

THE CORONA CHRONICLE PART 3: FOUND IN SPACE

by Tracy Lee Kendall

April 17, 2020: Chaos at 06:00, as we are all forced to pack our property, take it out to the rec yard, unpack it unto the same surface as everyone else, wipe it off, return to our housing, and unpack each others' contaminants. Outside of prison is the deadliest week of the pandemic in the U.S. yet, raising the COVID-19 death toll to 36,721 people. In Texas, over 165,000 have tested positive, and the governor says the worst is behind us before ordering schools closed until the end of the year and passing three COVID-related executive orders.

Outside of Texas, President Trump encourages re-opening protests in several states and cuts funding to the WHO, as Bill and Melinda Gates donate 22 million to the WHO and an ebola drug shows promise of treating COVID-19. Inside less visible communities, people are dying alone, and I wonder about my mom learning about her new world in the midst of everything, and everyone else in their new paradigm.

April 18, 2020: It's a cold day, and over 728,000 people in the U.S. are now infected. Their pile of corpses surpasses 38,000 as I sit here assisting other prisoners with education and parole issues.

April 19, 2020: A mass shooter disguised as a Mountie goes on a murder/arson spree in Canada; and another gunman hijacks a bus in Dallas. Here, I help a Christian learn about the Bible, and a Muslim study the Qur'an as prisoners leave the dorm. Normally, prisoners must go to designated units to be released; but with movement increasing the risk of COVID infection, parolees are released from their assigned units after receiving freeworld clothes until further notice.

April 20, 2020: According to the Wall Street Journal, U.S. officials in Thailand seized 200,000 facemasks bound for Germany and redirected them to the U.S. German officials consider this an act of piracy. Another oddity-- crude oil prices fall below \$0 for the first time in history. Another first-- the federal government will now track COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes. Elsewhere, my mother continues to make friends for the first time in over 46 years.

April 22, 2020: In the U.S., the CDC reports that 828,441 people are now infected with COVID-19, resulting in 46,379 deaths. This is all in about 4 months. Comparatively, in the entirety of 2018-19, 35.5 million people had the flu in the U.S., and 34,200 of them died. Not surprisingly, all prisoners on Lynaugh are issued facemasks and we go on lockdown wondering if someone on the unit tested positive--and why we are only allowed to shower every 2-3 days if soap neutralizes COVID-19 on surfaces like skin.

April 23, 2020: Around 2 or 3 a.m., I get a breakfast sack with two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a handful of frosted flakes inside. At 10:00 CEST, the WHO's "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report-94" shows 2,544,792 confirmed COVID-19 positives in the world with 175,694 resulting deaths. Above the pandemic, Iran's first military satellite orbits the Earth after a successful launch; and a Russian cargo module arrives at the space station I often see in the night sky above Lynaugh. A little lower, airline unions want masks on everyone flying as COVID-19 deaths pass the 50,000 mark in the U.S.

In Wichita Falls, my mother struggles through the military, banks, insurance companies, and an entire world as she navigates the aftermath of my father's passing. On Lynaugh, rumors circulate that a commissary worker and her husband (a guard) tested positive for COVID-19; and we all wonder about the commissary now in our lockers--which she passed to us out of the commissary window. In the midst of all this, I'm finding peace with my late father in the cubicle in the 63 man dorm my world has become.

April 24, 2020: Shelter-in-place orders and curfews are announced more frequently on the radio; the latest I hear is 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. excepting "essential" activities. The radio also says that COVID-19 has claimed over 200,000 lives worldwide. More than 53,000 of those deaths have occurred in the U.S. amidst 900,000+ infections. In Arkansas, the ACLU wants compassionate release for corona-vulnerable prisoners with non-violent and non-sexual convictions. Back in Texas, Lynaugh prisoners spread rumors about 3 positive COVID-19 tests of staff and prisoners as I read an email from my aunt. We have a lot to catch up on after 37 or 39 years.

April 25, 2020: Apparently, 20 Texas prison units have been locked down as a precautionary measure against COVID-19. The current norm is that when prisoners or staff in physical contact with a unit test positive, a 14 day lockdown takes place to restrict movement and lessen the chance of infections. My loved ones are out there too, trying to order food, entertain their cats, attend virtual services, take care of each other, and stay alive.

April 28, 2020: Over 1,000,000 people in the U.S. are infected with COVID-19, and nearly 60,000 of them have died. 26 million in the U.S. are now jobless and some politicians want to legalize state bankruptcies. North of Odessa, TX, a 2.4 magnitude earthquake occurs as an Adult Protective Services worker in Wichita Falls types me a letter looking for answers to help my mom.

