

Gone is our global village

Borders have been closed and my city is filling up with morgues-in-tents and with refrigerated trucks for corpses. How medieval is this?

by Phyllis Chesler



In a dizzying instant, we have traveled back in time to the Middle Ages. For now, and for who knows how long, we are living in small, fearful, and semi-contained villages. If we had moats, we'd be pulling the drawbridges up right now.

closed. When this awful siege is over, I doubt the European Union will reconstitute itself. European countries which, in the past, have refused to close their borders to economic migrants and Jihadists, have now been forced to do so for another kind of life-threatening reason.

As for the United States—one Anti-Trumper actually said this to me:

“That crazy Mexican President is advising people to carry on as usual. He’s presiding over a Dance of Death. I wish Trump had put up that wall!”

My city is filling up with morgues-in-tents and with refrigerated trucks for corpses. How medieval is this? Well, not that much, not yet, we are not yet dumping bodies into pits and/or burning them all. The police have not boarded up our dwellings.

But how is this madness affecting the doctors and patients in my personal life?

I have a very dear friend, practically a family member, who is a physician. Colleagues with whom she has been working on the front lines have fallen; one has just died. She now fears that she, too, may have the Wuhan (Corona) Virus.

I have another close friend who's trapped in a Rehab facility at the worst possible moment in history. He has cancer, he fell, and perhaps he also suffered a stroke. No one was allowed to visit him in hospital and the doors are also shut to visitors at the Rehab Center. His medical records and health care proxy seem to have fallen by the proverbial wayside. I am distraught over his fate.

I've been asked whether or not he's safer in a facility than at home. Here's how I answered: *All* hospitals and all Rehab facilities are hellholes in normal, non-pandemic times. One *always* needs a private aide, if not a nurse, and that is very expensive. A family member can take an 8-hour shift, but cannot be there around the clock. Hospital and Rehab facility staff are overworked, underpaid, sullen, surly, resentful, incompetent, neglectful—and occasionally, they are angels. They do not have the time or the inclination to change bedsheets all that often or to get someone up to use the bathroom.

One can only imagine how many more patients are in his position. And how hard the front line workers—the ambulance drivers, paramedics, pharmacists, physician assistants, nurses, doctors, and volunteers—must be working, and at such

risk. One cannot imagine how overwhelmed they must be.

We are not only back in time, but in some ways, the West has now become more like the “developing” world. (That’s the politically correct phrase that must be used to describe failed states or tyrannies, mired in enormous poverty, where no law applies.) In parts of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America, families are expected to provide the bedsheets and blankets, as well as the food for their hospitalized relative; they often have to buy the medicine, too—if it is available. There are few doctors and even fewer nurses. Family members either desert their ailing member or mount shifts of watchfulness themselves. Will New York ever become a bit more like Kabul?

Every evening at 7pm large crowds gather (hopefully, maintaining social distance), to cheer for these brave souls. I hear it from almost a block away, coming from where a Sports Bar stands. All day, and all night, I also hear the alarming sirens of ambulances.

Super-rich Americans will always be alright. But here are some unsettling questions.

How will those of us who used to have jobs and safety nets manage psychologically to adapt to limited horizons for a good long while?

What if the so-called “underclass,” which is now growing daily, has no money for food? Will chaos break out? Will there be looting?

What can we do about the fact that so many people are still insisting on attending large religious services?

What will the criminals, released from jails, do?

Will terrorists use this moment of enormous vulnerability to strike? It’s the kind of thing that terrorists do.

What do you think?

On the other hand, I spoke to a front line physician who assured me that the number of new cases each day in NYC is lessening.

The problem is that we were not duly warned in advance and we did not have a structure in place to deal with a pandemic. This will never—or should never—happen again.

Our world has been plagued by epidemics many times before. The human race has survived. The sun still rose each and every day. No doubt, it will do so again and again.

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