

①

THE CORONAVIRUS - MY TWO PRONG ATTACK TO SANITY BY

LARRY E. MAY

IN EARLY MARCH (2020), THE WORLD SUDDENLY CHANGED FOR US LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES. PEOPLE WERE WHISPERING AND RUMORS FLYING. A NEW KIND OF VIRUS BEGAN TO SPREAD RAPIDLY (WORSE THAN THE FLU). UNSEEN AND INVISIBLE, SILENTLY BOUNDING OCEANS AND SPEEDING ACROSS CONTINENTS, IT SEEMED LIKE THE PLOT OF A HOLLYWOOD HORROR FILM MORE THAN REALITY.

ON MARCH NINETIETH, CALIFORNIA BECAME THE FIRST STATE IN THE UNION TO ISSUE MANDATORY "STAY AT HOME" ORDERS. BUSINESSES SHUT DOWN, JOBS WERE LOST, SPORTS CANCELED, CHURCHES CLOSED AND COLLEGES/SCHOOLS SHUTTERED. PEOPLE BEGAN DYING, RESULTING IN TOTAL CONFUSION AS THINGS COLLAPSED AROUND US.

BEING INCARCERATED IN A CALIFORNIA STATE PRISON (LANCASTER), I DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND THE MAGNITUDE OF THE SITUATION.

BEING AS ISOLATED AS WE ARE, THE NEWS SOURCES AVAILABLE ARE LIMITED. TELEPHONE CALLS AND LETTERS TO/FROM FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS ARE THE BEST WAY TO GET IMPORTANT LOCAL INFORMATION. MY SISTER GIVES ME UPDATES ON INMATES AND GUARDS WHO HAVE TESTED POSITIVE FOR THE NEWLY NAMED "CORONAVIRUS" (COVID-19, FOR SHORT). I'VE ASKED THE MEDICAL PEOPLE AND PRISON PERSONAL. NO TRANSPARENCY WHATSOEVER. NO COMMENT, I'M TOLD. THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GET INFECTED IS BY SOMEONE BRINGING THE VIRUS IN. SOME GUARDS TAKE IT SERIOUSLY, WHILE OTHERS ARE LAX.

LIVING IN CLOSE QUARTERS, GERMS, DISEASES, COLDS AND FLUS SPREAD RAPIDLY. ALL WE CAN DO IS AVOID THOSE WITH POSSIBLE CONTAGIOUS SYMPTOMS THAT ARE TRANSMITTED BY THE INFECTED PERSON. MEDICAL HEALTH COVERAGE IN PRISON DOESN'T COMPARE TO THE EXCELLENT CARE OFFERED BY TYPICAL DOCTORS/HOSPITALS IN THE "FREE WORLD." TO BE FAIR, SOME PRISON HEALTH EMPLOYEES TRY THEIR BEST.

I HAVE A SUBSCRIPTION TO THE "U.S.A. TODAY" NEWSPAPER. IN THE NATION'S HEALTH

(2)

SECTION, THERE IS A "NEWS FROM THE FIFTY STATES" PAGE. LATELY, EACH STATE'S PARAGRAPH MENTIONS THE CORONAVIRUS. NURSING HOMES AND PRISONS SEEM TO BE THE HARDEST HIT.

DOES THE TYPICAL CITIZEN CARE ABOUT ELDERLY RESIDENTS? DO THEY CARE ABOUT CONVICTED FELONS? IN REGARDS TO THE FIRST QUESTION, I HOPE SO. TO THE LATTER, I'M NOT SO SURE. "LET THEM DIE, SO WE DON'T HAVE TO PAY FOR THEIR EXPENSES" COULD BE THE VIEW OF SOME. IF YOU DON'T PERSONALLY KNOW SOMEONE IN EITHER, YOUR ATTITUDE MAYBE LESS HUMANE. A DOZEN DEATH ROW INMATES HAVE DIED IN SAN QUENTIN BECAUSE OF COVID-19. PERHAPS, EVEN A MAJORITY WERE HAPPY ABOUT IT.

