

# Virus Under the Microscope

## Act Five

A play-within-a-play for teachers, parents and students  
about the COVID-19 virus with the introduction and naming of more viruses.

An educational story (a play) that concludes with hope by Robert Hicks

In act one of this play-within-a-play I said "If you're going to have a story, have a big story, or none at all. The following is a big story - not big in size, big in importance." What followed, I hope for you, was a story and a message that was big in importance. But what follows on this planet tomorrow, next week and in the months to come is what matters most. We all need to consider the part we will play in the story of the future.

COVID-19 has brought us closer together. For the first time in the history of the world, all of humanity, informed and assisted by the unprecedented reach of digital technology, has come together to focus on the same existential threat. A terrible pandemic that is very infectious and deadly. It has shaken us all. It has also shown us that we can come together in a global effort.

We can broaden this experience to work together to confront the issues (climate change, racism and inequality) that plague our earth and require urgent attention. The previous four acts have been building to this conclusion. Act five of this play-within-a-play is being written to tell you how, and why, I feel we can succeed. It will be up to you to decide if this play-within-a-play is fiction or reality.

At the end of Act Four, Lab Tech #1 said, "The next time we meet I would like to document our findings. The conclusion is surprising. It is powerful. I promise it will give you hope."

Tech # 2 responded with, "I'm looking forward to it. Next week I will introduce you to a new member of our team, Lab Tech #3; she is a brilliant technologist. Before we meet, I will update her on our discussions. We must take action to address the viruses. I think she can help us."

And to this Tech # 1 responded, "Great! I look forward to meeting her. Until next week, I tap my heart for you with four fingers to wish you Goodwill, Compassion, Respect and Justice!"

*At the end of Act Four, the viruses looked at each other, wondering why all the poetry in this play? Poetry makes them nervous. They can't understand why humans express themselves in this strange way (words expressed eloquently; their meaning felt deeply converting feelings into passions). They would much rather deal with complacent, demotivated humans that they can continue to manipulate. A look of confusion is now evident on the virus' faces. Is it possible? The words; the music of reason; the possibility that a heart exists within them? The viruses all look at each other again. They wonder what the other viruses are thinking. They wonder if they are all thinking the same thing.*

*The Lab Techs enter the stage and take a seat at the long lab table. They are 7 feet apart (they like the extra foot – it does not have to be 6 feet). A new lab tech has joined the fight against the COVID-19 Virus. She knows the other lab techs, but this is her first day on the COVID-19 Team. She enters with confidence, but concern.*

The new Lab Tech #3 says, "It's good to see you both. I am happy to join the fight. I have seen too many viruses. I can't help but wonder, why are their origins so perplexing? What are your thoughts?"

Tech #2 answers, "Well, a virus is a microscopic parasite that lacks the capacity to thrive and reproduce outside of a host body. They come in all shapes and sizes, from minuscule to monsters. Similarly, they come in a range of complexities."

Lab Tech #3 says, “They sure do and there are so many.”

Tech #1 adds, “The origin of all viruses is unclear, but one thing we know for certain, is the spread of the Virus of Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying, Bigotry, (RPDBB-20), the Virus of Policy Brutality and the Virus of Societal Indifference, the Virus of Inaction, and the Virus of Climate Change, is rooted in mankind. They are spread from person-to-person, group-to-group, and nation-to-nation.

These viruses fester and are spread knowingly or unknowingly. The reason they exist cannot be defined or justified. There is no reason! Not fear, nor difference, nor ignorance, provides a reason. Sadly, they exist, thrive and reproduce from body-to-body, brain-to-brain, and heart-to-heart. From a hardened heart to a broken heart.

The only virus in our discussions that has a defined reason for existing is the Virus of Climate Change. Scientists know why it exists, yet world leaders are ignoring why it exists. Leaders should not ignore it. It is not just an environmental problem, it includes, human health and societal stability. As money gets sucked out of the economy to deal with extreme events, there is less money available for education and health care.

The good news is, there is hope - the ability and desire to heal the hardened heart and the broken heart. There is hope – goodwill, compassion, respect and justice. Life is meant to be this way. Life can be this way!”

*The viruses look at each other and start to wonder – why do we exist if the reasons for our existence cannot be defined or justified?*

Lab Tech #3 says, “That was well said. I share your deep concern about these viruses, and I know we must all work very hard to address all of them. Lab Tech #2 told me about the virus slides, and we must all work together to defeat them. He also showed me the new greeting. Tapping the heart 4 times with 4 fingers to represent Goodwill, Compassion, Respect and Justice. I tap for you also. It is a great greeting!” It is very meaningful, and it supports social distancing.

Lab Tech # 1 says, “That is great to hear. We have been tapping our hearts with the quick four beats for weeks and we are getting use to it. We like it better than the elbow bump - lol.”

*The 3 Lab Techs exchange the 4 quick taps over their hearts.*

*The gesture is contagious! All of the viruses look at each other and tap 4 times where they think their hearts might be. When Climate Change told them it has a heart, they wanted one too. Having a heart is new to them. It feels strange – but they think they like it.*

Lab Tech # 1 continues, “I am glad you both came to work early today. Our shifts do not start for a while and there is a story I want to share. I am hoping you find it interesting and inspiring. It is a true story. It is a story that talks about where we have been and where we are going. It is a story about deep feelings and compassion. It is about protesting.”

