“How are you holding up?”

Friday, May 1, 2020 by Danielle Robichaud

"Hold up" meaning: To maintain one's position or state; to endure, hold out[1]

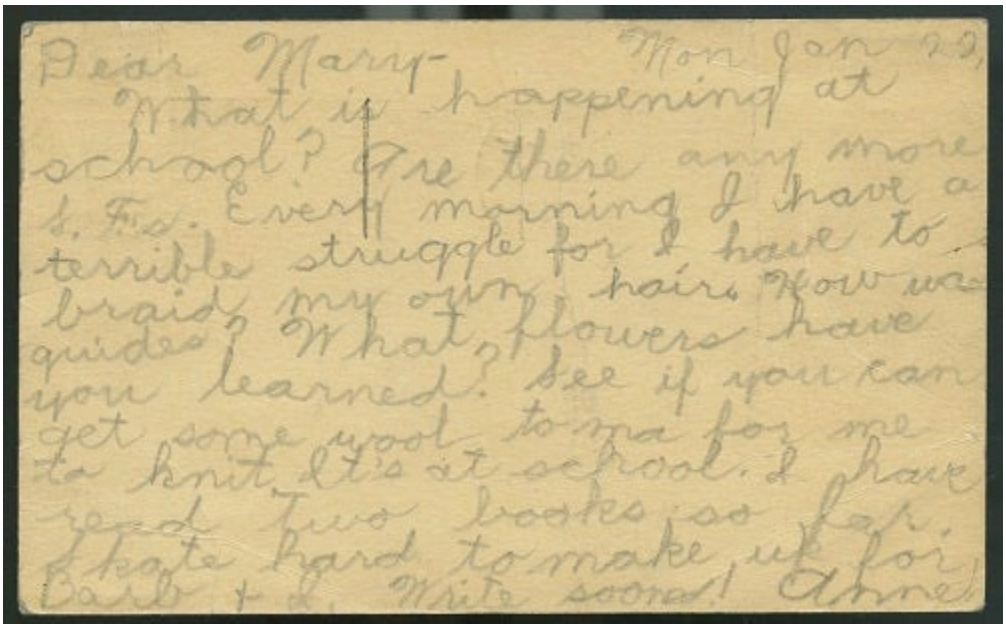
Nearly two months into the era of physical distancing, self-isolation and quarantines, I still find myself asking those around me: “How are you holding up?” Living during the COVID-19 pandemic is a new experience for most of us, and I want to know how you and everyone else is holding up - as much out of concern as out of curiosity. Is how we’re coping normal? Is my normal your normal? What does ‘normal’ even mean anymore? And will we ever find our way back to a common understanding of it?

Reflecting on those questions myself, I can confirm that since beginning to work from home my baseline anxiety and I have started to find a rhythm to each day. We aren’t always sure what day of the week it is, but we know that every morning, coffee in hand, we’ll go for a walk to mimic our previous commute to work. Beyond that, no one day is the same, but there are patterns that persist: attempting to limit my news intake to the radio updates provided by the CBC's *World Report*, petting cats, checking the price of *Animal Crossing* turnips, asking people if they’ve listened to *Dolly Parton’s America*, daydreaming about warm weather sewing projects, navigating grief, petting cats, wishing I had the focus to still read books, picking a tea bag in the morning that will get hot water added to it over the course of the day until eventually I'm just drinking hot water with a tea bag inside.. I’m always surprised when it’s Wednesday, delighted when it’s Friday, and comforted by Sunday still feeling like Sunday.

But that’s my experience. It’s likely not yours and your own won’t be like anyone else's. As a way to capture these differences, calls from historical organizations for people to document their experiences through photos, art, and writing have become common, Special Collections & Archives' own call among them, because there’s a genuine interest in archiving your COVID-19 experiences. The experiences that may feel unremarkable and boring or completely daunting and overwhelming. The way these individual stories are collected will inevitably be imperfect, but efforts will be made to collect them all the same because they matter and have value. Part of the reason is that they help to answer how we’re holding up and begin to paint a picture for

others to learn from in the future. They also allow for the identification of commonalities with the experiences of people who have previously lived through similar moments of uncertainty.

For example, as someone well into adulthood with secure housing and work I can do from home, I can only guess at the type of thoughts and concerns others are having, especially if they're in a different socio-economic situation, or if they live alone, or are from another culture, or are a different age, or have been deemed essential and have to report to their place of work each day - the list goes on. What I can do, though, is get a sense of what some of those experiences may be like by listening to the voices of people currently living those realities (like the workers striking today for increased safety measures). I can also turn my attention to events that happened long before I was born.



Mon. Jan 22. Dear Mary, What is happening at school? Are there any more S.F.s. Every morning I have a terrible struggle for I have to braid my own hair. How was guides? What flowers have you learned? See if you can get some wool to ma for me to knit. It's at school. I have read two books so far. Skate hard to make up for Barb + I. Write soon! Anne (Canada Post Card (Jan 22, 1945) - GA377-2-31)

In 1945, at the age of 11, Anne Innis Dagg contracted scarlet fever, a bacterial infection that most commonly affects young people. It spreads through sneezing and coughing. There’s no cure or vaccine, and infections

are often treated with antibiotics. As a result of her illness, Dagg was hospitalized, away from her family and friends, for several weeks until the infection ran its course. While in isolation, she wrote to her friend and neighbor Mary Williamson. Over the course of four postcards she shares how she kept busy and confessed she felt envious of people still able to participate in activities at school.

Anne's experience is her own and it's one I haven't had myself, yet I can still relate to what she shared as someone living during a pandemic. I miss my friends. I get jealous. I do puzzles to pass the time. What about you?

You can read more about Anne's experience in isolation, and browse a selection of records from the Anne Innis Dagg fonds on the Waterloo Digital Library.

[1]From the Oxford English Dictionary, retrieved 2021-06-04