THE FIRST NOTICE WE RECEIVED WAS ALL VISITS WERE CANCELED. THEN, NON-ESSENTIAL OUTSIDE INDIVIDUALS WERE DENIED ENTRY TO CONDUCT EDUCATIONAL CLASSES AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES. CURRENTLY, ALL MEALS ARE BROUGHT TO OUR ROOMS. WE WERE PACKED INTO THE "CHOWHALL" LIKE SARDINES. RUSHED IN AND OUT. NOW, I CAN TAKE MY TIME AND SAVOR EVERY BITE. THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY HASN'T CHANGED, SURPRISINGLY.

MASKS WERE GIVEN OUT TO EACH MAN, FREE OF CHARGE. IF WE LEAVE OUR ROOMS, WE MUST WEAR ONE. THE GUARDS WERE INSTRUCTED TO WEAR ONE AND/OR USE A PLASTIC FACE SHIELD.

THE R.N.'S CAME BY TWICE A DAY TO ASK QUESTIONS AND TAKE OUR TEMPERATURES AND EVERYONE WAS GIVEN THE DELUXE NASAL SWAB TEST BACK IN MAY. A "LONG WIRE" WAS INSERTED INTO A NOSTRAL, DOWN YOUR THROAT, TWISTED AND REMOVED. LOS ANGELES COUNTY (WHERE I'M HOUSED), HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST CASES (210,000) AND DEATHS (5,000) RELATED TO THE CORONAVIRUS IN THE COUNTRY. THE NUMBERS CONTINUE TO RISE DAILY.

PRISON OFFICIALS CONTINUED TO TRANSFER PRISONERS SOME, AGAINST THEIR WILL TO OTHER PRISONS DURING THIS PANDEMIC. THEY WERE NOT QUARANTINED UPON ARRIVAL AT THEIR DESTINATION. INFECTION RATES SOARED. I UNDERSTAND, THE TOP HEALTH OFFICIAL WHO AUTHORIZED THE MOVES WAS "REASSIGNED." HIS FAULTY DECISION AND ERROR IN JUDGMENT HAS COST MEN THEIR LIVES. WHY AREN'T CRIMINAL CHARGES BEING FILED?

MANY MEN HAVE COME UP WITH CREATIVE AND INGENUOUS WAYS TO RELIEVE STRESS AND BOREDOM

③

DURING THE PANDEMIC. SOME OF THESE INTRIGUING AND ASTONISHING IDEAS AREN'T AVAILABLE AT ALL STATE PRISONS. THE MEN HAVE LEARNED TO ADAPT AND ADJUST ACCORDINGLY AT EACH INSTITUTION.

THE TWO OUTLETS THAT HAVE GOTTEN ME THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT AND EMOTIONAL TIMES HAVE BEEN ① MY JOY OF COLLECTING POSTAGE STAMPS AND ② MY LOVE FOR DOGS. THE DAILY COMBINATION COMPLETES AND FULFILLS MY LIFE WITH ENJOYMENT ESPECIALLY, NOW.

I HAVE BEEN A PHILATELIST SINCE THE AGE OF TEN. DURING THIS "MODIFIED PROGRAM", I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO ORGANIZE MY HUMBLE COLLECTION OF NEARLY ONE THOUSAND STAMPS. I SEND MY DUPLICATES TO A SCHOOL TEACHER IN OHIO WHO IN TURN DISTRIBUTES THEM TO HIS STUDENTS. THERE IS A SMALL GROUP OF STAMP COLLECTORS IN MY BUILDING. WE SHARE STORIES OF THE PAST REGARDING OUR HOBBY. NOW-COLLECTORS SAVE STAMPS FROM THEIR MAIL FOR US. I HAVE QUITE AN ASSORTMENT (BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC). I'VE VISITED NEARLY FORTY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.

BEFORE COMING TO PRISON, I LOST MOST OF MY PERSONAL POSSESSIONS. MY FAMILY WAS ABLE TO SAVE MY VAST STAMP COLLECTION. THEY SLOWLY SEND

ME CERTAIN PARTS. MINT COMMEMORATIVES IN ALL DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS THAT I PLACE ON OUT-GOING MAIL. I RARELY USE "FOREVER" STAMPS. THE MULTIPLE STAMPS I USE (ABOUT 4-5) MUST ADD UP TO THE CURRENT FIFTY-FIVE CENT LETTER RATE. I NOW HAVE TIME TO MATCH MY STAMPS WITH THE PERSON'S INTEREST. I PROBABLY HAVE MORE FUN THAN THE PERSON RECEIVING THEM.