Lab Tech #2 says, “That is why we came in early. You mentioned you had a true story to share.”

Lab Tech # 1 says, “Before I start the true story, I would like to comment on some protest history. To share why future protests can be, and likely will be, different from past protests.

History provides many examples of protests that did not produce significant change. For example:

- On Feb 15, 2003, millions of people in 60 countries claimed the streets voicing their opposition of the prospect of war with Iraq and yet a few weeks later the United States was at war.
- In September 2011, for 2 months demonstrations arose to attack the misdeeds of the Finance Industry and “Occupy” Wall Street. It was a protest movement against economic inequality that spread to the wider Occupy movement in more than 900 cities worldwide. Social media

efforts at the time did not provide sufficient social connections and collaboration. It failed their purpose. The protest slogan was “We are the 99%”, against the nations wealthiest 1%, yet no US policies changed very much.

- In 2014, Black Lives Matter received front-page coverage in every major newspaper when they protested by name the killings of 40 unarmed black people by law enforcement officers. To date, the killings continue.

These results lead to the following questions:

- Does protesting have a point?
- Is protesting becoming repetitive and boring?
- Can protests be made greater and more effective, or are people raising their fists to the skies?
- Can protests be a productive use of our political attention, or is it just a bit of social theatre we perform to make ourselves feel virtuous, useful, and righteous?
- How can we inspire others when there is no Gandhi or Martin Luther King to lead the charge?
- Will the protests in the future require strong leaders?
- Why can we expect protests of the future to be more effective?

We know that you and I, and every person we know, can take to the streets, demanding change. We know we have some strong leaders in the world, but why must it be up to them? The world should be able to progress through thousands of leaders of every age and walk of life, understanding that for protests to have power, they must be sustained. This is more likely now that modern networked movements can scale up quickly providing better connections making collaboration easier. Today anyone can gather crowds through tweets and share updates in seconds to thousands of strangers on the move.

Does it require a new “I Have a Dream” speech to shift the national mood to make the protests large? The answer to that is yes and no. Yes, because such speeches will always be welcome and helpful. No, because similar speeches are now in the minds of every protester everywhere on earth. Millions of people are thinking the same thing. They know they have rights, and they know it is important to have the courage to fight for those rights and for the common good of all people. The world is coming together more and more every day. It will soon be more sensible for leaders to surrender to the required change than to resist it!

Today's youth do not need a playbook to guide their efforts. They see the cruel and unjust treatment of control today. They are gaining the courage to fight for a better future.

The answer to why protests of tomorrow will be more effective than the protests of the past can be found in the growth of compassionate radicalism. There has been plenty of compassionate radicalism in the past, but it is spreading like wildfire, engulfing the planet. The surge in compassionate radicalism is becoming faster than a streak of lightning, more powerful than the pounding surf, and mightier than a roaring hurricane in demanding the fundamental societal change that is required to improve world health and to secure justice for all people. Compassionate radicalism is in fashion and it will likely stay in fashion for a very long time.

The Dalai Lama noted, ‘Compassion is the radicalism of our time.’ Compassion includes positive thoughts and feelings including hope, courage, determination and inner strength. When someone expresses compassion toward others, they interact with the best version of themselves.

The choices behind public protest can be highly personal and private. Decision-making can be orchestrated by individuals rather than by a lead representative of a group. Humanity is appreciative of the words and motivation of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Greta Thunberg, and

Autumn Peltier, but no longer expects these powerful leaders to be the only motivators of change. Thousands and maybe millions of leaders everywhere, will step forward in this decade to stand up for Goodwill, Compassion Respect and Justice. As radicals of our day, they will radiate the required compassion and call upon the compassion of others, so urgently required in our communities, and countries throughout the world.”

*Hearing this the Viruses of Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry (the Terrible Five) know their time is up. They know they will be under constant surveillance, and they know change is imminent. But strangely they are not disturbed by this. They feel different. They get together for a quiet discussion among themselves. Something is brewing. They want to speak.*

Tech # 2 responds, “I see what you mean. I agree that compassion is the new radicalism of our time, and perhaps it is becoming widespread just in-time. Our world is going through a phase of acute polarization with divisions between individuals, communities, and countries.

This is a profoundly worrisome and stressful time. People feel powerless and are desperate for solutions. Especially with the COVID-19 Virus, many are finding it hard to cope. I agree, compassionate radicalism will bring about change. Humans have a tremendous resource of natural resilience; we must access it and learn to work with it.”

To this Tech # 3 says, “You guys really get deep into these discussions. I am sorry I missed your previous discussions. But I am glad I am listening to this one!”

Tech # 1 says, “Now for the true story. I want to share this because I think it is a good example of compassionate radicalism and protest. It is a story about a protest I was involved in many years ago.

