

This is a transcription of the Yellow Jack Podcast, Episode 4.

<https://podcasthouse.ca/2020/03/26/theres-a-lot-to-do-so-we-better-go-slow/>

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[Music – down for...]

[00:00:02 Voice Over]

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

The Yellow jacket is a flag. It's solid yellow, canary yellow. And back in the day, if you saw it hoisted from a tall ship at anchor, you knew to stay away because the yellow jacket signifies quarantine. Flash forward a few hundred years. And while we're not hoisting any flags, we are asking some people to self-isolate because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, anyone returning to Canada now from another country is required by law to self isolate. And some provinces are also requesting voluntary self-isolation for people who have flown in from another part of Canada. So with people all over the country locking themselves away for 14 days, I thought some of them might be willing to share their stories of self-isolation.

And that's what this podcast is about. People like Janet Smith, who lives in a small town in Manitoba, called Onanole.

I reached her by phone.

[00:01:12 Janet] Hi, Robert.

[Robert] How are you doing?

[00:01:15 Janet] I'm, well... I think my husband and I both are feeling like rounding the corner. We got back from Mexico, I think a week ago. It's kind of a time warp , to be honest, isn't it? A really interesting trip home, trying to get home from central Mexico where we were touring. And when we got the call there that the Canadian government wanted us home, we hightailed it to Mexico City and had a very difficult time finding flights out. So we finally flew domestically across the country to another to finally San Jose de Cabo, Baja and then found a flight on Swoop direct to Winnipeg.

So we got back a trip, cut our trip short by about 10 days and got home and we were feeling just fine. Obviously, it just went from airport to home and self isolating as per direction. But two days later, maybe a day later, we started feeling the classic symptoms. And so we phoned Health Links, which is our Manitoba start point. And the nurses there did an assessment. And given our travel history and the fact that we were feeling head-achy and feverish and dry cough, etc., they fast forwarded our information to the folks in Brandon, which is an hour away. And they called us the next morning at 8:30 and said, can you be here by 10:20? Which meant we had to jump out of bed and rush to Brandon. You know, in about 15 minutes to get there.

And anyway, it just went smoothly. The tests went smoothly. We got our results back in three days and it tested negative. So, of course, that's really, really good news. But I'm the better of the two in terms of I'm not as sick. My husband has got a really bad flu. I guess, where I'm looking after him, he's looking after me when he can. And we're just we haven't really found that new normal yet.

[00:03:20 Robert] So you feel like crap, but at least you know, it's not COVID crap.

[00:03:24 Janet] Yeah. Yeah. I knew I have an upper respiratory history, so that was my worry. But sure, we were young and healthy and we were, you know, kind of hoping that that was on our side in terms of even if it was that. I just have to say that all of the everyone has kicked in here like our doctors...all the health care professionals we've had any contact with over the phone ... testing site. We were just so thrilled and we just felt so confident. You know, you're so vulnerable in this state. And then when you have people who are saying, OK, come on and wash your hands, put a mask on, we've got this. It just does wonders for your sense of safety.

[00:04:09 Robert] Yeah, about. I know. So maybe we should let people know ,Onanole is where you are, where you live. And that's really quite a small town. Can you just tell people where it is and the size of it?

[00:04:20 Janet] Yeah. Well, I if I tell too many people, they'll want to move here because it's so great. We moved here three years ago from Brandon – So Brandon is two and half hours west of Winnipeg. We still work there or when we get back to work. We'll probably be working from home, actually, but that's where we have been working. I work in mental health and my husband works in for the provincial government in employment and training. But Onanole. Yeah. It's just outside of Riding Mountain National Park. So an hour north of Brandon. And it's this little community that I don't I can even tell you the numbers of people you moved. Like it's at three years ago. And I don't know, 300 people. I'm not sure. Just a little town.

[00:05:03 Robert] Wikipedia says around sixteen hundred.