I'M SURE PEOPLE ON THE "OUTSIDE" ARE DUSTING OFF THEIR COLLECTIONS. THIS HOBBY HAS ENDURED WARS, FAMINES AND IT WILL OUTLAST THIS DEADLY VIRUS. STAMPS TEACH US ABOUT GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, ESTABLISHED CUSTOMS/TRADITIONS, DIFFERENT CURRENCIES AND RELEVANT TOPICS THAT INCLUDE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE INNOVATIONS AND INVENTIONS. IT GIVES ME A CHANCE TO ESCAPE AND TRAVEL. THE ONLY RULES IMPOSED ARE THOSE OF MY OWN IMAGINATION. THIS IS WHY PHILATELY IS KNOWN AS THE "HOBBY OF KINGS!"

BEING PART OF THE "PAWS FOR LIFE" (DOG PROGRAM) IS A DREAM COME TRUE. OVER THIRTY DOGS LIVE IN MY BUILDING. YES, OFTEN IT DOES GET LOUD, BUT THEIR BARKING IS MUSIC TO MY EARS. THEIR UNCONDITIONAL LOVE CAN'T HELP BUT GIVE

④

ME COMFORT AND DELIGHT. THE AFFECTION AND CLOSENESS SHARED BETWEEN US HAS HAD A CALMING AND PEACEFUL EFFECT ON US BOTH.

WALKING AND JOGGING TOGETHER IN THE MEDIUM-HIGH DESERT (2,710 FEET) IS WONDERFUL. BESIDES SHORT "POTTY BREAKS", WE ARE ALLOWED OUTSIDE EVERY OTHER DAY FOR THREE HOURS. WE BOTH RETURN TO MY ROOM THIRSTY AND EXHAUSTED. WE RELAX ON MY COZY BED UNTIL WE CATCH OUR BREATH.

"PAWS FOR LIFE" IS ONE OF THE BEST PROGRAMS IN PRISON. I'VE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY AND PLEASURE OF BEING A TRAINER FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS. I'VE HELPED OVER TWENTY DOGS GET ADOPTED INSTEAD OF EUTHANASIA. I GOT ATTACHED TO MANY OF THEM. A FOREVER HOME WITH A LOVING FAMILY IS OUR GOAL.

ONE PARTICULAR DOG COMES TO MIND. "CAPER" WAS HIT BY A CAR. WHEN HE FIRST ARRIVED, WE (JACK, FOBIA AND MYSELF) HAD TO CARRY HIM BACK AND FORTH TO USE THE RESTROOM.

THE FIRST MONTH, WE PUT HIM THROUGH DAILY PHYSICAL THERAPY EXERCISES. CAPER SEEMED TO KNOW WE WERE HELPING HIM AND LOVED THE ATTENTION.

MASSAGING AND STRETCHING HIS INJURED HIND LEG BROUGHT US CLOSER. AFTER A FEW WEEKS,

HIS STITCHES WERE REMOVED. CAPER DISLIKED THE "CONE" AROUND HIS HEAD AS HIS FRAGILE LEG HEALED. HE RECOVERED IN RECORD TIME. SINCE HE IS ONLY SIX MONTHS OLD, CAPER IS A PLAYFUL PUPPY. HE LEARNED ALL THE BASIC COMMANDS FAST! HE WAS ADOPTED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.

FROM BEING WHEELED IN ON A CART AND US CARRYING HIM OUTSIDE TO HIM LEAPING UP ON MY COMFY BED IS QUITE A THRILLING EVENT TO WITNESS.

OUR MOTTO IS: "WE WORK HARD, SO OUR DOGS CAN HAVE A BETTER LIFE." CAPER DID HIS PART TOO! THE DAY CAPER LEFT IT WAS RAINING, SO NO ONE COULD TELL I WAS CRYING.