*On June 6, 2005, in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, seven young Red Hill Expressway protesters quietly filed into a hushed courtroom and filled the front bench of the jury box for lack of other seating space. On that day, these seven activists were on the Mayor of Hamilton's hit list. These seven eco-warriors (as they had come to be known), were already local legends. They were the 'Red Hill Valley Tree-Sitters'. They stood against some fearsome City opposition from the City, including the possibility of facing five-year jail terms for acts of civil disobedience.*

The previous summer, they tried to save a remaining small cluster of trees; the trees existence was threatened by the construction company building the Red Hill Valley Expressway. Over 37,000 trees had already been chopped down. At the end 47,000 trees were destroyed! The blasting of the face of the Niagara escarpment was scheduled to begin. This was a very dangerous place for the Red Hill Valley Tree-Sitters. Not only because of the imminent blasting, but also because of the two security crews the City claimed they had to hire to ‘protect’ the tree-sitters. The crews included some tough-looking characters.

Out of the eco-seven, only three stayed in the trees. The others were their ground support team; providing food and water, usually under the cover of darkness. Many believed that the security guards would beat the supporters if they caught them.

For the ‘Tree Three’, the summer of 2004 was riddled with horrible rainstorms and strong winds that almost blew them off their small platforms perched 50 feet in the air. From dawn to dusk, they were blasted by construction noise, and blinded by huge spotlights all through the night. Some of the security guards made spears and flung them at the very trees the sitters had claimed. Name-calling, insults and physiological torment was a daily occurrence. Still, the sitters stayed, determined to make their point.

They succeeded at making their point in the hearts of thousands of supporters, including the 19 community groups and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), that had voiced their objections to the project. They were examples of compassionate radicalism, but not in the eyes of civil leaders. Next, they were in court, and they refused to apologize for their actions.

After years of debate, the City had continued to ignore the warnings that many in the world had embraced. The City was scheduled to build a 7 km highway into farm fields that would enable developers to continue to build their large residential homes. Developers had been sitting on farm lots for years. With the new highway, there would be no stopping them.

Many of the developers had over-contributed to the Mayor's campaign and the local Justice demanded the Mayor and 18 corporations, lots of them numbered companies, open their books for an audit. Unfortunately, it had taken a citizen, with \$25,000 of her own money and more than 15-days in court, to prove an audit should be conducted.

There had been many court actions over the previous two years, including lawsuits by the City against the federal Department of Environment, its staff and former Cabinet Minister, for construction delays due to environmental assessments.

On top of this, a narrow majority of City Council endorsed lawsuits against the seven youths who had carried out the peaceful 104-day Valley Tree-Sit. This was a move a local journalist referred to as 'returning to the field of battle to shoot the wounded'.

The City of Hamilton sued the seven youths (mostly university students) for \$345,000, which was said to be the cost of hiring the security guards around their protest site. Additionally, the youths faced up to five years in jail. This 'my way or the highway' bully attitude angered thousands of supporters.

In response, the former Cabinet Minister of the Federal Department of the Environment, Shiela Copps, fought back again saying that 'environmental concerns are only discussed during campaigns. As soon as the campaigning is over and government begins, environmental issues are quickly overshadowed by developers with the money to make the laws, or in some cases, change the laws. Noting that a recent national survey said that 'young people do not trust the political system, and that the tree sitters offered an explanation for this attitude: Hamilton had some young people that stood very firmly for what they believed in. For this they were arrested and faced with huge legal bills, from the City of Hamilton, because the Mayor and bullies at City Hall think they are going to intimidate people into not caring about the environment.' As an example of compassionate radicalism these young people stood up to those bullies.

I took part in those protests. In my own version of compassionate radicalism, I supported the tree sitters and their cause. I did not only attend a rally at the construction site, I wrote a poetic 'Ode to Hamilton's Tree Sitting Heroes' and distributed copies to everyone attending a City Open House.

On June 1, I sent an email of the Ode poem to the Mayor of Hamilton and 15 City Councillors, which read as follows:

*'I hope the following Ode to Hamilton's Tree Sitting Heroes will help you see more clearly why it is so very shameful, disgraceful and wrong for you to be prosecuting these young people. Your olive branch will be seen by the community as nothing more than a twig with no leaves unless you drop this case completely. It is time for you to show needed compassion and tolerance before your efforts to punish these young people become a major national embarrassment to your City.'*

I received one response from a councillor saying, 'We are trying Bob.'

## Ode to Hamilton's Tree Sitting Heroes

By Robert Hicks

With courage and faith and willing heart  
They stepped forward bravely to do their part  
They tried to save a 14th century native village and protect native rights  
They tried to prevent damage to at least 11 archaeological sites  
They tried to save sixteen hundred acres of environmentally significant area  
They tried to bring more attention to the communities escalating hysteria

With courage and faith and willing heart  
They stepped forward bravely to do their part  
They tried for all the birds and animals to save their migration corridor  
They tried for all the endangered species that needed their habitat more  
They tried for all the creatures and a demonstration they did stage  
They tried for all the creatures knowing some people would react with rage

With courage and faith and willing heart  
They stepped forward bravely to do their part  
They knew citizens with breathing problems need the air to be clear  
They knew the expressway would bring another one million trucks a year  
They knew the expressway would double the amount of bad air days  
They knew efforts to express their concerns required bold new ways

With courage and faith and willing heart  
They stepped forward bravely to do their part  
The deed was what these eco heroes made  
It mattered not how long they stayed  
For they became heroes from the very start  
When in life's journey they stepped forward to do their part

