

This is a transcription of the Yellow Jack Podcast, Episode 1.

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Guests:

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Ina Fichman

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[music]
Voice over
[00:00:04]

Hi, I'm Robert Ouimet and this is Episode 1 of the Yellow Jack podcast.

So what is a Yellow Jack? Well, back in the day of sailing ships, hoisting a yellow flag was a message to everyone around you that your ship was under quarantine – there was some illness on the ship and people should stay away. The yellow flag, sometimes with big black squares on it was called the Yellow Jack.

So I think it's the perfect name for this podcast. A podcast where you will meet some of the people who now find themselves quarantined because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here in Canada, it's called self-isolation. There are a number of scenarios where people are being asked to self-isolate. The routine is basically to eliminate contact with other people for 14 days to make sure that you haven't contracted COVID-19. Usually this is for people who are coming back into the country from somewhere else. But there are some other reasons why you might have to self-isolate. And the self-isolation is meant to slow down the spread of the disease - to flatten the curve.

So who are these people? Well, they're from every walk of life and in every town and city across the country, there are people like Ina Ina Fichman, who's a film producer from Montreal.

[CLIP] At times like this, it's important we take care of ourselves. We don't need the stress. I mean, isolation in and of itself is stressful.

[VOICE OVER] I'll talk to Ina and find out more about her isolation in a bit. But first, let's connect with Riley Colosuonno. He's from Winnipeg. But right now, he's stuck in Vancouver in self-isolation.

[00:01:46 - Riley] So I was in the Philippines kind of coming near the end of my two month solo travel trip around Southeast Asia. And it was actually on my birthday when I found out.

[00:01:57] So March 12th, when I found out that Manila was going into a month long lockdown, which is going to be starting on the 15th.

[00:02:07] And so when I found out, we knew that there was no flying in and out of Manila. But we weren't too sure if his international travel, but I had flights from Manila to Bangkok scheduled for the 17th. And then from Bangkok to home on the 19th. So obviously, I wouldn't have been able to get to Manila regardless with my current itinerary so quickly, booked a flight out of the Philippines to Singapore for the fourteenth. And kind of while that was happening, a few other cities around the Philippines started going into lockdown. Even shorter notice. So luckily, I was able to get out of the Philippines before getting trapped there like a few other people that I had met in the Philippines unfortunately did. So then from Singapore, I was able to make it to Vancouver via Taiwan. You know, it was a

kind of a hectic 48 hours. But I made it here eventually. Albeit with no sleep. But, you know, I'm here now and I'm hanging on from quarantine, so. Good.

[00:03:18 Robert] Yeah. So you were sort of hopping a little bit ahead of lockdown. So talk to me about being in another country far away from home. And suddenly you hear from people, oh, they're going to lock the country down a couple of days. That must really get your heart going....

[00:03:34 Riley] Yeah. You know, as you know, as I said, it was my birthday. So we had a few drinks and ice and the group I was with. And yeah, as soon as we hear that news, it definitely sobers you up real quick. And it kind of instantly on your phone checking the news source.

[00:03:49] And then right after checking the news source, you're on Google flights there, Skyscanner just looking on. You can get to that country, that situation, as fast as you can, because, you know, you don't want to be stuck in the. In a country that's not your own during a time like that, because you don't know what may happen.

[00:04:08 Robert] Yeah. So a lot of people right now are trying to get home and are finding it hard because the flights either aren't there or they're getting canceled. So you are lucky, but you're still really not home. You got to Vancouver. And because of the 14 day self-isolation rule, you are stuck in Vancouver for a little while. How many days have you been back in Canada so far?

[00:04:30 Riley] I arrived back on Sunday night. And today is Thursday, I believe. Yeah. For a few days now.

[00:04:41 Robert] So you've got a, you know, a week and a bit to go still before you can go home. Can you talk about that? Self-isolation, that's a kind of a weird concept for most of us, although, you know, all of us are hearing about it now. But when it first occurred to you that you're going to have to do that. What were you thinking?

[00:04:59 Riley] Well, like you said, being from Winnipeg, I'm not a huge winter activity guy. So especially during university over winter break, I kind of did my own self-isolation at home anyway.

[00:05:13] So I'm not I'm not too unfamiliar staying home and just kind of doing my own thing. You know, especially when it's minus 30 degrees outside, there's really no reason to go there. I'm kind of used to staying in, you know, watching Netflix, browsing the Internet, playing video games here and there.

[00:05:34 Robert]. But that's all you can do now. Right. Yeah. Yeah. So when you when you don't have the option to do anything else, it's a little different. Can you imagine doing this without the Internet though.

