

Quarantined: Diary of a contemporary pandemic

What better task can a writer undertake than to keep a record of daily events given that she must practice “social distancing?”

by Phyllis Chesler



Today, the streets in Manhattan are cold, sunny, and relatively empty as are the roads and highways. It is blessedly quiet here. I have been told that people have engaged in fist fights in supermarkets over cleaning supplies.

Yesterday, the shelves and climate controlled units in our local kosher supermarket were utterly and completely empty. No meat, no fish, no fowl were to be had in all the land...The next

time we can order through Fresh Direct is two weeks away. However, we are already fully stocked.

New Yorkers are hardy souls and we have already experienced time suspended on 9/11. Back then, nothing felt as if it would ever be the same—and it hasn't, not really—and yet, life still returned to “normal.”

The Wuhan (Corona) Virus is not the first or even worst pandemic the world has ever known.

Between 1918-1920, 50 million people all over the world died of Spanish Influenza.

The Black Death or Bubonic Plague (really, the “terrible” death), decimated between 50-75 million people or more in Eurasia, in waves, over ten centuries. It was caused by infected black rats which fleas fed upon before they landed on humans.

From 1629 to 1631, it was known as the Italian plague and it humbled Italy. Northern Italians then—as now, were more susceptible than southern Italians. Venice lost about 33% of its population; Milan lost 46%; and Verona, 61%. Florence lost only 12% of its people. Quarantines were imposed and the penalties for disobeying the [wrote](#): “Oh happy posterity, who will not experience such abysmal woe and will look upon our testimony as a fable.”

And now, the world is again at the mercy of a new pandemic. My friend and colleague, [4,141 cases have been confirmed](#) and 71 deaths have taken place across the United States.

Bit by bit, over time, people are beginning to self-quarantine; city after city are on lockdown; schools, churches, synagogues, temples, child care centers, libraries, museums, opera houses, movie theaters, Broadway—Disneyland!, the Saint Patrick's Day Parade!—gyms, casinos, bars and restaurant (except for take out and deliveries) have been shut

down; courts are contemplating skeleton staffs for emergencies only. Conferences, and professional meetings have been cancelled. Hospitals and pharmacies remain open; grocery stores too, except for fewer hours so that they have time to sanitize and re-sanitize their shelves.

Small business employers in NYC are worried sick about how long they will be able to pay their staffs if they themselves are not being paid and how quickly and efficiently the promised government coverage will kick in.

Employees are worried about how they will be able to pay their bills if their paychecks stop coming.

The parents quarantined at home with small children are trying to set up virtual play dates and praying for good enough weather so that parentally supervised playing in a park (with gloves on) can commence.

Friends and acquaintances are worried about whether their doctors will be able to see them for a routine test, for minor surgical procedures, or for non-virus related emergencies.

Last night, a cyber attack was launched against America's Health and Human Services system that was meant to slow the agency's response to the Wuhan (corona) virus but luckily, it failed to do so. And thus, terrorism and other evils have already reared their Satanic heads. Why am I not surprised?

As for myself: Since I'm walking disabled, I'm used to staying at home until I can hitch a ride to a movie, an opera, a play, or a restaurant. These diversions are now all closed. Thus, I've watched one or two movies every night (God Bless Roku which gets me to every conceivable platform, including that of the Metropolitan Opera House). I've also sought solace in a park along the East river which I've visited twice in the last few days.

On Friday, March 13th, life in Manhattan [Israel National](#)

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