

Don't Hold Your Breath

A small sliver of light appeared as I cracked open my eyes this early morning. Bigger and bigger, that small sliver of light got as I forced myself out of bed. I lazily tossed the covers off and sat up with a groan. Sundays are overrated. As a kid, Sundays were my favourite day of the week. No school, and no activities. But as a current day doctor, Sundays are the death of me. I'm joking of course, as I love my job working in the pediatric section of our brand-new hospital, downtown Toronto. Big, busy Toronto has turned into a flourishing, green community. The city is more beautiful than it's ever been. With that thought in mind, I finally got in the right headspace and hopped out of bed onto the sturdy floors of my towering apartment building. I think it's one of the most beautiful apartments in Toronto, with its gorgeous green rooftops holding our crops, flowers, trees, and the lush greenery draping down the sides of the building. I occasionally have to lean out my window and trim the plants which grow so much they obstruct my city view. I walk over to my wall, and flick on the lights. They are all run by sustainable energy sources, like our newer installation, the RidgeBlade. It stretches out along the the top of our building and harnesses the wind to produce energy. This new power

source basically runs the whole building! The rest of the power comes from the solar panels on the roof.

Speaking of energy, in order to give myself a boost of the stuff, I stumbled into my kitchen and poured myself a cup of mushroom coffee. I sat down at my counter and glanced up at my clock only to see that I was on the verge of being late! I'm almost never late, and I didn't want this to become a habit. I rushed around my house collecting what I needed for the day. I threw on some clothes, and rushed out into the lobby, flew down a flight of stairs, and out the door. I almost forgot to put on my mask, which is used to filter out the chemicals in the air. (I know there will come a day when we don't have to filter our air. And I have a feeling that day will be soon.) I gave a quick wave to our local gardeners who work so hard at keeping our green walls thriving and I continued down the street. I saw the electric bus pulling up to my stop, and I started running. The driver is always nice, but nice enough to hold up traffic? I don't think so. As an electric scooter whizzed past me, I reminisced back to when I was a kid, and the first model came out. It was the most exciting thing back then, but now they are one of the easiest, and most common uses of transportation. As I kept running, all I could hear were my jars clinking around in my bag that I needed to refill, as it was my shopping day. Nevertheless, I kept my eyes fixed on the bus. It was pulling into the stop just as I

came to a walk, slightly aware of the lingering eyes on me. I probably looked like a mess. I hadn't even had time to look in a mirror. As the electric bus took a few minutes to restore its full charge, I rustled around in my purse for my bus pass. It's funny how some things stay the same when others change so much. My pass is almost identical to the one I had when I was a kid. I climbed onto the bus as it detached from the charging station and let out a sigh of relief when I sat down. Emily Booth was not going to be late.

When the bus pulled up to my stop I got up and shuffled my way to the doors. I realized that during the ride it had started raining! No wonder the bus was so busy today. When it rains, it's much easier to take the bus rather than the electric scooters or bikes. I stepped off the bus into the pouring rain and walked as fast as I could towards the hospital without getting fully drenched. I have always loved my short walk from my bus stop to the hospital. Surrounding the hospital are several patches of small forests. It's my favourite place to take some of the children I work with. Over the past few decades, air quality has been getting worse and worse. Only recently, have we been starting to see some positive changes. It is one of the reasons we are starting to have more small forests throughout the city. The air quality has mostly been affecting children around the age of 10 and under. Their little lungs just aren't used to the pollution and the chemicals that are

apparent in the air. I've spent most of my life figuring out solutions to help these children breathe more easily, and I think that finally, it's working.

I hurried up the stairs to the entrance of the pediatric department. The familiar, clean smell of the hospital greeted me as I entered. Thank goodness they switched from those awful chemicals to toxin-free disinfectants. When I first worked at the hospital, the smell of the cleaning supplies was awful. I rounded the corner on the way to my office and admired the new greenhouse across from where all the children's rooms are. It now smells of fresh herbs and veggies. They have these mini indoor farms on almost every single floor in the hospital. It makes bringing food to patients much easier and fresher. I remember back to when I was little, and my brother was in the hospital for scarlet fever, and the hospital food was disgusting. My dad and I would sneak him in Tim Horton's, as that was his favourite. Nowadays, hospital food is nutritious, delicious, and crucial to a patient's recovery. I continued walking and made my way to my office at the end of the hall, sat down at my computer, and got to work.

Once I had finished writing my emails, I decided to walk over to the little café right beside the hospital. It had stopped raining, so I could truly appreciate our beautiful city. When I entered the café, the faint sound of Taylor Swift music

played. When I was younger, she was the most popular singer out there. And in my opinion, still is. I ordered a cricket flour cookie and handed the barista my reusable mug for my peppermint tea. Years ago, I had just started getting in the habit of bringing reusable mugs with me. But now, it's become a necessity, as there is no other option.

I slowly sipped my drink, savoring its warmth as I walked back to the hospital. My favourite part of the day had arrived, when I could take some children outside for their fresh air and walking treatment. Even though we still had to wear our masks on the walks, it was better than being inside all day. Once I was inside, I checked the air quality monitor, and was surprised to find that the air was much better than it had been for weeks! Had the solutions that the city had been trying to implement finally worked? I rushed over to where my good friend, Abby, sat, on her break.

“Have you seen the monitor today?” I asked her excitedly.

“No, not yet. Why? What does it say?” She replied.

I explained to her that it had improved significantly, and that I was going to go take the children out early. She was as equally excited to hear about this as I was. Maybe, just maybe, these kids could breathe easy.

I made my way to where a few kids sat, playing a card game. I told them that we were going to go outside, and that they could play out in the sun! To see the joyful expressions on their faces made my day. Our time in the gardens is their favourite part of their whole week. I led them over to the door and I noticed they had stopped.

“What’s the matter?” I asked cautiously. “Is everything ok?”

“We need to go get our masks!” Lily, the oldest girl of the group replied.

A sad feeling made its way through me. I remembered when we didn’t have to wear masks on a day-to-day basis. The air filters, and cold climate heat pumps helped inside, but these kids have never known a world where outdoors is a place to breathe safely.

“No masks today.” I said with confidence. That day, whether these kids knew it or not, was a day of change.

They all looked at me with extreme uncertainty.

“Come on guys! Let’s go!” I said. “The air monitor is way past the safe zone. It would be a crime to wear masks on a day like this!”

A few smiles broke out amongst the crowd. This was going to be a great day. The best day for most. No filtered air, no masks, just breathing earth's fresh air. That night, I fell into bed with a huge grin on my face. Finally, the efforts of our world were working. And even if some people didn't know it, today just changed the lives of a bunch of little kids at a little hospital, in their little world. And I feel that maybe, just maybe, I made a difference too.