

Along the track

Which Stories?

I read somewhere that *our lives expand or contract, depending on the stories we tell ourselves, and we get to choose which world we wish to inhabit by becoming conscious of which stories we want to share, amplify and embody each and every day.*

So what stories will we tell about 2020?! What stories will we choose to share, to take to heart, what stories do we want others to hear?

2020 began so well, with the usual high hopes mixed with all sorts of jokes about 20/20 vision. But for so, so many people 2020 turned into a dreadful year. Loss and devastation, anxiety and tension, so much worry and uncertainty and for too many, not being able to be with loved ones.

2020 has left a lasting legacy. Throughout the year we were all waiting for things to return to 'normal' but, underneath it all, we realised that everything will not be as it used to be. Things have changed, some for the better, others not so.

There was a popular song way back when I was young – it was called 'Not Responsible'. It could well be a theme song for 2020. We began the year with dreadful bushfires, shocking destruction and loss. But 'now is not the time to talk about that', we were told. Then the pandemic hit. 'Let's wait till we all get through this', we were told. But we all wanted someone to blame, some person or organisation to be held to account but a virus doesn't play its game according to our rules. Even so, there was a lot of pointing the finger at the next person, dodging, denying or others blessed with wonderful hindsight. Lots of apologies but not much taking responsibility either. Will that be a legacy of this pandemic? Will that be the world we wish to inhabit? Will we no longer hold ourselves accountable?

'We are all in this together' didn't quite ring true. What we regarded as pretty artificial borders became real and one state after another banned fellow Australians. This virus was so contagious, drastic measures were needed. Being in Victoria made us wonder, why only us? But, at the same time, people took to the streets to protest about measures designed to protect the community – for them, individual rights became much more important than the common good. Conspiracy theories, once regarded as on the fringe began to take centre stage.

Will they be the stories we choose to share, amplify and embody? We have seen some of the darker sides of ourselves, which perhaps in time become things we may learn from.

So what stories will we tell ourselves and others? Will we tell stories of the kindness we saw during the lockdown, where people reached out in small ways that made such a big difference? Shopping for others, checking that neighbours were OK, buying an extra item at the supermarket and dropping it off at the food bank and a hundred more other examples. Will we tell stories of the creativity, the humour and the funny stories we shared that did so much to keep spirits alive?

Will we tell stories about those in the front line who put themselves at risk to make sure the rest of us were safe while they cared for those who were ill? In doing so, so many of them caught the dreaded virus as well. We must tell their stories so they will not feel unappreciated and their gift to the rest of us will live on. I was told about a person who waited each day for the postie in the hope that a letter might arrive, news from the outside world as it were. Let's not forget the posties or the front line at the supermarkets and those in other shops and banks, in the trams and trains and buses and the front-liners who were confronted by those who refused to wear a mask. We have experienced patches of true generosity, care and resilience... and selfish disregard as well.

Will we tell the stories of those who died, so many of them who were frail, elderly and so very vulnerable. There was nowhere to escape, no holiday home or yacht to take them out of danger, no-one to hold his or her hand in their final hours, no way to give them the farewell they so richly deserved. Will we tell their stories so that their families do not feel they are forgotten and so that they can live on in our hearts and in our memories?

In Victoria, this lockdown was really hard. For most of us, it wasn't all that bad for a while but the going did get tough. God knows what it must have been like for the homeless, those in the high rise apartments, in those suburbs where the virus ran rampant. Not being able to visit family and friends was hard. There's nothing wrong with feeling proud that we 'did it' and proud of those who helped us, proud of learning skills of parenting in isolation or coping with the pressures of working alone from home. We can share those stories.

So why will we not return to 'normal?' Because the pandemic has blown the illusion that we are in control of our own lives. We are not. We are not invulnerable. We need others and they need us. We waited every day for news of a vaccine that others may have 'invented'. If anything, isolation taught us how much we need to talk to others, to stay in touch. Thank God for zoom and all the other forms of social communication.

In this time of unrest, individualism, disconnection, and conflict, what stories will we tell ourselves and share? Those that enrich our lives, stories of gratitude and quiet courage, our stories of transformation, kindness and a new shared empathy? Or will we spend our time in search of stories about blame. This time, it's not just about me? It is no longer about, "Am I right?" or "Are they wrong?" There is strength and power in stepping away from questioning what we gain or lose and asking "What is it that will help us to grow, to come together, to renew and rebuild?"

Will we now welcome each day for its freshness, its richness, for the opportunities it may bring? Will we think about the people who have brought so much into my life and will we reach out to them today? And tomorrow?

Regards
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