With courage and faith, they showed willing heart  
With courage and faith, they bravely did their part  
With courage and faith, they sat high and alone  
With courage and faith, they sat adjacent to the construction blast zone  
With courage and faith, they sat fifty feet above the ground  
With courage and faith, they sat and waited for that awful sound

Through bright blue skies and tree leaf greens  
They surveyed what they steadfastly envisioned pristine  
They were tired but they remained brave and they remained bold  
Then for their safety they were told  
Come down now we give you warning  
Blasting of the earth will start in the morning

For the safety of the Tree Sitters all said they did care  
But rocks the size of footballs did fly through the air  
Fifteen meters deep and eighty meters wide  
The City of Hamilton would take a huge chunk out of the Niagara Escarpment's hide  
Even though it is a World Biosphere Reserve  
They proceeded with regrettable unforgettable unshakeable nerve

The Tree Sitter's heroism did not stop or slow down construction  
From up high they could only look down on destruction  
They are true Eco Heroes they did not do this for fun  
They did it to save the environment for East Hamilton  
They became true eco heroes to thousands and certainly to me  
But unfortunately, not to everyone in our society

Although the delicate ecosystem that existed in the Red Hill Valley soon will be gone  
The efforts of thousands of concerned citizens must remain forever strong  
Like those brave Tree Sitting Heroes we must continue to care  
We must continue to fight for the environment and for clean water and air  
A big thanks goes out to everyone who supported them and felt their cries  
These Heroes will be remembered by all of us the rest of our lives.

Those three Tree-Sitters and their team influenced me. I will never forget them. Fifteen years later, I am telling you this story about them. It feels like yesterday. I think the actions of the Tree-Sitters and this poetic Ode, are examples of what compassionate radicalism is about. They are certainly examples of very strong feelings.

In October 2005, the last of the Tree-Sitting Red Hill Expressway Protesters charged with civil contempt to appear in court, accepted a negotiated settlement with the City. The suit against the tree sitters cost taxpayers nearly a quarter-million dollars. The City didn't collect a penny. In the end, they let the Tree-Sitters go free."

*Upon hearing this, the Viruses of Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying and Bigotry (the Terrible Five) and the Viruses of Societal Indifference, Police Brutality and Inaction were moved. They all felt the pains of compassionate radicalism within them; a feeling they had not experienced before. They were realizing, like the Virus of Climate Change, they had hearts as they admired the hearts of the tree sitters. The Virus of Climate Change had tears in it's eyes (similar to the tears in my eyes as I write this).*

Tech #2 says, "Oh Wow! That ode was powerful."

Tech #3 says, "Thank you for sharing your story. Does anyone have a Kleenex?"

Tech #1 continued, "I have another example of compassionate radicalism. It is recent and powerful. It is another true story.

Last month Greta Thunberg and 'Fridays for Future' (FFF) climate activists from Belgium and Germany published an open letter with demands to the European Union (EU) and world leaders. In the last month their letter has been signed by more than 125,000 people. On August 21, they hand-delivered the letter to German Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

*The letter said the following:*

- *"(Their) Our demands include halting all fossil fuel investments and subsidies, divesting from fossil fuels, making ecocide an international crime, designing policies that protect workers and the most vulnerable, safeguarding democracy and establishing annual, binding carbon budgets based on the best available science.*
- *We understand the world is complicated and that what we are asking for may not be easy or may seem unrealistic. But it is much more unrealistic to believe that our societies would be able to survive the global heating we're heading for – as well as other disastrous ecological consequences of today's business as usual. We are inevitably going to have to fundamentally change, one way or another. The question is, will the changes be on our terms, or on nature's terms?*
- *In the Paris agreement world leaders committed themselves to keeping the global average temperature rise to well below 2C and aiming for 1.5C. Our demands demonstrate what that commitment means. Yet this is just the very minimum of what needs to be done to deliver on those promises.*
- *So, if leaders are not willing to do this, they'll have to start explaining why they're giving up on the Paris agreement. Giving up on their promises. Giving up on the people living in the most affected areas. Giving up on the chances of handing over a safe future for their children. Giving up without even trying.*
- *Science doesn't tell anyone what to do, it merely collects and presents verified information. It is up to us to study and connect the dots. When you read the reports, as well as what leaders have actually signed up for in the Paris agreement, you see that the climate and ecological crisis can no longer be solved within today's systems. Even a child can see that policies of today don't add up with the current best available science.*
- *We need to end the ongoing wrecking, exploitation and destruction of our life support systems and move towards a fully decarbonized economy that is centred on the well-being of all people, democracy and the natural world.*

- *If we are to have a chance of staying below 1.5C of warming, our emissions need to immediately start reducing rapidly towards zero and then on to negative figures. That's a fact. And since we don't have all the technical solutions, we need to achieve that, we have to work with what we have at hand today. And this has to include stopping doing certain things. That's also a fact. However, it's a fact that most people refuse to accept. Just the thought of being in a crisis that we cannot buy, build or invest our way out of seems to create some kind of collective mental short circuit.*
- *This mix of ignorance, denial and unawareness is at the very heart of the problem. As it is now, we can have as many meetings and climate conferences as we want. They will not lead to sufficient changes, because the willingness to act and the level of awareness needed are still nowhere in sight. The only way forward is for society to start treating the crisis like a crisis.*
- *We still have the future in our own hands. But time is rapidly slipping through our fingers. We can still avoid the worst consequences. But to do that, we have to face the climate emergency and change our ways. And that is the uncomfortable truth we cannot escape."*