[Janet] You're kidding.

[Robert] I was surprised when I read the. So I guess I grew up not very far from there, I grew up on the other side of Riding Mountain Park on the other side of the mountain in Dauphin, and we used to stop in Onanole. Like when you said 300, I thought, that's probably a lot. But according to Wikipedia...maybe that's the whole area. The 16 might be the whole area.

[00:05:24 Janet] So of course it, it burst at the seams in the summer because like so many national parks with cottages inside the park. People flock here in the summer. So it really, really grows and has a very busy tourist season. And. But during the winter, you know, fall, winter, spring, it's pretty quiet. But we just have an amazing group of it's unlike any small town I've ever been to in that it's very eclectic. You know, people from all over the country who have moved here to work for the park. We have a lot of folks that happen to be like craft people and artists and musicians. And it's I think of it as kind of an intentional community that people have decided they want to be close tonature. You know, close to community. And so we've benefited from that so much coming home. As soon as our neighbours and our friends hear that we were back, you know, like every day there's something on our doorstep, like a casserole or a pot of soup or, you know, at thermometer. We didn't have one of those and they might just come by and wave at us through the window. I guess I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, honestly.

[00:06:43 Robert] What a nice what a nice picture you're painting over like kind of a lousy situation. But if you have to be in a lousy situation, sounds like a pretty idealic place to be in.

[00:06:51 Janet] Yeah. Yeah. And I you know, I think that time will tell. Right. They've just closed down all the trails in National Park. So, you know, one of our thoughts was once we emerge from our 14 days and we're symptom free because we can't be even out until all of our senses are over, even though we've tested negative. The trails are closed. So you can't actually go out on them. And many of them are...you'd be the only person on them right now. But there's this weird thing about not wanting to be seen out. Like at least that's how we've been feeling. We don't want to add to the fear if it's out there of people think, well, they just get back from Mexico? Right. Like, you know, I don't think that would be the case, but we just we're just being mindful, not only as I think all Canadian, most but most Canadians have been mindful of the perception of others and that the needs of others as well as your own. So while we're when we feel better, we'll be desperate to get out into the in the onto the trails and so forth. It's just it's all around us. We'll have to think about what that would be like for other people.

[00:08:07 Robert] IOT's interesting, as we all venture into this new world in the new rules and the changing rules all the time, how we are going to behave as a society seems to be, you know, adjusting almost daily. So in terms of your support and and, you know, supplies and stuff, is it just people in the community or helping you out and bringing you food, making sure that you've got what you need?

[00:08:28 Janet] Yes, it's pretty much help people in the community, plus our friends and family and Brandon, that has driven up and dropped something literally driven up an hour, dropped something at our doorstep. Waved at us and gone home. Yeah, that's what's happening. That's right. And I know I'm not alone. I know that this is, you know, this group of folks that are helping a lot of people out.

[00:08:53 Robert] So. So I realize that now I'm just doing the math. So you really just found out the other day that you tested negative.

[00:08:59 Janet] We found out yesterday.

[00:09:01 Robert] So so that obviously must be a relief. But you still have the flu, so you feel crappy. Have you? Have you? Are you able to relax at all?

[00:09:11 Janet] You know what?

Because my husband was so sick, like literally. He's been in bed probably for three, three days. And he was coughing so much that he just couldn't get any rest. So I feel like I haven't been busier in a long, long, long time because I was really caring for him and trying to care for myself and connecting with all my friends and family. Have a big circle of friends and family and everybody wanted to check in with me. And I have to work stuff that I'm trying to, you know, sort out and around the edges. And so I've been really busy and I have found it because I work in like the area of mental health and and people in crisis. Like, I feel like I'm kind of wired for that kind of go into firefighter mode.

[00:10:04 Robert] I was going to ask you about that because you work for an organization. I think it's the Manitoba Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services. Yeah. And that's really a it's a crisis center. Correct?