[00:05:45 Riley] Yeah. I assume I'd read a lot about that's for sure and I'm sure I'll still read a few books, but I know it'll be hard right now.

[00:05:56 Robert] What's the first thing you want to do when you get back to Winnipeg?

[00:06:00] Ah, I'm not too sure, honestly. I think – as much as I find my dogs back home annoying, I'll probably play with my dogs a little bit.

[music]

[00:06:10 Robert voice over] All right. Well, best of luck with your stay. And have you found a favorite cleaning product? Have you got a favorite amongst the disinfectants that you get to use?

[00:06:22 Riley] Probably the bleach mix I'd say. [laughs] Seems to work the best in my non-professional opinion.

[00:06:34] Riley Colasuonno, currently in Vancouver, staying in his uncle's spare room, counting down those 14 days of self-isolation until he can get back home to Winnipeg, Though, why he'd want to leave the green grass of Vancouver for the snowy streets of Winnipeg is anybody's guess.

Up next, Ina Fichman.

Ina's aa film producer from Montreal who also spends part of the year in Los Angeles and that turns out to be part of the problem. Here's her self-isolation story.

[Music fades]

[00:07:07 Ina] Well, basically, I spent every winter in Los Angeles and realized, I guess it was last week that I should probably come back to Canada sooner rather than later. And normally I spend I would've stayed till mid-to-late April. So I got a plane ticket. And obviously, having been in the States, I feel it's my social obligation to self-quarantine. I mean, nobody is saying it's mandatory, but I think it's really important that we all do what we need to do...

[00:07:44 Robert] Yeah.

[Ina] ... During this crisis

[Robert] And and, you know, if no one else has said thank you to you for doing that, I'm going say thank you to you for doing not because, you know, it's important. People aren't being mandated. But as you say, we're being asked to do it if you've been out of the country or that kind of thing. How many more days do you have to go?

[00:08:06] Ah. Twelve. [laughs] Yes. Twelve. Yeah. '

[Robert] So you're you're kind of just at the you're at the beginning of your journey.

[Ina] Exactly.

[00:08:15 Robert] If people don't know you, you're a very long standing film producer in Canada.

[Ina] Yes.

[Robert] You've produced a lot of really incredible films. I'm imagining that your normal work is sort of partly remote because you're dealing with people all over the world. But then in the other part of your work is very much in close proximity to people.

[00:08:35 Ina] Yeah. I mean, the strange thing about - not strange - but my work involves a lot of travel and I generally don't go on film shoots, but I go to film festivals and film markets all year and my busiest period was actually starting very soon where I go to Hot Docs and then to Cannes, and then to Sunny Side of the Doc, and to this event in Israel. And on and on and on until July. And then I have a little break and then I travel again. The flip side of it is because I do so much international business, I'm used to doing Skype calls and Zoom calls and emails and Google Docs and just communicating with my colleagues in multiple time zones all of the time.

[00:09:20] Yeah. So it's kind of a you've got kind of a real mixed bag of activity. So in some ways you are able to do what you were doing before. But in lot in other ways, you can't do any of the stuff you were doing before.

[00:09:32] Well, exactly. Like I was getting ready, I had a film that was showing in Tribeca. And then I have three films that I'm associated with showing at Hot Docs. And then I was off to the Cannes Film Festival because one of my VR projects is being, you know, shown in their section as well and and on and on, and of course all of that has been canceled. So at a time when I am usually getting ready for a crazy amount of travel, I'm actually going to be doing no travel.

[00:10:02 Robert] Have you got people to help you? Like, are you are you your family around you that's helping you while you're self-isolated or how's that working?

[00:10:08 Ina] Yeah. So my son actually went and I sent him a grocery list. My son is 25 and he bought everything I needed except the eggs, whatever. Just won't eat eggs for the next few days. And yeah. So that was really helpful. And, you know, it's a little weird sitting at home. But you know when I'm in Los Angeles, I work out of my place there, so there are days when I don't go out that much. I guess for many of us, it's like not having the option to go out, to even go have that coffee or see a friend or a colleague or have a face to face meeting. And, you know, I luckily have nothing that is filming until the earliest, July. So I don't have any shoots to cancel. But I do have a film in post-production where my director from Israel was supposed to come to Montreal, where she was very determined to come. And then they instituted a lockdown in Tel Aviv and she's pregnant. And she realized, you know, if I go to Canada and then can't get back into Israel or have to quarantine myself, that's going to be pretty crazy. So she didn't come. And also, a lot of, you know, some of the smaller studios are staying open, you know the sounds studios, but, you know, even trying to do this in normal times, it would be challenging but doable to do post-production remote. I could send her the online, which is the final edit of the film, and she could look at it on a big screen in Tel Aviv, but she can't even do that. Because all those places are closed.

