

A Brief Outing in an Almost Deserted City

by Phyllis Chesler



After hibernating and self-isolating, which is what I usually do, my Dearest One dragged me out via car to Carl Schurz Park which runs along the East River on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Usually the walkway is crowded with runners, skaters, walkers, strollers, parents pushing baby prams, dogs on leashes, (dogs in prams as well!) and people sitting on benches viewing the water, talking to each other or on their cellphones; some people sitting on benches, reading books, or wordlessly pondering the sky and eternity. Brass plaques have been affixed to some benches in memory of someone who once used to sit there. Children galore whoop and holler in the playground and dogs make merry in a dog park. Yesterday, there *were* some runners, with fiercely fixed expressions; *some* parents, *some* children, and *some* dogs—but very few compared to all the many times I've been here.

The city hangs suspended, in suspense, as it awaits the rollout of the plague. My best friend reports that her usual one-hour commute from Queens to Manhattan took only 18 minutes yesterday, door to door. The Saint Patrick's Day parade and numerous professional meetings have been cancelled, schools, universities, and some courts have been closed, religious services curtailed. There was nothing else to do but call a good friend, a recent widow, who lived right nearby and invite her to dinner. We talked no politics but rather worried about what we will do if fresh vegetables run out, if the food chain is degraded or entirely broken? May we all escape this plague—is it biological warfare run amuck?—with our lives and health intact.