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## GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS

# Here's What I Think About That

LISA BRYAN,  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Just when we thought things were beginning to look up yet another "something unexpected" happened. This time it's the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Did the whole world emerge from Covid isolation stark raving mad?

Reading the news with my morning coffee, the Russia-Ukraine stories feel like something from a newspaper circa 1939.

I read every word of "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich," snowed-in and trying to stay warm without electricity by burning unseasoned wood in 1989. It was one of the few books on the shelf I hadn't read and I found myself engrossed in a story I thought I already knew. The most fascinating part to me was the slow slide into what became World War II and the opportunities lost that might have stopped it.

History offers many parallels, but it takes reading to recognize the distortions bandied about lately as attractive soundbites. There seems no shortage of people eager to play the role of victim or to be a victim blamer. It's a curious phenomenon of our day and a grotesque perversion of history.

My mom, not typically engrossed in world news, said she's been glued to the television and felt worried sick. My great aunt Leida, my grandmother's sister, just celebrated her 100th birthday in Estonia where she has lived all her life. On the heels of World War II, my grandparents and their infant daughter left their families behind and fled the country by boat to Sweden as the Russians invaded the small, independent nation and declared it a republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

What little they carried included a couple handfuls of Estonian dirt my grandfather scooped up to ensure that in case they perished or could never return, they would still be buried with the soil of their homeland.

The stories of their escape and their years as refugees were legendary to my sister and me growing up. But our grandfather took more pride in their hard work and success as American citizens. As a kid I remember feeling a little guilty. Why did we have so much

while our relatives left behind in Estonia had so little?

The obvious answer to that question was free-market capitalism, the ability to access money to invest and grow. In the end, authoritarian communism didn't turn out very well.

Estonia won its independence, like Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, with the collapse of the once mighty USSR in 1991.

All three Baltic states and Poland are members of NATO. The idea that my 100-year-old great aunt could see her country overrun by Russians twice in her lifetime keeps my mother awake at night.

Meanwhile, life at home feels hopeful yet different after two years of pandemic. Repeated waves of COVID-19 and restrictions affected everyone but also divided us, leaving fractured communities, friendships and families in its wake.

We are again on the cusp of re-entry March 21 when the state mandate to mask indoors is scheduled to end. Omicron is still out there but county-wide vaccination rates have continued to rise. There is optimism that this time will be different.

But do any of us really remember how to be together? When was the last time we invited friends to share a meal? Will my lifelong habit of sticking my hand out for a shake return with the first new person I meet? Will I see an old acquaintance I've missed and rush to tackle them with a big hug at the grocery store? Will I remember to hold my tongue and refrain from criticism? My patient "better half" husband can tell you that's something I've forgotten to do at home.

I can tell you this: Whether handwritten or delivered with a click, your letters to the editor are the mark of an engaged community. They range in topic and length, from a single sentence to

a record-breaking anonymous lecture 1,263 passionate words long.

We don't publish anonymous letters but regularly receive them from people who want their opinions heard, at least by our staff. Anonymous writers often express fear of retribution, but anonymity also insulates them from the very type of challenge they are making.

And haven't we had enough of insulating,

isolating, separating?

What will it be like to re-engage with each other? Will we remember that everyone, even people we don't care for, still belong to our Key Peninsula tribe?

In some ways it feels as if there is a homecoming just ahead. I don't know if I'm ready, but at the same time I can hardly wait. Nothing feels so good as belonging. In the end, I think that's what we all want most of all — just to belong. ■



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