TO SUMMARIZE, THIS CORONAVIRUS HAS TAKEN A TOLL ON HUMAN BEINGS INSIDE PRISON AND OUTSIDE IN SOCIETY. THE COST IN LIFE, HEALTH AND SUFFERING CONTINUES TO THIS DAY.

RUMORS OF VACCINES ON THE HORIZON HAVE BEEN PROMOTED IN THE NEAR FUTURE. CASES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PERSIST IN SPITE OF TAKING PRECAUTIONS. CALIFORNIA (MY STATE) HAS SURPASSED EVERY STATE, INCLUDING NEW YORK. LOS ANGELES COUNTY (WHERE I LIVE) HAS THE HIGHEST NUMBERS IN THE STATE. THE COUNT RISES DAILY WITH NO END IN SIGHT.

(5)

SLOWLY, THE VIRUS CAME TO THIS PRISON. SOON, IT INFECTED THIS YARD ("A"). NOW, MEN IN MY BUILDING HAVE CONTACTED IT. SINCE I'M SIXTY-FIVE YEARS OLD, IT IS A LITTLE WORRISOME.

THIS PRISON HAS SOLID DOORS AS COMPARED TO BARS. THIS HELPS CONTAIN THE DISEASE. TWO MEN PER ROOM. MEN THAT LIVE IN DORM SETTINGS ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE AND SUSCEPTIBLE TO GETTING SYMPTOMS AND AFFECTING OTHERS. THE SIX FOOT SOCIAL DISTANCING PRACTICE IS IMPOSSIBLE. PRISONS ARE OVERCROWDED ALREADY.

GOVERNOR GAVIN NEWSOM HAS PROMISED TO RELEASE INMATES CLOSE TO THEIR RELEASE DATE EARLY. HE IS TAKING A LOT OF HEAT FOR THIS HUMANITARIAN GESTURE. AS I STATED BEFORE, SOME PEOPLE DON'T VALUE THE LIFE OF THOSE INCARCERATED.

MY PARENTS (AGES 92, 93) LIVE IN A RETIREMENT HOME. THERE IS A SMALL NURSING FACILITY ON THE PROPERTY. MY MOTHER'S LEG HAS A BLOOD CLOT AND PERHAPS, WILL NEED AN OPERATION. SHE WILL SPEND A FEW DAYS THERE GETTING EVALUATED. MY FATHER ISN'T ALLOWED TO VISIT HER BECAUSE OF THE CORONAVIRUS. THEY ARE RARELY SEPARATED, ESPECIALLY OVERNIGHT, EVEN THOUGH THIS SEEMS

INSIGNIFICANT TO MANY, IT IS A HARDSHIP FOR THEM BOTH. HOPEFULLY, THEY WILL BE REUNITED SOON.

IN CLOSING, I'D LIKE TO OFFER MY SYMPATHY AND COMPASSION TO INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LOST LOVED ONES, THOSE IN THE HOSPITAL FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES AND THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE RECOVERED FROM THIS DREAFFUL, WIDESPREAD OUT BREAK. TO THOSE HEALTH CARE WORKERS ON THE FRONT LINES ARE TO BE PRAISED AND COMMENDED FOR THEIR DEDICATION TO THE PROFESSION, RISKING THEIR LIVES TO CARE FOR AND COMFORT THOSE UNKNOWN TO THEM IS TRULY A SELFLESS ACT OF LOVE.

THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE I HOPE WE ALL ASPIRE TO BE: ① THE PERSON WHO PERFORMS A KINDNESS AND ② THE PERSON WHO IS THANKFUL FOR THE KINDNESS DONE.

DEDICATED TO :

PAVEL KARLICKY FROM PRAHA (PRAGUE), CZECHOSLOVAKIA (CZECH REPUBLIC) WHOM I'VE TRADED STAMPS WITH FOR THREE DECADES. HE HAS WELCOMED ME INTO HIS HOME ON SEVEN SEPARATE OCCASIONS. ALEX TONNER AND JON GROBMAN OF THE "PAWS FOR LIFE" K9 RESCUE ORGANIZATION.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

DAVID GOOGLE, FOR HIS ARTICLE "STAMP COLLECTING IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS."