

## MY PANDEMIC STORIES

### 1. Personal Reflections on a Global Pandemic:

#### How I approached and dealt with the impending doom of a world pandemic.

When the news of a deadly new virus spreading in China and killing people there, flashed onto TV screens in January 2020, I had an intensely sinking feeling that this was not like other viruses, not stoppable and it was going to be very bad. I had known for a long time that this sort of thing would happen someday, and I dreaded that day.

Oddly enough, I had just watched the apocalyptic movie Contagion with my nephew for his birthday on January 3. We had talked about how terrifying that scenario was and what we would do if it actually happened, how we would deal with it. It felt ominous.

Our conversation proved to be prophetic and helpful, since a few days later the scenario in the film happened in real life. We were stunned by the synchronicity, it was more than coincidence. We wondered if some intuitive or psychic sense had prompted us to watch the movie and spend that evening discussing it, in depth, and talking about the future.

When real life imitated film, my first strategy was to read – everything I could get my hands on, to learn all about the virus and how it affected people biologically, how it affected the blood and immune and neurological systems, and how dangerous or survivable it might be. The information struck terror in me, due to my age, and my auto-immune and inflammatory disorders. I was worried about how much stress it would put on my sensitive health, the toll it would take, and if I would survive. This was my primary coping strategy -- constantly reading to stay informed, and making crucial notes in a document that I updated regularly with the latest, changing info.

I also compiled 3 pages of covid data info and guidelines for my HOA where I live, and drafted a document about safest and best practices for protecting our community residents. I proposed that we close the HOA to all visitors, so only residents, wearing masks, could use the clubhouse, briefly when getting their mail or doing laundry. We adopted safe practices and CDC guidelines, and closed our HOA to visitors. I hunkered down for a long and scary year.

My second strategy was to prepare myself and my home for 6 months of isolation. I shifted into planning for survival, like planning for a famine or natural disaster. I made a list of foods, personal items, cleaners, masks and clothes I would need to survive if I was isolated for 6 months, then I went shopping, wearing 2 masks on my face, and gloves and staying 10 feet from other people. I spent hundreds of dollars on dried, canned, frozen or non-perishable foods and supplies. I stocked up enough food and supplies to last for 6 months. Then I settled in, for months of isolation.

My third strategy was watching inspiring stories about survival and healing. I needed to feel hope that life wasn't over, we could deal with this and we could survive it. I began reading stories of people who had covid and how they dealt with it, day by day, and how they recovered. It was deeply sobering, dire. I live alone, no family, other than two nephews who live miles

away. It was very lonely, dealing with all of that by myself. Yet I did find hope and was able to let go of fear, by reading stories and following the online diaries of people who had covid, and recovered. They were my heroes.

The biggest issue for me during this whole time, was not money or work, since I'm retired, and living on savings, not having to work in public, and I had food storage. The biggest issue or problem for me was shifting from the unknown, and fear of the unknown, to the known, the real, and dealing with that. This strategy worked, it helped me, relax, let go of fear, and focus on just living my life.

My last strategy was to let go of all distractions, and focus on the most vital things in my life. This was a huge shift, away from wasting time on anything other than the highest priority things in my life. This gave me a sense of power to deal productively with the pandemic. It was something I could control, make progress on. I began organizing my life and belongings, getting rid of carloads of items, books, clothes, junk and finishing projects, that should have been done years ago. It was time to do everything I had put off or wanted to do. I decided to live fully, in the present. I focused on goals, getting things done and letting go of things that were never going to be finished. I decided to simplify, prioritize, and finalize all aspects of my projects and life plans. This has been immensely rewarding, a very positive result that has come from the pandemic. I'm still focused on this practice – of finishing things, or discarding them. It has simplified life.

## **2. Global History during a Global Pandemic: How studying global history in 2020 helped me deal with a global pandemic.**

I signed up to take Global History in March 2020, at the beginning of the global covid pandemic. Why? I needed the Global history course to graduate, and I wanted to learn the theories and methods of global history. Yet at that time, I was feeling overwhelmed and afraid, due to the dangers of a global pandemic coming to my state, and the stresses and uncertainty of a major earthquake in my city. I felt inadequate to take on any additional work, deadlines, or responsibilities at that time. I didn't feel like I could plan or commit to anything, unable to plan ahead. I was also dealing with several health problems that had been weighing upon me. So I had no idea what the spring would bring and how I would be able to deal with it. Or if I would even be alive....

