

Talk Nice Now
by Joyce Covington

Let's face it. The 2020s have been tough so far. The decade began with Covid. It was new. It was contagious. It was scary. Everybody was told to go home and stay there. Isolation was enacted through lockdowns, physical distance and face masks. Social interaction was actively discouraged. Family and friends stayed apart for months and months in an effort to keep from getting sick. You focused on yourself because that's what you needed to do to keep healthy.

When the vaccines came in record time, they were hard to get at first. As it got easier, people slowly started to emerge. Gradually the use of face masks was no longer required, social distancing relaxed and you could finally hug your daughter, son, grandchildren and friends "like normal." But nothing was quite normal. We had gone through a most non-normal time and this began to show in daily life. People seemed to be driving more aggressively. Customers yelled at sales staff more often. Adults raised their voices at each other at work and at home. Outgoing relaxed kids were unusually shy and timid or aggressive and mean. Suddenly you were no longer the only person you had to think about.

In addition, the world has become more rough and tumble. Politics, which had never been gentle, took on sharper edges — harsh languages, threats, name calling, rumors and bald-faced lying. We survived Covid to return to a world of "survival of the fittest." That's where we are now.

We moved to Victoria Falls in 2005. The area behind our house was filled with ongoing construction or red clay. It's almost impossible to remember that today. I should have taken pictures. But from the beginning I do remember people being nice to each other. As the community grew, I don't remember ever meeting anyone who wasn't pleasant and friendly. Having come back from the West Coast with its mellow vibe, this was particularly welcome and appreciated. But, with Covid and now after, things seem edgier and less relaxed. I see it in myself too. I'm more annoyed and less forgiving. Friends here have seen anger, yelling and even bigotry directed at themselves or others. People you would never have imagined saying or doing things which would have been out of character in the past. Their behavior has "harshed" my deepest mellow and made me question if civility is gone the way of ten cent gum. To be fair, this hasn't happened a lot. But it has happened here in Victoria Falls!

Which is why I'm writing this article. People have moved to Victoria Falls in part because people here are so nice. They smile. They laugh. They invite you to join and appreciate it when you do. They want to help and they feel like they can ask for your help if they need it. Residents talk to each other on the way to the mailroom and strangers feel less so after attending an event or going to an exercise class. Victoria Falls wants people to get together. That's its appeal and its history and its bright future. But it only works when we commit to do the same. We can counter these negative times with a simple "hello" or a smile or by holding the door or offering to help somebody with a grocery bag. Little niceties in a not-so-nice world. Not by casting shade but by brightening a day. It's the small stuff that makes the big stuff happen and what we need is "the right stuff" to keep Victoria Falls a place we want to live.

