



2020 ViBe Story Exchange Event Series

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Life Lessons in the Time of *Pandemia*

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Just a few days into what has now become an unprecedented nine-weeks-and-counting quarantine, I found myself thinking about the interesting way in which the unknown shakes us up and exposes our fears and vulnerabilities. In the midst of a faceless, intangible threat, it seems we're powerfully reminded of our fragility.

Suddenly, we find ourselves unwillingly participating in mental gymnastics, as we somersault through dozens of questions: *Is my immune system strong? Do we have enough food? Does our dog? How much is enough toilet paper? When will I ever get to travel again? How will my older family members fare? Is that clean enough? Is that a cough?*

Times like these don't just *test* our strength, they reveal that we may not be as strong as we once believed. And *that* realization is terrifying. We become crippled by uncertainty. When the things we have so often and, without much thought, taken for granted – *a trip to the supermarket, a coffee date with a friend, lunch at our favorite restaurant, access to food and toilet paper, a stable job* – are suddenly at stake, we're forced to sit face-to-face with the undeniable reality that we're *not* invincible.

Yet, just as the unknown has the power to individually bust us wide open, so too does it seem to expose our shared narrative. In the same breadth of questioning, fearing and scrutinizing, we realize that, clichés aside, we're in this together. But why does our acknowledgement of our collectiveness seem to be reserved for big moments like these? Once the daily buzz of natural disasters and national crises inevitably begin to subside, we all seem to revert back to our ways. With this being the first (and hopefully, the only) pandemic of my lifetime, I can't help but wonder: is our current, seemingly inescapable togetherness here to stay, or is a global pandemic – in spite of its social-distancing mandate – strong enough to keep us together long after it has come to pass? And if so, what does it look like to move forward?

If the past several weeks have unearthed anything, it's a series of lessons that I hope transcend our present situation and serve as reminders for many years to come. In our most vulnerable time, we have been reminded that we all crave connection; that the simple things are often the most joyful; that there's a tremendous freedom in relinquishing control (and in admitting that we never really had it anyway); that there's so much strength to reap from one another, if we dare admit we can't go at it alone.

While I pride myself in optimism, in the spirit of vulnerability, I must admit that I am weary. You see, my biggest worry isn't whether we'll get through this. We will. But it won't be enough to get *through* this, if life returns to how it was before. We must reemerge changed. We must sew the lessons we've learned during this time to craft a new normal characterized by connection, simplicity and togetherness. I hope that in seeing each other's humanity, we can show up with a common understanding: before, during and after this, we have been, are and will be the same. And we're all equally fragile, yet made so much stronger together.

Indulge me for a moment, and close your eyes. Picture this vision of what could we if we took these lessons to heart and didn't wait for another pandemic-level event to provide the "time out" for reflection.

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*What if we made time for sunshine,
for games, for conversations – every day?
What if we always said 'yes' to happy hours
and vowed to spread only positivity online?*

*What if kids playing in the yard weren't a rarity,
and if tending to a garden weren't a chore?
What if we checked on elderly neighbors 'just because'
and remembered to thank people more often?*

*What if we read more books and did more thinking?
What if we did more giving and less judging?*

*What if we dared to live more like the people we are
when we're not given a choice to be otherwise?*

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Think of the kind of people we would be. Think of the kind of world we would leave...