

Two Differing Stages of the Pandemic

by Inga Liden

May 2020: A Day at Home in the Time of Corona

I was inspired by a friend who asked me "How do you spend a day in this locked-down fearful time?" It is weird that all of us, our friends and family anywhere in the world are fighting the same deadly invisible fierce little virus.

I am terribly scared of getting the horrible illness which is described every day in the media as ferocious. Imagine, to be isolated in an intensive care unit with no one who is near-and-dear to me - and to think that I shall probably die soon - because I am almost 80.

That makes me very strict in my isolation. My household is just me. I am alone at home and I walk alone daily. I am far too worried to join a friend and try to keep six-foot distance which is the law in California. When I walk I wear my mask and garden gloves. It amuses me that I see new and different things when I walk alone in my own neighborhood where I have driven for years.

Now and then I meet a dog who has taken his master for a walk. Both of them look happy and when we meet, they walk into the street or I do it in order to keep the distance. Thank heavens there are hardly any cars around. We look at one another and say "thank you". Instantly these two words become important and meaningful - maybe we both live solo? Perhaps it is the only exchange face-to-face for the day?

Returned home to my locked-down spot I look around and enjoy my "things". Here I am surrounded by my favorite things - little piles of books to read, although I have not read as many as I assumed when my isolation started...and my different projects - to sort out closets and drawers. I create piles of "stuff" labeling them Save, Give Away, Trash.

Fortunately, I love to cook! And also, to shop for food. I do it once a week now and with a list in my hand. Gone are the days when I would dash out to pick up something spontaneously.

Reminding myself not to whine over that but say I'm lucky to be allowed to buy my own food - 'tis a privilege and a pleasure. Many grocery markets give away the bags for free since the recycled ones are forbidden. The virus is said to live on plastic or fabric for 72 hours.

In my own home I can play music when I want to and whatever category I desire! Oh my, how I appreciate those hours! When I cook, I often play opera and at HH (Happy Hour) swing jazz.

On my balcony I turn into a farmer. My herbs are especially satisfying because I enjoy eating what I have nurtured. My flowering potted plants show their gratitude by blooming in cascades after I have eliminated the invaders that EAT! their buds and leaves. The power of growing is visible in my little pots and also the power of life from a seed - makes me humble...

The new phenomenon is our Zoom room. Here I go to class, listen to lectures, learn about new things and have drinks with good friends. We exchange thoughts, titles of films and books, and we discover that we listen better in the Zoom room than in real rooms. That's something valuable. Maybe we appreciate the togetherness more now than ever before?

The old telephone has been through several new lives adding camera, alarm and music. Yet, best of all, it still offers us a choice of just audio - no visuals - reminding us that active listening IS an art.

Below the surface of a courageous attitude during the fearful Corona experience, I feel a gentle sensitivity from friends. I find more caring from near-and-dear ones, but not only from those people who are close to me, but also from worker bees in the grocery store, bank and post office. Let's carry this compassion with us as we enter our New Normal!

September 2020: Life in the Time of Corona

by Inga Liden

There is a haze in the air since many days. It is like June Gloom here in Southern California. The milky white air outside my window covers up a lot of my view and within a few hours my neighbor houses and trees will come into focus again. It reminds me of how I feel about the Corona virus - it has put a haze over my daily life, but sadly it stays on as a veil in my head. It is a depression. I am not alone; several close friends express how they are struggling with pessimism that goes into depression.

I am angry, too. I hold back my grumpy comments about other people who ignore facial masks, and we all make satirical remarks about how the political Administration acts arrogantly about masks. I don't say what I want when I meet a non masked person in public, but I want to scream "shame on you!" You ignore that you very easily could give me the virus, because I am 75+ and very vulnerable and obviously you don't care if you would get it yourself. Maybe you are stupid, yes stupid, enough not to know how the Covid-19 is spread. It is airborne! How could you NOT know it? Our media world pours out information around the clock. Many automated company phones have several minutes of info on how to protect yourself and your loved ones from the vicious virus. Do not defend yourself by saying you did not know you could carry the virus without getting sick yourself.....do not fake the truth in order to avoid wearing a mask. SHAME ON YOU! I still want to scream it, but I don't. I am afraid that person has a political agenda behind her/his demonstration of no mask. How on earth could a deadly medical issue become political? All I know is it did. It is sad and it scares me that that many individuals belong to that political persuasion.

