

“Covid-19 & The Power of One Little Bat”

by
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Last year, when covid-19 struck, amidst all the lay-offs and closures, authors everywhere, including Stephen King, had to cancel their book signing and reading events. Book festivals and writer's conferences were cancelled. Book stores closed. We came to call the sudden, emergency covid safety measures "The Shut Down." We also heard from abroad, the term "lockdown." But, in this instance, what I have learned is that it was a shutting down. Not only the economy, but society was forced to shut down and shut out connections.

Those who were essential workers felt the pain of loss of connection to loved ones, unable to attend funerals, to come together as a family and grieve and comfort each another. Those who could not or would not comply with safety measures, experienced loss nonetheless. No one on the planet was spared. In our day to day lives, avoiding contact, even eye contact on sidewalks, has been painful. Being shunned as passersby turned their backs on us while hiking on the trail or pushing a shopping cart in the store past them, has caused pain.

We could not keep it up for long, when online events zoomed into our lives and, sink or swim, we all needed to adapt to the new normal. Becoming tech-savvy seemed like a survival measure, trying to stay in touch and stay connected. Neighbors wave to one another from across the street, shouting, "Good morning!" Little kindnesses, messages in chalk on sidewalks, and humble acts have helped us all to honor our fellow humanity.

Still, the long hours once filled with travel and going to the movies, meeting up with a book club or the work day in an office, attending sports and school events, were now filling with stress. Loads of screen time, take-out food, hoarded canned and packaged food, overeating out of boredom, watching too much tv, brought us the "Covid-10" as we gained that 5 or 10 pounds that won't go away. Everyone in the same space at the same time, or being alone day after day after day becomes nearly intolerable. Many of us found that an "I don't care" attitude helped, wearing whatever we pleased, whether mismatched, goofy outfits with sparkles and hair dyed or dumpy sweatpants, even pajamas, no matter. Hair grows and must be cut...or not.

The shutting down and shutting out became a forced "time out" for all of us. News of the sad state of the world, the nation, and the state, has been a relentless barrage of problems, issues, and overwhelming sorrows. Little messes in the corner of our rooms become enormous messes in the world's chaos of uprisings, protests, mass murders, starvation, refugee camps, climate change, and on and on and on. Demands for justice, for change by those no longer tolerating the status quo have challenged further our ability to cope. Fortunately, this upheaval is not a permanent situation. But, no one can honestly deny that it has changed us all as we emerge from our shuttered lives, squinting our eyes in the bright sunlight, anxious and fearful of our re-connection. We know that those whom we once knew will not be there to connect with at this time. We know that we must continue on, carry on without them.

I lost my sister-in-law and my aunt in 2020. Attending their funerals and memorials were not allowed. Both lived near me and I often turned to them for support and friendship. I loved them and had a close connection with them. My book signings and readings, too, were cancelled last year and my writer's group did not meet. Yet, in this opening up period, I am hopeful. I have faced the long silencing of

distractions and non-essential activities, faced myself, and I have grieved. I'm also taking an honest and tolerant look at the world's issues in amounts I can handle.

Today, with many places in the world yet in the throes of the pandemic, we are reminded it's not over here in America until it's over everywhere. As we look out into the world, wanting to be out there again, we do so with joy mixed with terror, eagerness mixed with anxiety. I set dates for book signings and interviews with excitement and with concern. But, I am still hopeful.

Hope is what we need to rise above the tumult of our times. Hope is what will pull us out of the darkness of these times. No one on the planet was spared. No one on the planet is forgotten in this unearthing of injustices in our deep dive within. I find it tragically profound that bats symbolize going within and transformation. They go into caves and dark places and emerge at night. It is tragically profound, the idea, the possibility that one bat is changing the entire world.

Santa Barbara County, California June 9, 2021