[00:10:18 Janet] Yeah. So the parent organization is Klinik, community health. So Klinik. It's based out of Winnipeg. And we've had a branch office and I've been the manager of that and Klinik have a whole range of services, including primary health care, counseling and community outreach. So they're swamped right now and the crisis lines are swamped.

And I'm feeling a bit on the edges because I felt I was only supposed to be getting back from holidays today. So I don't know how I'm going to be able to be helpful from here. Now, with everything that's going on and I would like to be helpful and we'll see how that goes. So you're in the days to come. But A yeah, I I've worked in this in this field for a while. And so my response is to go into firefighter mode, when you're asking if I can relax and it's just like, k, we gotta... here's what you get. Now, the next thing this person is because cetera. So myself personally have a lot of little bit here and there, but not now. I feel pretty keyed up, if you can tell....

[00:11:35 Robert] I can I can tell you you want to try to do your job, which is help people. Right. This is what you do. This is sort of this is sort of prime time if you're in the business of helping people who are in crisis.

[Janet] Right.

[00:11:49 Janet] So you're kind of helpless when you're in when your hands are tied. To not be able to do that.

[00:11:54 Robert] I guess it's going to give you a you know, not by design, but it's going to give you a certainly a perspective of what it's like to be on the other end of it.

[00:12:02 Janet] Oh, totally. Yeah. I mean, I just I feel like my I know that I'm that I'm I'm ramped up a bit. But that's, you know, and that's adrenalin. But I also know I'm fully I have a home, I have food, I have family, I have support, I have love. And there's a lot of vulnerable people out there that don't have one or more of those things. And they're going through that. So that's those are the folks that we're you know, we're usually serving and helping. And, you know, my I feel I really feel for them.

[00:12:38 Robert] Yeah. And I think most of us you know, those of us who live in cities, we think of crisis intervention lines and crisis centers as urban things, you know, urban issues. But you're actually working with people out in rural areas and on farms.

[00:12:51 Robert] Yeah. Yeah, we have been. We have called the Manitoba Farm Rural and Northern Support Services. So essentially anybody knows Manitoba. Half the population or even a little over half live in Winnipeg and the rest live outside of Winnipeg. And while cities like Brandon and Thompson are our cities, they really have a very rural feel to them there. Their economic engine is agriculture. And in the north, of course, mining and etc. So it's very different. There are lots of differences beyond the perimeter. And so our crisis line has been really dedicated to understanding the realities of living on a farm, living rurally, living in the north.

[00:13:37 Robert] And I guess with this now, you kind of going to have, you know, two fronts to firefight. You know, the the COVID front, but then also the economic front and just the just people getting supplies and being able to manage because they can then do you know, the next town, maybe a few hours away?

[00:13:54] Yes, exactly. Yeah...Well, that's one of the good things about living rural is we just take it as a given that we rely on one another. It's not it's not it's not unusual. It's part I mean, because we might have been communing to Brandon, everyday for a job like that. Several times a week, we'll have a text from a friend saying, hey, can you pick up a can of paint. Can you, like, you know, get the things that they can't get up here? So we're kind of the unofficial courier service. So that's that's just normal for us. So this isn't really a stretch,

whereas it might be in a larger center where you don't know your neighbours or if you know your neighbors. You certainly wouldn't be relying on them necessarily for this kind of thing. And there is something about like a geographical neighbour, like you're not necessarily going to have each other over for coffee, but just the fact that they're two doors away makes it easier to call upon them for something like in our case, do you happen to have a thermometer? Ya, be there and five, be there in five, you know? Right. Yeah, it's. To me, it's interesting times.

[00:15:10 Robert] Well, you know, I you know, as you're talking, it also is inspiring times. If people are helping each other in and doing that, you know, making an effort to be supportive. I mean, it does give you hope in a world where we're bombarded with, you know, bad and negative news that people are pulling together and trying to help each other. Make sure we can get through it.