This letter comes at a time when government choices in the next couple of years will shape our future for decades to come, for better or worse. To be for the better they must facilitate a fair but large-scale industrial transformation that prioritizes human life and the environment over profits. This is a time when governments world-wide must draw inspiration from increasingly popular initiatives that are happening in Europe; such as, The Economy of the Common Good (ECG) movement, that envisions a capitalist order that rewards economic activities promoting human rights, sustainable development, accountability and transparency. Rather than simply measuring financial profits, a company's success is determined by its contribution to the common good.

The EU's Recovery Plan is indicative of this. It entails the 'do no harm principle', a policy instrument that excludes financial support for economic activities not considered sustainable, such as the fossil fuel industry.

One reason this is very important is that in September 2019, when the world got together for the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, countries had been called upon to bring concrete targets to a special summit with the aim to compel countries into stronger action on climate change and get on track to meet the Paris Agreement. Seventy-seven countries committed to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The US did not offer any commitments. President Trump made a surprise appearance at the summit, staying for just ten minutes.

Arguments about climate change rage around who does what and who pays. Progress demands that nearly 200 countries with widely differing levels of prosperity and vulnerability, different political systems and interests, agree on the means to achieve an unprecedentedly challenging set of objectives. The conversations are both driven by the understanding that failure would bring catastrophe and hindered by the complexity and scale of the effort required.

In May 2019 the UN was pushing to end new coal plant construction saying, 'Don't build new coal plants after 2020, and certainly don't pay for them with taxpayer money.' The leaders of Australia and Japan (both countries support expansion of coal production), did not address the summit.

Today there is more tension than harmony in global geopolitics and China has yet to demonstrate its potential for climate leadership. Since the US left the Paris Agreement, the loss of political momentum is great. It will have to be rebuilt. If Joe Biden wins the election in November 2020, maybe that will be possible.

How to emerge from this global pandemic crisis with more resilient and sustainable growth will test the wisdom, determination and foresight of all governments. They may have wisdom and they may have foresight, but do they have the determination it requires? Until they begin to talk-the-talk and



walk-the-walk, protesters will have to walk the streets of every country and do the talking for them using cardboard signs. Since government transparency and trust is sparse, the walking and the talking of the protesters be constant. The FFF movement has made that very clear.

August 20 marked the two-year anniversary since the first 'school strike for the climate' took place. Since then, millions have taken to the streets to join the decades-long fight for climate and environmental justice. Over these past two years, the world has also emitted more than 80 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> according to the Global Carbon Project (80 gigatonnes = 80 billion metric tonnes).

Tech # 2 responds, "I am glad the FFF movement has not slowed their efforts in light of the COVID-19 crisis. The next Global Strike is set for September 25<sup>th</sup> and the FFF movement and other groups are asking for a [#JustRoveyForAll](#) from the COVID-19 pandemic that puts people and the planet first."

Tech # 3 says, "Yes the COVID-19 crisis will not slow them down. Since August 2018, mostly on Fridays, sometimes on Thursdays, Saturdays or Sundays, the FFF movement protests have occurred all over the world and some of them have been huge. On March 15, 2019, 1.4 million people participated, and in September 2019, during a week of protests, 6 million people participated with thousands of towns and cities uniting people across time zones, cultures and generations to demand urgent action to the escalating ecological emergency.

I remember a spokesperson for the FFF movement coordinating the demonstrations said, '*People power is more powerful than the people in power.*' *It was the biggest ever climate mobilization, and it's only the beginning. The momentum is on our side and we are not going anywhere. We will keep fighting until the politicians stop ignoring the science, and the fossil fuel companies are held responsible for their crimes against our future, as they should have been decades ago.*"

Tech #1 continued, "Yes, there is no doubt the FFF movement and many other environmental and social justice groups will fight hard in the years ahead. I can feel the compassionate radicalism in their letter to world leaders and I can feel the compassionate radicalism that is spreading everywhere. I agree 'people power', 'compassionate people power' can make the difference required.

People may wonder what it means to 'make a difference'. Everyone talks about 'making a difference', 'changing the world' or 'doing good', but few define what they mean.

Consider this:

*Your social impact (making a difference) can be determined by the number of people whose lives you influence and improve, and how much you influence and improve them, over the long-term. You can increase your social impact by helping more people, by helping the same number of people to a greater extent, or by doing something which has benefits that last for a longer time. The latter is especially important when your actions affect future generations. For example; if you can improve the quality of government decision-making, you might not see many quantifiable short-term results, but you will have solved lots of other problems over the long term.*

This definition is broad enough to cover many ways to make the world a better place. It's broad enough to cover environmental protection. If we let the environment degrade, the future of civilization will be threatened. In that way, protecting the environment improves lives. It is also broad enough to include the fight for social justice and help people who are confronted with racism, prejudice, discrimination, bullying and bigotry (RPDBB-20 the terrible five), and the virus of Police Brutality.

