

President's Report 2020

Hello everyone. Thank you all for calling in. When I first started writing this, I was going to promise that I wouldn't use any cliché phrases. That's a promise I don't think I can keep. So, if you like, feel free to make a game of it and keep tally of how many I use.

Let's start at the beginning, shall we? Last September we had reported the upgrade of the computers for recording. We also switched recording programs from Plectalk to Obi. Not long after that, there was almost a month of disruption due to construction and renovations in the hallways of 27 Carlton Street. The work continued and PAL endured.

October to December went by in a flash. It was business as usual, really. Our last big in-person event was the White Cane Week Expo in February where Susan, Marguerite and Danielle represented PAL. It was a good event by all accounts. Some old clients reconnected and a few potential clients also said hello.

Then COVID happened. At first it was just a creeping cloud in the distance and then it was a thunderstorm. The office closed a little ahead of the lockdown and then everything changed. There was more than a little concern from staff, volunteers and board alike. However, following a few conversations and meetings, some of those concerns were alleviated. Derek is working from home, which inevitably means he is working more than he should be. Mark still goes into the office daily, but has very limited exposure to anyone. The work continues and PAL endures.

Sadly, we are not able to have a full contingent of volunteers as many are high risk and it just isn't feasible. As this second wave washes over the GTA, it is clear that we made the right decision to remain closed to the public. Whenever we do open up again, it will be very carefully with a mountain of new protocols in place.

That said it hasn't been all gloom and doom. One somewhat good thing that has come out of this, is that it forced the board and me to revisit the bylaws and (hopefully) change a couple things in there so that future AGMs can be held virtually if need be. Don't get me wrong. Nothing beats the in-person company of the PAL members, but if things do not improve to a point where in-person meetings are safely possible, we may well need to hold next year's AGM virtually.

As most of you know, every year PAL participates in the Great Canadian Giving Challenge. This year, while it was a little different, we still managed to raise \$57,900! In a time when we expected fewer donations because of the circumstances, we were blown away by the generosity of our clients and donors. I have to give a MASSIVE thank you to everyone who contributed or even just spread the word.

I'll be honest; I have no idea what this year is going to look like. What I do know, is that whatever happens, PAL's staff and board are going to keep this ship sailing. If you have books, send them in. If you know someone with deep pockets, give them a nudge. Uncle Derek and Uncle Mark are still reading to Tim-Tim (if you don't know what that means, feel free to stick around after the meeting and ask). The work will continue. PAL will endure.

As it seems I always end on some sort of quote, this one feels fairly appropriate for these uncertain times. If you're getting a little bogged down, remember, Fernando Pessoa in *The Book of Disquiet* said that "*Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life.*"