

Pandemic (Pan-de-Mik: widespread and affecting a large population of people. It comes from the Greek "Pan-demos": people). In a pandemic outbreak, practically everyone may be infected. The world has been spinning topsy-turvy. Scientists, doctors, medical personnel, policymakers, and world governments are stricken with death, panic, and pleas of relief as we frantically scramble to fully understand the epidemiology of the novel Coronavirus and arrest its deadly infectious rate. The shock of the hour has all but crippled world economies and shattered our sense of physical, emotional and financial security. Angst abounds in the U.S. as hot zone cluster sites sprout up like armies of crop-ravishing locusts or unexpected flash floods on a sweltering summer day. Growing doubt proliferates in every sector of American society as hazards and insecurities exponentially accelerate while countries are engulfed also in civil war over naked partisan politics that creates bitter factionalism. Wooden Leaders conceal their collective failings by and large via playing the same old, lame blame game. As the legal maxim goes, when the law is on your side, argue the law, when the facts are on your side, argue the facts, but when you don't have either, then bang on the table. Social distancing has become Standard Operating Procedure ("SOP"). Commercial sector violators of the CDC guidelines are taxed with penalty fines. Strangely enough, very little is being done to secure the safety of an overlooked and underrepresented segment of America's demographic. As a imprisoned person, I am afforded a front-row seat as it concerns the left-handed dealings of politics and underbelly of the strains and struggle of life as an exiled citizen, and especially during the era of Covid-19. The ravishing effects of the Coronavirus on prison life has given new meaning to the concept of Death By Incarceration ("DBI"). When SCI-Chester had its first inmate confirmed positive case for Covid-19, [end of first email]

the administration had the ingenious idea of capturing this moment on film, especially early on, while the experience was most visceral for Reece, the inmate [WC: infected?]. He was interviewed by the administration as soon as he returned to the prison after being discharged from the Intensive Care Unit ("ICU") at Crozer hospital. He shared how he'd been hooked up to a ventilator for several weeks and felt like he was going to die. I applaud him for his strength and courage in dealing with the situation and for wanting to share his journey with the general population. Facing the specter of death at any juncture in life must be a lonely and daunting reality and especially under the duress of a strange abode like captivity. The humanity displayed in this on-camera interview was palpable. The raw vulnerability was evident in both Reece's

voice as well as in the interviewer. But we would speedily learn that Covid-19's coup de main was yet to be dealt to SCI-Chester. A month later the proverbial bullet hit the jail like a tsunami, leaving both staff and prisoners sick, panic-stricken, and even fighting for their lives. Next came the strict quarantine lockdown. We weren't allowed out of the cells for any reason — not even for showers — for 14 days. Scenes of despair played out daily as guards and medical personnel marched in housing units [move “in housing units” to after “played out daily”] once being mobilized for Covid-19 medical emergencies or due to other issues related to pre-existing medical conditions that were being triggered by stress related stimuli. When someone exhibited Covid-19-like symptoms, this activated a host of additional safety procedures. A red-and-white paper stop sign was then attached to the respective inmate's cell door, reading: “Warning!” The penalty for this scrutiny was an automatic administering of a Covid-19 swab test along with subsequent leprosy-like ostracism until laboratory results came back. Unfortunately during this period I cannot recall a single test that came back negative for Covid-19. [end of second message]

Both prisoners & staff were being taxed to capacity. All of this was the result of lackadaisical staff who irresponsibly failed to wear masks and take necessary precautions. Staff became superspreaders. I recall one staff member showing up for their 6am-2pm shift after coming straight from the Philadelphia International Airport. They'd just returned from a week-long vacation in South Beach, Miami, Florida. They refused to wear a mask at work, often citing how they thought the Coronavirus was a hoax. The psychological strains are daunting. It's routine for prisoners to deal with multi-pronged stressors while navigating captivity. But Covid-19 is deleteriously impacting friends and loved ones in society. Many prisoners lost elderly parents, friends and children to its deadly sting. My elderly next door neighbor complained of having chest pains.

He was rushed off the block and into a waiting ambulance. A battery of tests were done to determine the problem. He was returned back to the jail, but policy dictates that anyone who leaves the jail for any reason must be quarantined for 14 days. While he was sitting in the cell alone, medical staff made their way to his cell in order to speak with him about the diagnosis. We would eventually learn that he'd been given only two months more to live. A day later after receiving the news from the prison doctor, two chaplains from the jail showed up at his cell.

Presumably to give him his last sacred rites. How do we slice this prognosis with a knife? The human spirit is elastic. Hopes are tried during moments like this, & minds are being stretched to the brink of collapse. Even without any additional quarantine measures, we're locked in a cell on average 23 hours a day. Sometimes as much as 36 hours a day. Yesterday the one-hour slot allotted for me and my cohorts to come out (4 cells at a time) was at 6am. Today we come out at 9pm. That's almost 40 hours later. Yet we're admonished to suffer all this peacefully [end of third message]

Dealing with all of this can be extremely stressful. The psychic wounds are tremendous. Some of the strategies I employ for dealing with the exacerbated trauma associated with these heightened health challenges and isolation concerns have included delving deeper within myself. Yoga works wonders. But also engaging my mind and body in calisthenics helps ameliorate anxieties. Emotional Intelligence ("IG") & Mindfulness techniques remind me that adversity is temporary & part of awakening to higher states of consciousness. The PA [Department of Corrections] recently resumed virtual visits. Virtual visits aren't the same as having that person-to-person physical contact as experienced with in-person visits, but it does offer advantages. Virtual visits allow prisoners to enter places normally out of reach. Such as the living room of one's home or the dining room during supper time. I had an opportunity to take part in a parent-teacher virtual conference. Me & my wife conversed with teachers concerning our 17-year-old eleventh grader. This is something that I've felt left out of for eleven plus years. My 17-year-old is a musical prodigy, & this technology allows me to view footage of his performances. He's always keen on performing live for me during our visits. This facilitates an invaluable therapy for both me & my family. It also keeps me beaming with a fatherly pride. I've had the opportunity to experience the joy of witnessing my wife's on-screen cooking & finished dishes, looking sumptuous [WC: scrumptious?] & delectable that always whet my appetite. The nostalgia of it all can also tug hard on one's emotions, eliciting lasting moments of *de profundis*! Creative writing is yet another outlet in reducing the pangs of captivity. Focusing energy flows on lofty goals, such as perfecting the temple of perfected man & eventually making my post-Coronavirus Exodus from the bowels of this destitute Bastille. To then be able to strive in rebuilding a worthy life on the exterior of prison with family, friends, & comrades.