If I would catch the virus, test positive and have trouble breathing I have written a Statement, saying I do not want to be taken to the hospital. Keep that hospital bed for someone who is eager to try to win with the help of a ventilator. I do not want to try. I

want to stay at home and prepare to die with the protective help of Hospice. I do not want to survive the ventilator treatment.

This decision prompts me to prepare for my heirs and write little notes why I want each of them to see their name on different objects. I have not done that to the extent I think I should. I have experienced receiving things with a note with my name and it has filled my heart with joy and gratefulness. I do feel joyous to do that, but I also mourn the fact that I am facing my own death.

How did previous plagues affect people? The Black Death hit Europe with a peak time 1347 - 1351. I remember learning about it as a nine-year old and how scary it was. In Venice Italy one third of the population died. They began to isolate the sick and it resulted in a new building, their first hospital. The magnificent church Santa Maria della Salute was built in gratitude to God who ended the plague.

The Plague by Albert Camus published in 1947 was spell binding even as an allegory for fascism. I read it on a long train ride and never looked out the window. I still remember its powerful message fifty years later.

At the start of the lock down we were allowed to shop for food and pharma and to go for a walk. I love to cook, and I decided to try new foods, experiment and not worry about the risk since I am a single household. I wrote my list for the week. Some markets created certain hours for seniors. There could be a line outside with painted signs on the ground, "six feet apart", some seniors chatted with one another, others were checking their phones. At the entrance a staff member handed you a sanitized cart and politely said "leave your recycled bags outside - you will get new bags for free". Customers and staff wore masks; some had homemade ones, others pulled up a turtleneck over mouth and nose and a few wore designer made masks - how chic!

We, also learned to thank staff for coming to work.

My food marketing became the high light of my week, a ritual filled with joy. All the rules made me feel pampered. After unpacking it all at home, I sanitized everything. The minute it seemed boring I talked to myself, tough talk, "do not complain - it is all about pushing death out of my life, Here and Now...

But my cooking is always to share the food and drink, and my balcony was too narrow to have guests - and to be outdoors was a must.

So, I got the idea to call on my closest friends with patios and gardens and ask if I could bring whatever they wanted and then we could eat outdoors together. They were all as strict as I and this was the beginning of a wonderful sequence of garden meals and maximum four people.

Our feelings when being face-to-face was nurturing and more than Zoom visuals. I think it became a time of gratefulness and our conversations got deeper than when it was "normal pre- Corona times". I wonder if we were all keeping fear of dying under control when sharing food and talks.

Many of us took the time of lock down to go through closets, garages, and bookshelves. Downsizing gives me a liberating feeling - some is given away, some sold at consignment shops and what I keep is dear to me - often associated with lovely memories. Perhaps

Consumerism was now seen as a 'bad sport' -- unless you really needed it. Maybe Bauhaus was right a long time ago, "Less Is More"!

One of my favorite books of all times is *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez published in 1985 in Spanish and translated into English in 1988. Someone wrote a few comments that I will paraphrase: The title means DEATH. The novel is about people who choose hope over despair, self knowledge over self dramatization in the belief that LOVE can transform age and time.

Now this has summarized why I love the novel and why I will keep on nurturing HOPE, even in the time of Corona.

The author, Inga Liden. My home has recently become San Marcos, CA, and is close to California State University San Marcos, where I have volunteered already as a mentor. I was born and educated in Europe. I received my M.A. from Stockholm and Uppsala Universities with majors in Anthropology and Aesthetics. If I had to do it again, I would choose these rather unusual disciplines for the joy they have added to my life. I did my internships at UNESCO, Paris, and the UN, in NY. My career was clear, UNESCO was for me! But instead, I fell in love with an American man, married and lived on the East Coast. I have worked in the Arts and Education, enjoying every day. Before retiring I added working with seniors as the director of sales and marketing in Senior Communities, learning from the residents about aging. Now almost 80, I am active in The Village Movement as co-chair in North County Village. After being introduced to San Diego Independent Scholars and creating a guest exchange between the two clubs, I immediately became an active member of SDIS!

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