[00:15:27 Janet] I know, I know. I think of it. It's like this is a pause for the planet. You know, do we really need to go and buy stuff? Do we really need to drive places, do we really need all those things. I think the thing that's hardest for people will be the hardest for people. It's the social distancing because as human beings, we are wired for connection. So we're reconnecting in lots of creative ways. And that's pretty neat. You know, I love hearing about all the ways that people are doing that. My son and daughter in law live in Toronto and they're, you know, talking about how people are coming out on their on their porches and how deejays are creating, you know, these online jam sessions. And, you know, people are getting very, very creative. But as it gets warmer out, particularly in our neck of the woods anyway, we're going to want to come out of our cocoons. And so we just I think right now we just need to say that's all we have. We just hope right now. We have to say right now, we're going to stay home and we are going to connect with people in these creative ways and then we'll see what happens.

[00:16:38 Robert] You sound pretty chipper for somebody who's been sick. And and through the stress of trying to get you know, trying to get home alone was probably seriously stressful when you're trying to get it. Yeah. So you sound pretty chipper. I can tell you're busting to get going back to work. I would just, you know, let me give you some advice as a neighbor from far away. OK. You bet. When you know, before you go to work, you you need to a couple of days where you're just going to be able to relax and make sure that your husband is feeling well and you're feeling well. You've had a chance to, you know, charge up because you're going to be busy.

[00:17:09] Yeah. Yes, we are going to be busy out for sure. And my, ah, former clinical director and my very best friend says :”Tere's a lot to do. So we better go slow”.

[00:17:22] Right. I think that's probably the best advice I've heard all week.

[00:17:26] It's good, isn't it? It is good. Lots to do. So we got to go slow.

[00:17:30] Janet thank you so much for getting out of your sickbed to talk to me and all the best to your husband. And I hope you feel. Thank you.

[00:17:37 Janet] And thank you for the opportunity. I hope that I'm sure you talked to so many, so many others with with both challenges and positivity it's both this and that, isn't it....

[00:17:50 Robert] It's interesting when you're locked in your house for a few days, the things that you actually start to think about, it's actually striking to me that we forget how busy our lives are and that we don't really take a minute to go. Oh, let me think about things. We're just going. We're doing it we're constantly at it. And so suddenly, when you're confined, that's a very interesting thing seems to happen that people are, you know, thinking about stuff. And they're also obviously you're surveying the landscape a bit differently because you're stuck in your house.

[00:18:19 Janet] Right. And you hopefully are instead of just texting people, you're actually picking up the phone. I can't make a list every day of who I want to call. And I don't I hate to work on a crisis line or manage a crisis line. And I really don't like the phone, but I've made a point of saying, OK, today I'm going to call my my, you know, 90 some year old 94. I think she is a year old aunt in a personal care home in Brandon. And I try to keep it like narrow it, but great actually reaching out by phone or video conferencing. I think it's really important in that at least for me, I've decided that's one thing I can do. And limiting my social media intake has been it's really important, I think, and just trusting science, trusting, you know, what we know and our government and what they know and limiting your news sources if you very trusted one.

[00:19:25 Robert] And the best advice I've heard is "We've got a lot to do so...."

[00:19:28 Janet] We better go slow. [laughs]

[00:19:33 Robert] Thank you so much, Janet.

[Janet] OK, Robert.

[Music up then down for]

[00:19:39] Janet Smith recovering from the flu. Not COVID-19. Fortunately, at her home in Onanole, Manitoba.

If you head over to the web site, you'll find links to some of the things we talked about, along with some other resources and a full transcript of this podcast.

If you or someone you know is in self-isolation and would be happy to share their story, get in touch with me on the website. There's a form there that you can fill out and I'll get back to you as quickly as I can.

That's on the website www.podcasthouse.ca/yellowjack

I'm Robert Ouimet in Vancouver. Thanks for listening.