

March 2019, my husband and I crossed the border at Champlain, New York. While he had been quite ill for some time, , and while our future was uncertain at best, and having lived in the Hudson Valley for many years, we had made the decision to return to Quebec for at least part of the year.

My husband's cancer was terminal and we had no idea how much time we had left together.

The political climate in the USA was frightening for people with long term green cards. We had already had his green card seized once and had been sent to "secondary immigration" for questions a few times.

Long long ago, we had begun our relationship in English, moved to Quebec for many years where we lived in French, moved back to the USA, where, of course, we lived in English. Now, in the very twilight of our time together, we wanted to live once again surrounded by French culture. My husband wanted time with his family and his city : (Montreal),

We had rented a shared apartment with two of his sisters. We had visited Canadian Immigration to reactivate my status. We had taken care of financial paperwork. We made the decision not to immediately sell our home until we had a more concrete settled plan.

Because of the pandemic, my husband would never again see his country, live in French or see his family or friends.

We were traveling back to New York because we were expecting the birth of a new grandchild. We were excited and happy, and never ever could have imagined what awaited us over the next few years.

As we came through the border we were sent to secondary immigration. We laughed it off. However, the guards asked us unusual questions.

Had we visited China or visited with people (!) recently arrived from Asia?

Our car was swept(searched for foods etc.).

Our temperature was taken.

When we asked for an explanation, it was ignored.

They did not ask for any proof of residency, which was unusual.

We arrived home to the awful news that the entire world was experiencing. A pandemic was declared. While it is difficult to imagine now, because science has really kicked this horrible

disease into a somewhat more manageable place, during those early months,...our world was governed by terror.

As our sad little planet came to a screeching silence, we all prayed and hoped for release.

For my husband and I, it was the end of our plans for a peaceful ending of our story. Our lives would become consumed by increasing illness during a global pandemic.

While we would make every attempt to make the best of our time, time was not in the cards. We had peaceful moments, we talked and processed our lives together, we eventually could see our new grandchild, and spent lots of outdoor time with family and friends, we did get vaccinated, which did give us a bit of ease, and we did spend much much quality time together, which I will forever and ever be grateful to have had.

As is usual during great illness, our close friends in New York rallied to support us, while others slipped away. The hospitals and our oncology team did their best to keep me informed when I could not be in hospitals. We never had a problem getting tested (We had weekly tests). We, like so many many people, did our best to cope with our fears and our mortality during a terrifying time.

Eventually things eased for some of the world. However, my husband lost his life on earth before he could ever again see his family, experience his beloved city or know the ease of living (and dying) in his own language.

I fully realize that I am not alone in this sad pandemic story and I also understand how fortunate we were to have been able to share so much time together, no matter the place or circumstances. We did find joy and peace during those ' couple moments' and we were together with our beloved son when my husband passed away. I have half a century of memories to sustain me as I grieve.

But I sure do wish that we could have returned to Montreal, the city where our love was nourished.

Susanne Oullis Desrochers