenly, I was in this house with my

sister and my kid and their partner, who I didn't know very well. All of us were working full time jobs remotely. And I got to live with my kid as an adult. Like when- when Kit left for university at 18, 19, things were not great. And Kit left, you know, "I will never come back and live with you. Never again." And justified like, there were reasons to be pissed with me. And our relationship has changed a lot since then, pre-pandemic, but we hadn't actually lived together since then. Like, they would come and visit, stay a few days, most of the time be off visiting friends. So, we got to spend that enormously important day to day time, and it was one of the things I missed when Kit moved out and later when their brother, Stuart, moved out, was just that day to day. Like, knowing what they're interested in, knowing what they're reading, knowing what they're mad about, knowing how the job is going. So I think I- I felt more actively mothering during the pandemic with my eldest, less with my youngest because he was back here in Ottawa, doing his thing. And he was absolutely unreliable about looking after my apartment. So there was some concern about that because I really wanted someone to be checking on it once or twice a week, just to- it's an apartment building, floods happen like, I've had, I've had a few. I don't know that I felt more distant from him, though, because he and I don't talk as much as my eldest and I do. And when he was living with me, sometimes like, he- I'd be in bed because I had to get up stupid early for work. And he'd come in and pull up a chair in my room and just chat for an hour or so if there was something on his mind. So he did talk to me, but- but it wasn't something that we did much after he moved out. Whereas in Calgary, like we were making joint decisions about food, you know, who was going to trek out to the grocery store with backpack on to buy whatever it was we needed that week and what were the alternatives if we couldn't get what we needed because that was a thing. And it just felt wonderful like once I got over the shock of living with people and actually considering what anyone else might think about a decision that I made to just like fuck off for a walk or... [laughs] Kit would be like, "Where are you going? Are you okay?" Like I just want to get out of the house. "Yes, you can come with me. I'll be fine." Once I got past that, it was just- it was just nice. It was comfortable to- to be living with them again. There was a bit of triangulating going on between the kids. The kids, the unit and my sister and I because they didn't always think that the things she wanted done a certain way were reasonable. And I would think reasonable or not, it's her house. It's a lot of how I operate, well, reasonable or not, it's your house. Like, if it's not really hurting me, why would I care? So- so we would sometimes get into it over really, really petty, stupid stuff. But overall, it worked well. I adore Avi. He's great. He's also a weirdly wonderful cook. So is Aruna, so we were all eating very well. Despite the varied dietary requirements and needs. Aruna is vegetarian. Kit was off and on vegan, keto, vegan and keto, which is insane. I will eat just about anything unless it's super spicy. Avi's from Texas of the loves are super spicy. Aruna is of Indian heritage. She loves it super spicy. So it made- it made for interesting cooking, but I didn't do much of it because they were just so much better at it. So that wasn't any different. Like as a mother there, I didn't do a lot of cooking in the same way that when they were kids, I didn't do a lot of cooking. It's like, "Here have some cheese." [laughs]

Angelica Ramos 40:06

You touched a little bit about going to the grocery store and already planning on alternatives. I am very curious to know what maybe the short supplies items were because I know in the US, there was this

really weird period of toilet paper shortages, and then we did the hand sanitizer and stuff like that. So can you talk just a tiny bit about that?

Carol De Rose 40:32

Yeah, those were the same here. I think it was clever folks who were paying attention did some panic buying and some stockpiling for resale. It took a while for the stores to start putting limits on how much you could buy those- those items. But for a long time, they just were in very short supplies is hand sanitizer, not at all. So we were looking at things like, how do you make your own sanitizer? What is the proper proportion of alcohol that it actually kills the germs and doesn't just sort of scoot over the top of them? Flour was in short supply, yeast, because a bunch of us wanted to like, bake our own bread. I don't know why; it felt like the pioneer days. So anybody who scored, you know, flour or yeast would just crow about it online. "I got flour today." What else? Different kinds of cereal went into short supply. And I know in Alberta, they had several outbreaks in meat processing plants, so that would affect meat supply. Beef, usually, I think it was mostly beef. So it would- it would vary from week to week. Early days, definitely toilet paper, sanitizer, and then flour and yeast probably for a good two years. And other things, it was like there's something here that's almost what I'm used to like, it's not the brand that I'm used to. We're horrifically spoiled, I think, in North America in that we have all of this brand choice. So you go into like, there's the ketchup aisle, the salad dressing aisle. And it's like, "Why can't I find vinegar?" Because people were buying it to clean, because they couldn't get the regular cleaning products. What else? Often on, eggs, milk, and some of that was transitted- transportation issues, I think. But it was just- there were a lot of people who were sick, so it really messed up supply chains, like something would be made, but they couldn't get the paper to package it in, like that was one of the issues with the flour. And there was something about packaging with the yeast as well. It's like, the yeast plant is working just fine, but they can't package it and ship it out. Some stores here did creative things like, they would have the giant bags of flour, and they'd repackage in smaller amounts. But you just- you just knew that if you went to the store, there'd be something that you wanted that wouldn't be there. And think about, "Will this do?" So you know, it's the age of cell phones, so we would just text back and forth. "So I can't find this thing you asked for. Is it because I am not seeing it, because I'm not familiar with the store? Here's a picture of the aisle." [laughs] So I found that in some ways, communication went up during the pandemic because people were sharing that kind of information as like, "Hey, this store has flour, go. I got eggs today at this store. If you get there quick, you might find some." It-

Angelica Ramos 44:29

Would you-

Carol De Rose 44:29

-was just-

Angelica Ramos 44:30

Sorry.