May 1, 2020: Gilead Sciences may have a drug capable of treating people



infected with COVID-19. On Lynaugh, guards are now wearing plastic face shields as well as face masks. On the radio, the President asserts that spikes in COVID-19 cases are partly due to prisons. At 6:00 p.m., the Texas Department of Criminal Justice COVID-19 Medical Action Center releases a report that 1151 prisoners across the 110 Texas prisons have tested positive for COVID-19. Of those, 19 are "presumed" dead of COVID-19, with 8 pending autopsies. Additionally, staff at 49 Texas prisons have tested positive as well (no death tally was given). Inside all this, I am learning things I never knew about myself as my mother grows closer to those who have been the closest thing I've had to family for over 21 years.

May 4, 2020: I receive the letter from the APS worker and begin digging through my brain for answers buried under decades of my life; as over 1,700 people die per day from COVID-19 and the radio condemns Madonna for going to a birthday party knowingly infected with COVID-19. Deep in the night as I brew tea in my hotpot, I reflect on the need for people to take care of and for each other so we don't run out of life.

May 6, 2020: At 2:30 or so, I'm listening to an unplugged cover of the Byrd's "Eight Miles High" (history's 1st psychedelic song) on Undercurrents. I've always loved it and can hear the words so clearly, and I'm wondering if the meaning I read into it was intended. Decades ago, driving back from a drunk and high day of my murder trial, everything converged and broke me as I heard that song. It always makes me think of everyone and everything--the whole--and how it never seems like a lot as we drive through it, until we look in the rearview mirror.

Newest trend in Washington State? The radio says COVID-catching parties. In DC, President Trump wants to open the country back up as COVID cases rise. Objectively speaking, how long will our resources and infrastructure last with entire industries ground to a halt? In the darkest times, humans are forced to make decisions for gods. Those decisions include the choices each person makes if the U.S. comes off lockdown, because we hold each others' lives in our hands. Realistically speaking, we could have avoided all of this merely by staying inside for a month when the pandemic began. Now, we're past that, but we can learn from our mistakes and be careful moving forward.

May 7, 2020: Washington State officials attempt to revise the COVID-catching party news.

May 8, 2020: A group of prisoners attempt to convince me that the WHO, CDC, President Obama, Bill Gates, the head of the U.S. corona task force,

and the Democrats are infecting the population with COVID-19 and overreporting infection rates in order to sabotage President Trump, the economy, make a fortune from a vaccine, insert microchips into children, and enslave the world. When I ask what made them believe this, they claim that on AFR, a report came out that documents surfaced including a pact signed by the above parties and a promise by Attorney General Barr that they would be prosecuted for the above conspiracy as well as paying the Chinese lab in Wuhan to create COVID-19 in the first place. They become angry when I do not concur, and I reflect upon Pizzagate and mass shooters.

May 9, 2020: We come off lockdown 08:00. By last chow, we are let out of our dorm for the first time since April 22. The world's lockdown has been a lot longer than mine, and is still going; yet even in such a short amount of time, the world outside is a little different now. Air pollution has decreased, a panda couple in a zoo have mated (due to privacy) for the first time in 13 years, penguins are allowed to tour their zoos, 150 foot siphonophore sea monsters have been sighted off the Australian coast, entire industries have gone dormant, the world survived without so much fracking, and many families have discovered they can actually eat a meal together.

Back on the dorm, I try to facilitate a discussion about critical thinking--it doesn't go well.

May 10, 2020: On my way to the chowhall for breakfast at around 4:00 a.m., I look up and see the replenished International Space Station; and I reflect upon how similar the average household is to a space station now due to COVID-19. Like the ISS depended upon Russia, often portrayed as an enemy of the U.S., to bring vital supplies, we need to learn to give and receive across ideological and other lines. Otherwise, we'll be an ISS happy about an aborted Russian supply mission--and a lot more people will die. Likewise, as the astronauts protect each other from the hostile environment of space through the precautions they take, we must take precautions for each other in this pandemic.

On Mother's Day, my mother is safe in the pandemic, and overcoming her challenging new world because people have reached out with vital insight and resources. Sadly, our time, resources, and precautions cannot bring back those who have already died. However, we can honor their memories by saving each other from adding to the COVID-19 death statistics, whether by participating or helping others to. Let us not sentence each other to death through negligence, when we can do very simple things to keep each other safe and end this pandemic.