We must all fight for all people plagued by these viruses. Justice is more than fairness. The nature of justice is both a moral virtue of character and a desirable quality of political society as it applies to ethical and social decision-making. It is essential in a just society. Life is meant to be this way; now, and 100 years from now.

Compassionate Radicalism or Radical Compassion is a specific type of general compassion, which includes the inner imperative to change reality in order to alleviate the pain of others. It is total compassion – nothing is excluded. This state of mind is universal and stands at the root of the historical cry for social change. It stands at the root of protests today.

There is an important difference between the protests of today and the protests of the past. Protests of today are more visible; everyone is watching. Ugly state-sponsored violence, or anti-protest violence against peaceful protesters will be visible through social media and will likely motivate the immediate spread of further protests. Easy-ended protests are a march of the past.

*Hearing this the Virus of Police Brutality knows it's time is up. It knows it will be under constant surveillance. It also agrees that compassion for others must support the rule of law.*

Accordingly, today's leaders should realize their time is up. Reasonable and required demands for dramatic change will be forced upon them by millions of youth with likely support of their parents. As a result, the next 5 years will see dramatic change throughout the world.

*Hearing this, the Viruses of Indifference and Inaction know their time is up. They know they will be under constant surveillance. They know that fewer and fewer people will be complacent and complicate in their silence. They know this decade will make a difference. This decade will be about caring for the future and refusing to be part of its destruction.*

To be successful, people must rise to speak truth “through” power, as much as to speak truth “to” power. Change will be swift through mainstream power via our culture institutions. Protests are necessary but protests alone will be insufficient without help from persuaded and committed leaders and institutions. Institutions should by now know that world-wide protests are not the result of disgruntled masses that can be ignored, but due to informed masses that clearly see the failures of their leaders and a lack of effort to correct those failures. In this decade, governments and institutions will observe the informed masses whose knowledge and correctness must be heard. They will not observe disgruntled masses hoping their protests can work. They will observe informed masses knowing their protests will work because they must.

In the past leaders dismissed anything that reached beyond their understanding. They were focused on delivering their own messages and unwilling to hear the messages of others. Today's leaders know the people they lead are not naive. Leaders no longer have acceptable excuses or alibi's for dismissing the actions urgently required in support of human rights and justice.”

Tech # 2 responds, “Seeing the big picture makes me feel worried and comforted at the same time. On one hand what you have told us is alarming, to put it mildly; on the other hand I am encouraged the protests we are likely to see over the next few years will bring about significant and required change.”

Tech # 3 says, “Yes, seeing the big picture helps to keep the final-destination in sight. In everyday life there will always be things happening that will shift our focus away from the big picture. What matters is how strong and persistent we remain towards achieving the end goal; to hold world leaders accountable to make the required changes now, to delay, climate change. Greta Thunberg is leading this fight and she has my 100% support.”

Tech #1 says, “What a great discussion this has been. I also feel comforted and encouraged that future protests will make the important difference.”

*Unexpectedly, there was a knock on the Lab door. Tech Support Services delivered a large envelope addressed to Lab Techs # 1, # 2 and # 3.*

They said, "I found this on my desk in the mail room when I returned from coffee. I don't know how it got there. I delivered it right away. It might be important!?"

The 3 Lab Techs said, "Thanks", and facing the Tech Support Service Worker, tapped their hearts 4 times as he left the lab.

Tech # 1 says, "I wonder what this could be?"

*Tech # 1 opens the envelope and finds a very surprising letter:*

*Dear Lab Techs # 1, # 2 and # 3,*

*We are the Viruses you have been discussing for weeks while you have been working to address the COVID-19 Virus. We are the Viruses of Racism, Prejudice, Discrimination, Bullying, Bigotry, RPDBB-20, Societal Indifference, Police Brutality, Inaction, Climate Change and COVID-19.*

*During the last few months, you took a magnified look at us under your microscope where we described ourselves in detail. Anyone who examines our slides will understand us, if they didn't already.*

*While you were studying us, we were studying you. We listened to every word you said. Surprisingly we learned something about you AND about ourselves that we were not aware of. Your discussions made us look inward and we discovered, like the Virus of Climate Change, we have hearts!*

*As a result, we owe you an apology. We are very sorry for what we have done to you and all of humanity.*

*How did we make this change of heart? You taught us to recognize that the emotions of billions of people around the globe are common. You taught us that billions of people care about causes that are too often swept under the rug by governments while perpetrators of aggression and wrong doings receive only slaps on the wrist, if at all. You have taught us to see the inequity, the inequality and the injustice in your world.*

*We see the frustration expressed by the masses. We cannot ignore the collective grief and outrage felt by countless victims of our terrible and collective actions.*

*We see the many failures manifested by the Virus of Societal Indifference and the Virus of Inaction can no longer be tolerated and why none of us can persist. We deeply regret and are profoundly sorry for all harm we have caused.*

*We hope that this acknowledgement of our errors in judgment will encourage others to examine themselves. We do not expect to change all minds, but we hope our apology will plant a seed.*