[00:11:46 Robert] Yes. Did you find yourself like every day kind of going, oh, I'm going to do this? -- Oh, no, I can't do that

[00:11:51 Ina] Well, you know, I'm trying to be as flexible as possible. So, for example, we were supposed to record narration next week and her producer, because he's been busy, you know, trying to organize his business, hasn't gotten around to finalizing with her in the final narration script. Well, we moved by a week. And, you know, it was so funny because I called up the casting agent - we have a really very well-known Canadian actor. R.H. Thompson's doing the narration - and I said, OK, do you think he'll be available the next week? And as the words were coming out of my mouth, I went, well, ah, he's not shooting a movie. He's not in a play. You know, everyone's available right now, of course, he's available.

[00:12:27 Robert] So what I'm hearing is that you are as busy as always and you're not just sitting around twiddling their thumbs and going...

[Ina} oh, God, no.

[Robert] I'm isolated and I'm just going to chill.

[00:12:37 Ina] No, no, although I'm trying to chill a little more. Like I'll stop work at around 5:00, and I'll, you know, maybe watch a little junk on Netflix and, you know, and take my dog for a walk and a little more because I feel that at times like this, it's important we take care of ourselves. We don't need to add stress. I mean, isolation in and of itself is stressful.

[00:13:02 Robert] Did does something like this, as a creative person, does something like this give you ideas around like a film you'd like to make or a documentary you'd like to see done about this subject?

[00:13:12 Ina] The biggest irony is one of my main production now is a film about the gig economy.

[Robert] Right.

[Ina]So we have finished filming. This is the one that we pitched at Good Pitch [Vancouver] with Shannon Walsh, the director. And like now, Shannon and I had a call this morning and I'm like, maybe we need to go back to our characters. And obviously we can't film with them because, we can't film, nobody can leave and go travel or whatever. But maybe they could do video diaries and maybe we could do Zoom or Skype interviews with them just to get an update about how things are going in this new reality for them.

[00:13:56 Robert] Right. And so for people that don't know about the film, could you just give us a quick precis? I mean, I saw the pitch, so I know a little bit about it but most people won't.

[Ina] Ya it's a film about this new economy of gig workers who are working for companies like Uber and Lyft and Deliveroo and Task Rabbit rather than just, you know, looking globally at how this new way of working has changed the way we work with each other and the rules of the game as it pertains to work.

[00:14:25 Robert] And the irony is, one of the major pieces of that is the fact that they have really very little protections.

[00:14:32 Ina] Well, exactly. There's there's freedom, but there's no protection. So people like some of our characters probably wouldn't have other jobs for whatever reasons. In France, we have someone who's a migrant and he would have never had a job, you know, unless it was through the gig economy. But at the same time, this is a new way of working. We're not going back to nine to five. So how do we cope with that? How do we manage it? How do we legalize it? How do we protect the workers? All of these questions are things that we deal with in the film. The irony is this is a sector - I mean, everyone's going to be hit economically by this crisis. But the gig economy is something - I mean, every day there's another article about how this is impacting these workers worldwide. So of all the films I'm working on, this one is, you know, so relevant, so pertinent to, you know, the new world order for that's happen as of January.

[00:15:32 Robert] Yeah. And it's interesting to wonder how this crisis will affect, you know, legislation and a variety of other things...

[00:15:42] Also, you know, for the first time, governments are realizing and legislators that, hey, you know, not all the work, everyone on the workforce is eligible for unemployment insurance. So how do we deal with the freelancers and the gig workers? And they're actually dealing with everyone because they don't have a choice. COVID-19 is forcing us to rethink a lot of things. So I actually think that as horrible as it is right now, there's no question maybe there'll be some lessons learned. Maybe. We hope.

[music]

[00:16:15 Voice over] That's Ina Fichman in Montreal.

On the website, you'll find some links to information about COVID-19. There's some information on the film Ida mentioned that she's been working on and there's some other stuff, too. You can leave comments there.

Also, if you are stuck in self-isolation right now, I can't think of anything more fun for you to do than be a guest on the Yellow Jack podcast if you're interested. Just drop me a line at info@podcasthouse.ca or fill out the form on the Podcast House website. That's www.podcasthouse.ca/yellowjack.

That's it for this edition. I'm Robert Ouimet, talk again soon.

[Music up and out]