Carol De Rose 44:30

[unintelligible] ...you know?

Angelica Ramos 44:30

Would you be willing to share some of the ways you've been taking care of yourself during COVID?

Carol De Rose 44:38

Well, as I said, I'm really good at isolating. [laughs] So- so there's that. I am not very good at reaching out. I'm what is referred to in addiction circles as the 'lost child.' So I'm used to being sort of invisible. And deliriously happy when somebody notices me, reaches out, whatever, and I can respond but not very good at reaching out myself. There's a lot of... would be interested. [laughs] So I think I got better at that during the pandemic because there wasn't the casual contact. Like nothing was casual during the pandemic. It just seemed like everything had to be planned and thought about. So I think, you know, for me, that was an improvement. I got better at reaching out, seeing how someone else is doing instead of just not. I think that was good for me. I think it was good for my relationships. I am working very hard to continue that. I have a few friends who've gotten quite ill, nothing to do with COVID, just aging stuff. And I am better about checking in and that- and because of what I started to practice during the pandemic, which I think makes me a better friend. Other than that, I, you know, I work for Health Canada, I followed public health recommendations. With regard to the pandemic, I ate a whole lot better at Aruna's than I would ever live at- eat at home because it was just better food. And she's vegetarian, she cares more about that. And some of that has carried over at home. I... I built some habits when I was there. But otherwise, I'm a ageing pretty self-centered person with several conditions. So there are things I have just had to learn to do to look after myself, physically. And I was working with a wonderful therapist who, we early on moved to, I think, Skype during the pandemic. So even when I was in Calgary, I could meet with him. And he's been really, really good about reinforcing how to set boundaries that will protect me emotionally, and ultimately protect relationships because if you're not setting boundaries, you're building resentments, or at least I do. So there's that. I learned to do things like turn off the news. Because it's just- it was too much. It was- it was too much. It was... And I kept thinking, you know, "You're such a coward because these people are living it, and you're just hearing about it, how can you not listen?" But the truth was that listening and getting distraught wasn't going to help them. Understanding that it was real would perhaps help because it would change my behavior and my attitudes but- but not inflicting further trauma on myself. So probably, you know, just- just what I had been doing but more of it and more mindfully.

Angelica Ramos 48:54

What has the word, 'pandemic,' come to mean to you?

Carol De Rose 49:00

Ministerial correspondence. [laughs] We didn't call it, 'the pandemic,' a lot of the time. We just called it the plague. Because it did feel that way. I mean, I just the imagery from the Black Death kept coming up, and there was a reason for that because people were dying in droves. And doctors were not able to help. For the longest time, they didn't have treatments that worked. There was really very little they could do. I think it probably intensified the meaning because we first started talking about pandemics during H1N1. And, as I said, I was working for health then, too. And- but it didn't last that long. And I think it was after H1N1 or- or just before, there was SARS. And again, it was limited kind of thing. I don't think it was ever actually declared a pandemic, although it was a public health emergency here. So I got more of a sense of how it can go global and how much damage it can do beyond just killing people. And, yes, it killed people. But it also disrupted supply chains. It also broke families. It also made for shortages of workers in certain industries. It also killed businesses because you know, people weren't allowed to go out. Businesses closed. I remember going through Aruna's neighborhood and just seeing so many businesses that had been thriving for 20 years, and they were boarded up like, we are gone. And it happened here, too. I think it happened pretty much anywhere. So it's- it's not just a health crisis. It's a societal crisis, and it's global.

Angelica Ramos 51:30

What are your feelings about the immediate future?

Carol De Rose 51:33

I want to retire. [laughs] Think you probably mean bigger than that. I am oddly cautiously optimistic. I keep hoping people will come to their senses and stop watching YouTube videos by yahoos. I really want education to get better. So that critical thinking is again, being taught. Is that going to happen? I don't know. Immediate future, the climate probably won't kill us this year. It'll kill some people and many, many animals with the forest fires up here being worse this year than they have been ever. And this is across Canada. I have a very dear friend who's going, you know, "There will be generations of animals that are lost." And she's right. She's right. Their- their habitat is gone. They're either going to die in the fires, fleeing the fires, or because they don't have a habitat after the fires. And that matters. It isn't just people on this planet. I think the planet would do just fine if we all died. It's not going to do great if the rest go. So immediate future, cautiously optimistic, but generally, I'm a depressive, so I see a lot of the hard stuff.