*To the skeptics, we ask you to consider exploring your heart for an understanding and emotional connection with people you would otherwise dismiss. We now understand that having the courage to listen to another person's pain can commence the process required to create change.*

*Empathy is the minimum requirement to create change; supported by listening. We listened to you through the five acts of this play-within-a-play and we have learned from you. We did not expect to learn, but we did. Now we wish you and all of mankind Goodwill, Compassion, Respect and Justice. As we leave you, we tap our hearts four times for you.*

*Sincerely*

**THE VIRUS OF RACISM, THE VIRUS OF PREJUDICE, The Virus of Discrimination. The Virus of Bullying,**  
The Virus of Bigotry, **THE VIRUS OF RPDBB-20, The Virus of Societal Indifference,** The Virus of Inaction, *The*  
*Virus of Police Brutality,* The Virus of Climate Change, The Virus of COVID-19

*PS: Please look under the microscope.*

*Before the viruses turn to leave, they wait for Lab Tech #1 to look at the slide they slipped under the microscope.*

Tech # 1 says, "This slide is asking why humans speak through poetry?"

Tech # 1 answers, "Because poetry is a strange and wonderful thing. Poetry is literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings; expressing words that may otherwise not be said. The words become guides to the feelings that lie between the lines."

*The Viruses agree they like this answer. Poems express the contents of hearts and minds, often inserting the remedies between the lines. The Viruses realize everyone wants goodwill, compassion, respect and justice. They realize everyone DESERVES goodwill, compassion, goodwill and justice. They decide they will share this play-within-a-play with many, often! The Viruses hold hands as they depart to spread the word. Tap, tap, tap, tap ...*

Tech #1 says; "WOW! I did not know this story would end this way. I wasn't sure how it would end but the ending is not what I expected. It gives us hope a wonderful new day is possible."

Tech # 2 responds, "I am stunned. The letter was amazing. Your description of poetry is beautiful! It makes sense."

Tech # 3 says, "That letter is astounding! This is an amazing moment! I'm thankful I worked with you today. This is a day I will never forget. I am inspired and I want to try to write poetry. I have so much I want to say. We all have things to say!"

Tech #1 says, "Oh, one last thing before we start work, I wrote an open letter of thanks to all peaceful protesters in all parts of the world. The idea of thanking all peaceful protesters may sound inappropriate, especially to people who think that protesters are annoying troublemakers, and don't believe in what the protests are for. Let me read the letter and you can tell me if you feel it is appropriate."

Tech #2 says, "Nothing you do or say surprises me anymore."

Tech #3 says, "The idea of thanking protesters for protesting has never occurred to me. This might be a great idea."

An open letter to Peaceful Protesters everywhere on earth,

Peaceful protesting has long been a part of our history, and for the benefit of society it is not just a written right, it is also an unwritten responsibility. The responsibility to ensure our governments are truly, as they should be, 'of the people, by the people and for the people'.

In our democracies you have a right to get together and peacefully protest whatever we feel is wrong, could be fairer or more just. Putting your beliefs out there for the world to see and judge is not easy for many people and when you do, we should extend a heartfelt thank you, to you, for doing it. You deserve to be celebrated as caring world citizens who drive necessary change. You, by the raising

of your voice, hands and signs, spur our governments to act on required, even crucial change or to change course on policies that have been harmful or misguided.

As you have likely noticed, today, people everywhere are expressing their appreciation and gratitude to all who are serving in the fight against the COVID-19 Virus. I am sure you agree these expressions of thanks are very appropriate. What you may not be aware of is that you also deserve appreciation and gratitude for standing up and speaking out for goodwill, compassion, respect and justice.

Please keep doing what you are doing. It means the world to so many today, and it will mean so much more for humanity long into the future.

To those peacefully protesting, please know that we see you - and we thank you - the world's future is brighter because of you!

Sincerely,

(Insert your name here)

Tech #2 says, "I would like to add my name to that letter."

Tech #3 says, "Yes, I was just about to say the same thing. I think it is a wonderful letter and very appropriate. This letter is long overdue. I would love to sign it."

Tech #1 says, "Yes, that would be great – please do. I have not figured out who to deliver the letter to, or how to distribute it, but we'll figure it out. Maybe others will help us.

Okay, time for work. This fight against the COVID-19 Virus has been challenging, but together we will win the fight!

Oh, I almost forgot; I got up early today and baked you a Loaf of Peace."

*Tech # 1 gives Tech #2 and # 3 a Loaf of Peace.*



Tech #1 says: "I baked these loaves using different ingredients. I never know what they will look like; they come in all shapes and sizes. I am not the greatest cook, but every loaf I make is made with goodwill, compassion, respect and justice in the recipe. Hmm, sounds like a good recipe for life.

I've included the poem I wrote in Act 1; enjoy."

### **Let's Bake a Loaf of Peace**

There is as much hunger for Peace in this world as there is for bread;  
Conflicts starve us all.

There is as much love in the homes of ever country as there is in your own;  
Love unites us all.

There is as much need for understanding in this world as there is for forgiveness;  
Reconciliation can save us all.