However, I decided to go ahead and take the global history course, in spite of all the stress and uncertainty, because I wanted a different perspective to help me deal with the stresses of the historic moment I was living through, and because I needed a normal life activity and focus to distract me from the fears and worries of pandemic and earthquake. I also really liked the idea of studying global history during an historic global pandemic, which was the perfect topic to be studying at that time. It felt like synchronicity. I wasn't sure if I would be able to finish the course, given all the uncertainties of my life, but I wanted to move forward in faith and give it my best effort.

All of my reasons for taking the global history course panned out. The course gave me invaluable perspective on global history and global issues, including my own historic global

moment in time. It also gave me an engaging, positive, constructive and informative focus to take my mind off fears and dangers of death in pandemic and quake. Most of all, the course gave me a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of peoples, cultures, relations and influences between human beings around the globe, in all ages of history. It taught me that people and cultures in different countries and even hemispheres were not as isolated or disconnected from each other as traditional views or understandings had depicted, but were very connected and mutually influential, shaping each other in major ways. The topic of the pearl trade alone was extremely informative and deconstructive to my understanding of global culture and history. The pearl itself as a metaphor for an idea or concept that circulates among all people and carries meaning, worth, value among and between them all, connecting them all, while also having a unique relationship to them all, was very instructive. The lens of global history offers a new way of seeing history and global relations, that uncovers the reality of our deeply interconnected and interactive relationship as human beings, regardless of the geographical and cultural distances between us. Different peoples and cultures profoundly affect each other, reshape each other, regardless of distance.

I thought about the pearl as being like the covid virus – a tiny, round, rare, wonderous almost magical item, that circulates and spreads around the world, carrying meaning and change with it to each person it reaches. A symbol of an idea or belief or value, that spreads among diverse peoples and cultures, deeply affecting lives and changing culture. Seeing that image of the virus on media constantly every day, made me think of it as a strange gem that carried power, to change, morph, strengthen or destroy people's lives. It could embolden many while destroying others.

I saw coinciding themes, between global history and global commerce and global pandemic – each conveying a common experience and exchange between diverse peoples around the globe. I saw the parallels and connections between cultures and ideas and disease, revealing how utterly connected and affected we are by each other.

The jet age only speeded up that global process already in place during the past, making it possible to happen more rapidly. The modern speed of global relations enabled the covid virus to spread much faster than the 1918-20 flu pandemic, yet the modern speed of global scientific collaboration enabled historic cures via the fastest vaccine ever produced.

Like the pearl, the covid virus has greatly affected and transformed local and global culture, the way people live, do business, make money, survive, enact culture. It has reshaped lives, culture, society. In some ways, the virus has pushed us back in time, retreating to past ways of living and relating to each other, returning to a home and family-centered life, far more self-reliant, self contained, home-made. It has caused a retreat from public social spaces into private family home space, like life in pre-industrial times. Yet it has also forced us to see how deeply, inextricably connected and one we are as a species, all of us in the same biological boat, struggling to stay afloat.

Global history gave me an invaluable context for making sense of and dealing with a global crisis and existential threat, in my own time and life. It helped me cope, find meaning and productive ways of dealing with the pandemic of 2020.

### **3. Double Jeopardy: Pandemic + Earthquake**

#### **How a major earthquake in March 2020 intensified the Pandemic's arrival in Utah.**

In 2020, Salt Lake experienced a massive double whammy: a once-in-a-century pandemic came to town, and a once-in-a-century major earthquake arrived at the same time. On March 18, 2020 the Magna 5.7 earthquake was the worst quake to hit Salt Lake since 1934, and one of the two worst quakes on the Wasatch Front since 1901. From the white settlement of Utah in 1847, when show 8 quakes above 5.0; the 2020 quake was the 6<sup>th</sup> worst of those 8 quakes.

