



MY WEEK

Alvin Hall



Making a great restart of it in old New York

Walking around New York, going into shops and restaurants and running into friends on the street, it is clear that worry about the Delta variant of Covid is on everyone's mind. More people have started to wear masks all the time. We are wondering if there is a next wave and just how bad it will be.

At the same time, many of the people I talk with feel we must enjoy this time when we can still greet each other closely – with touches, hugs and yes, even kisses. So we do, but with a nagging hesitancy somewhere in the back of our minds that leaks into our body language. After all the pleasantries are done, it seems every conversation invariably leads to the same topics. Friends share stories about family members who have not been vaccinated and the effect this inaction or decision has on birthday celebrations, weddings, family reunions and

memorial services. They recount concerned emails they've sensitively and carefully crafted to these family members. Nearly all contain the sentence: "Please understand, I make no judgement."

Colleagues talk of their concerns about returning to workplaces, especially those with open-plan offices. Several people joke that they used to be concerned with not having privacy for conversations – now they are concerned with not having protection from contamination. Acquaintances fret, with no small amount of annoyance, about how the protocols for travel, testing and quarantining in different countries keep changing, upsetting their holidays and other late-summer rituals. They just want their lives to be normal again, the way it was before March 2020.

Other people I meet complain about the months-long delays in getting cabinets, appliances and lumber for home renovations, the exorbitant cost of rental cars, the rising prices of food, the uptick of inflation. There is disbelief in their voices, usually followed by the question: "But what can we do?" One friend, who has grown tired of the resignation implicit in this question, has decided to respond with: "We do what we can and must be careful and respectful doing it!" The first time I heard him declare this – and it was indeed a declaration –

everyone went silent. Then someone in the group said: "You're right," and the conversation shifted.

Individuals started sharing things they had done, actions they were taking to support the city's reemergence. The variety was impressive, but also uplifting: returning to favourite restaurants and leaving substantial tips; attending free performances and events around the city and bringing friends; getting tickets for the reopening of Bruce Springsteen's Broadway show; taking older neighbours to Little Island, a new architectural attraction on the Hudson River; using the ferries to take excursions around the city; simply being more polite and kind every day. Everyone also talked about being mindful of staying safe – for themselves and others.

Suddenly, with energy and smiles all around, we began talking about why we live in New York City and will most likely continue to live here. I know for certain that I will not join my friends who have left for the suburbs, the country, and other states. Living in New York during the pandemic, we all longed for the arts, the buzz, the vibrancy and the challenges that define the Big Apple. And I, along with many stalwart New Yorkers, know that despite the fears, frustrations, delays and annoyances, we must do our part – small and large – in whatever way we can.

Right on cue, an appropriate lyric, with a few little changes, popped into my head and out of my mouth: "We'll make a great restart of it in old New York!" We sang a few bars together, hugged each other carefully, then left smiling – and humming.

FORGIVEN, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

I lost a favourite gold ring this week. I remember taking it off my finger in my apartment, but I can't remember where. Usually, I remove it when I'm washing dishes or cooking a dish that I must mix with my hands. I always put the ring on the same tray. A few days later, when I wanted to wear it again, it wasn't there.

This is quite frustrating. I'm so orderly about certain activities that I rarely lose track of anything. I've mentioned the loss to two or three friends but, as is my nature, I am keeping the depth of my feelings to myself. However, my mind spontaneously and uncontrollably keeps recollecting specific incidents from the past that I thought I had emotionally sealed in neat, no-leak compartments. Every night this week, as soon as I went to sleep, the leaks started.

I dreamed about the Bulova, a self-winding watch I had bought myself as a graduation gift. I had casually placed it on my lap while driving to work one day and it must have fallen on the ground when I got out of my car in an unpaved parking lot. Later in the week, I woke up with the same feelings of disappointment and hurt related to an incident when a producer borrowed my only photograph of my grandmother. She accidentally lost it when it slipped out of the unsealed envelope in which she was carrying it.

The dream of the lost photograph brought me solace. I remembered consoling and truly forgiving the producer, who felt deeply remorseful. So I decided to end my week by forgiving myself (not always an easy task) and to start the new week by leaving my worry behind.