To satisfy the worlds hunger for Peace;  
Feed yourself with good judgment,  
Feed your governments with good advice,  
Feed all others with compassion and hope,  
Feed them with opportunities to help them cope.  
Let's grow more crops of goodwill and respect,  
Let's grow more caring and more sharing,  
Let's harvest the will to feed us all,  
Let's Bake a Loaf of Peace.

The three Lab Techs are happy. This experience has changed them. They make copies of the Viruses Letter of Apology to Mankind to give to their friends. The letter fills their hearts with joy. They know the road ahead will be a difficult one, but they are feeling positive about the future. The letter gives them hope.

They wish each other well with 4 taps over their hearts, as they begin what they know will be a busy day fighting COVID-19.

End of Act 5

**Act 6 will not be written by me - I hope it will be written by you.**

In the year 2100 when people read this play-within-a-play they will ask what did we know, when did we know it, and what did we do about it? We should be asking now what will humanity be like in the year 2100? What will climate change look like in the year 2100? What will we do now to help our youth experience a healthy and happy year 2100?

Nothing will change unless we change our thinking. We can create peace and restore the structure of our social fabric to foster peace like we have fought COVID – together. We must slow down our planet. We must slow down all human activities on this planet – together. This will be the decade of compassionate radicalism. Maybe I will see you at a protest.



### **I Tap For You**

I wish you goodwill throughout your life.  
I wish you compassion without any strife.  
I wish you respect, every minute, every day.  
I wish you justice, life is meant to be this way.

Robert Hicks

Canadian Peace Activist, Climate Activist, Poet and now a Playwright

About the author:

As a peace activist in 2002, Robert Hicks was nominated for the YMCA Canada Peace Medal for his efforts to promote world peace through the Toastmasters organization. As Vice President Education of Mansion Toastmasters in Burlington, Ontario, he organized a special meeting for "Peace Talks." It was an evening of speeches about peace that provoked people to think more about the importance and meaning of peace in the new millennium. His hope was that more "Peace Talks" would take place throughout the world and that through a meeting of minds and hearts we can pave the way for a peaceful and just future for all people.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> 2003, as a member of Poets-Against-the-War, Robert headed the Canadian delegation of a world-wide effort to present the leaders of 7 countries with 13,000 Anti-War Poems that had been submitted to a Poets-for-Peace website over a period of just 6 weeks. On March 17<sup>th</sup>, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced that Canada would not participate in a pending invasion saying Canada refused to declare war against Iraq without United Nations Security Council approval and because the people of Canada did not support it.

Robert likes to think that the 13,000 anti-war poems helped to motivate that decision. He wrote the following words on the inside cover of the 13,000-poem presentation. "There is as much hunger for peace in this world as there is for bread. War starves us all. To satisfy the world's hunger for peace – starve war."

Robert's presentation of poems MP Paddy Torsney



MP Paddy Torsney presented the poems to PM Jean Chrétien



As an environmental activist from, 1998 to 2002, Robert served as a member and Chair of the City of Burlington Sustainable Development Committee.

As founder of the Friends of McNichol Park Community Group, Robert led the group through a successful court case against the rezoning of a 14-acre lakefront park in Burlington Ontario. After winning the lawsuit Robert wrote a successful application for a \$300,000 Federal Millennium Fund Grant to help restore the mansion now known as Paletta Lakefront Park and Mansion. The park has become the jewel in the crown of the city.

In 2004, Robert formed a Student Math Action Research Team (SMART), an Ontario Public Interest Student Research Working Group at McMaster University. The Group's slogan was - "Making mathematics matter more for the environment." In May 2005 Robert gave a SMART presentation at a Natural Resources Canada Adapting to Climate Change Conference in Montreal, and also to the Government of Ontario at Queen's Park. During that time Robert served a 5-year term as a community representative on the OPIRG Board of Directors.

Additional community contributions include:

2010 and 2011 – Organized the 'Art in the Mist' Fine Arts Festival in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

2010 to 2016 – Volunteer for Meals on Wheels Program in Niagara Falls.

2018 to 2019 – Volunteer in the Emergency Room of the Niagara Falls General Hospital (now on hold due to COVID-19)

As a poet, Robert's poems are written from the heart. Robert's words convey goodwill, compassion, respect and justice. Robert's hope is peace for all in a healthy world.

Robert retired in 2008 after a 35-year career in senior purchasing and contract administration roles within the industrial sector. Born in 1948, Robert is 72. Robert has been happily married to his wife Loretta for 49 years. Loretta is an accomplished artist and Robert adds, a wonderful cook.

Due to COVID-19, Robert had to stay home when social distancing protocols were put in place and he could not go to the gym or volunteer at the hospital. With time on his hands, Robert sat in front of his computer and started to write a submission for the Brock University Library, COVID-19 Archive. The request was for people to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences in real-time, and in a novel way, to help people in the near and far future looking for such materials to retell our history. Robert could not resist the opportunity to respond.

His words now translate their importance through a play: "Virus Under the Microscope".

Robert's sister and self-defined amateur wordsmith, Carol Fentiman, has contributed to this submission. Whether it be the change of a word, format of a sentence, or the creation of the "I Tap For You" poem, Carol recognizes what her brother has to say is important for others to hear. Robert has written this play for you. A story of truth. A story of hope. A story everyone can be a part of. What we do now can change the ending. What will you do?