Angelica Ramos 53:28

What are your hopes for a more distant future?

Carol De Rose 53:35

It's probably the same. I hope education gets better. I hope there are more left wing parties that are running things for a while. It's always a back and forth here. I think it probably is similar in the US and other democracies. People elect one side, things change a little, then the other side gets in because we get ticked with the first side for something, and- and things get shifted back a little bit. It just feels like

the last 20 years or so, it's been shifting further and further to being more restrictive, more... problematic, less socialist. Yes, we're all commies in Canada. [laughs] I hope it'll get better. I hope I can do something to help make it better in whatever small ways are available to me. But without a very serious shift in thinking. You know, like, you can't eat or drink money. That's not going to do it when the rivers are gone, when the trees are gone, when the bees are gone, we're done. I was watching a thing where a scientist was talking about, you know, we keep talking about finding other planets and terraforming them, and that's- that's a huge, expensive effort and takes tremendous amount of science to accomplish. Why aren't we fixing this place? Like, why aren't we doing that stuff here? Let's terraform Earth and try and get it back to a state of health. And he's right. He's right.

Angelica Ramos 55:46

This is my last question. And it's a bit tricky to word, but I'm going to try my best. What kind of histories would you like the historians of the future to tell about this moment? What kinds of things would you like to make sure history doesn't forget about now?

Carol De Rose 56:14

I don't know that history can ever accurately capture something this big. I am thrilled with this project because it seems to me that people are being interviewed who nobody would care to interview otherwise. You know, what did this do to your life? How was it better or worse? I would like us to learn from that history. I always want us to learn from our history. Because if we don't, we just keep repeating the same crap. I would like them to remember that there were people who were so self centered that they- they bought up all this stuff and tried to make a profit instead of sharing it. There's- there's a thing that we say it's like, when times are tough, don't build bigger fences, build a bigger table. Right? And- and I would like to see that. Did that happen during this pandemic? Here and there. Here and there. There was- there was some stuff going on that was good. I would like history to reflect on the fact that the distrust of science and governments didn't come out of nowhere. That in fact, education needs to be better so people can think for themselves, so that they can identify a specious argument when they hear it or at least investigate it. And it's like I- I'm not a scientist, but I've worked with scientists for over 20 years. And they are dedicated, they care, they work ridiculous hours without overtime. Like, because they care like, we want this to be right. And I'm not sure many people know that. And, you know, the ones I work with are civil servants. People think civil servants up- at least up here. "Civil servants have at cushion, you know, they get paid too much. They don't do anything. They sit around. Lately, they've been sitting around at home, doing nothing." That's like, I'm not watching TV between 7:30 and 3:30. I'm working. I opened my computer, and I might wander out, make a cup of tea, wander back, work on the computer. 2:30 or 3, I think, "Oh my god, I haven't had lunch." I don't know. I don't know how historians will remember this moment, but I hope that it's in more detail, not just broad strokes. Because I remember learning about the Black Plague in very broad strokes, and never stopping to think about what that must have been like until I heard a piece by someone very close to me. Who talked about what it must have been like to be there and all you smell is death, and the person knew what death smelled like because they had found their father's dead body. That suddenly made it much more real to me. And

that brought home those horrible images we had from Italy, sort of mid-2020 when things were just gone, like they couldn't keep up, they couldn't help anyone get a sense of not just the desperation, but how fragile the infrastructure is and do something to shore that up maybe. I mean historians don't shore things up, but if we don't learn from them, we won't know what we need to do. I think that's it.

Angelica Ramos 1:00:53

Those are all the questions that I know how to ask. But I did want to just open up some space. If there's anything that you wanted to share about your experience with COVID or the last three years, please take some time to do so now.

Carol De Rose 1:01:12

I think I've said most of it. I mean, I was incredibly privileged and very lucky and- and knew it. So I also saw people who weren't. And I was so, so grateful for those people who were showing up at, you know, shitty jobs for shitty pay and doing it so that there was something on the grocery shelves. And there was, you know, the grocery store was open so we could go in, only so many at a time. Are you masked? Are you vaccinated? [laughs] But yeah, it, for me, was a relatively easy go, I think. But I'm acutely aware that it wasn't for variant people. And because of that, feel responsible for using my privilege to do something. So I upped my food bank donations. I upped my emergency stuff. I went to live with my sister for a few months. And then for a few months more. And that, you know, those were the gifts. There's always a gift in everything. The gift isn't always ours. But there's always a gift. So I'm hoping that we'll figure out what the gift of this pandemic was in a larger sense, not just for me, and- and do something with it.

Angelica Ramos 1:03:11

I wanted to thank you so much for your time and for the openness and the honesty of your answers. Mostly just your time in all honesty. It was such a pleasure talking to you.

Carol De Rose 1:03:23

Thank you so much.