<https://earthquakes.utah.gov/magna-quake/>

This quake violently shook the entire Wasatch Front, from Ogden to Provo, and was felt in Idaho and Nevada. It was followed by 6 major aftershocks in the 4-5 point range and 30 aftershocks in the 3-4 point range, with 137 in the 2-3 point range, 698 in the 1-2 point range, and 1507 in the 0-1 point range --for a total of 2300 aftershocks in 4 months, and 2600 aftershocks in one year.

It shook my home so hard, I thought my house was coming apart, in unreparable ways. It felt like the world was ending, and my life as I had known it was over. I had never experienced such a violent quake, that shook pictures off walls, items off tables, books off shelves, decor from light fixtures. It was terrifying. I was worried about damage to my home, assessing and dealing with that, while in a pandemic. I was in a state of shock, just trying to adjust to what happened, deal with the new bizarre reality and calm my brain. I cried for a week.

This was traumatic, on all levels. It destabilized life and left me feeling like there was no refuge, no safe place. I couldn't go anywhere, leave, travel, stay with others, and suddenly my home wasn't safe either. I was in jeopardy at home alone, and out with others. Our only stability was whatever we had created for ourselves, via whatever reserves, support, money, security we had amassed by March 2020, to rely upon. Sheltering in place took on whole new challenges, dealing with dual fears, risks, and dangers from both pandemic and quaking.

I felt alone, unsafe, unstable, not knowing where to go for refuge or help. I was truly alone and vulnerable, no one to rely upon, but me. This drastically changed my view of self and the world. I knew I needed to make some major changes to my life.

Everyone was vulnerable, forced to rely upon ourselves and our own resolve.

My preparations for the pandemic had helped me, because I could simply stay home, and my home was intact, not damaged to a degree that required work or workers. Yet for many others, their preparations didn't help, as their homes were damaged and their supplies had to be moved to a new location, along with their belongings or discarded.

The quake kept life doubly unpredictable, unstable. It presented us with a new list of life problems on top of deadly viral dangers. We had to inspect our homes inside and outside, for cracks and damage, and make or plan for repairs. We had to learn about insurance deductibles in case of quake, and try to find quake insurance if possible. We had to plan for future quakes and learn emergency preparedness, then plan and organize our homes for emergencies. This was all far harder to do, during a deadly pandemic.

Nothing reorients one's view of life, home, self and reality quite like a quake. Suddenly the ground, your house, your ability to walk and function, and the earth itself, is not the solid, stable thing you thought it was. You realize that reality can morph, in minute and everything you thought was real or solid can dissipate.

Again, I turned to my main coping strategy for the pandemic – I needed to center myself in my body, health, wellbeing and prioritize, refocus my life on only the most vital, essential things. I needed to get rid of everything that was non-essential and breakable -- picture frames, chandeliers, vases, junk, book cases – let it all go. The quake intensified my process of simplifying life and refocusing on only the most vital things.

This was very helpful, again it gave me a sense of personal power, ability to move forward and function in effective ways that would help the situation. I got rid of many books and belongings, all my picture frames, so much junk. I wanted to be able to move to a new home, if needed, having very few, basic essential items. I made enormous progress and was truly stunned by how much junk I had accumulated in my home. I realized I had been burdened by belongings, surrounded by piles of files and papers, stacks of books, shelves of items I never used. I wondered how and why I had carried so much stuff – enough for a family, when I am one person alone. I had an entire house full to the brim of stuff. I got rid of 1/3 of it in 2020, and felt like a burden had lifted. Yet I'm still going through this process, hoping to downsize to a small minimal few belongings by this fall.

I also decided that I need to look for a new place to live, not live alone anymore, but live with others who care about me and can be there for me. I have lived in a small HOA for ten years, with 26 units which itself has been very isolating, due to residents who are constantly in conflict with each other. The quake forced me to realize that I'm not living in a safe or supportive or caring environment, but have been tolerating a bad environment which has isolated and weakened my wellbeing to such an extreme degree, that dealing with the quake and pandemic was entirely overwhelming. I realized that I need a far better place to live. I also need to move away from the danger of living in the liquefaction area of Salt Lake. So I have been actively searching for new places to live.