* Greetings to my fellow Child Survivors of the Holocaust

Who would have thought..again. Still, we child survivors of the Holocaust have always known that catastrophes could happen. Our skins were always thin.

But wait. This is quite different.

I vacillate. There is something familiar in seeing empty shelves in the supermarkets, people struggling for toilet rolls. I have trouble signing on to the Will we be short of food? Ah, after much frustration I managed to get on the Woolworths web site for home deliveries to old people. They can deliver in four days. Luckily we have sufficient food till then.

What about services, what if I run out of batteries, light bulbs, what if the phone or internet network seize up? What if I break a leg?

There is much talk in the media of the Apocalypse, or at least of a war footing, like in World War Two. Yes, we always believed that what happened could happen again, but we did not really believe that it would. Who would have thought that in the dusk of our lives we would be thrust back into the world of our childhoods? That our worlds would change almost overnight from security to once again being the most threatened sections of the community- then as children, now as the elderly? That we would have to hide inside the four walls of our homes, afraid to go out, each outside person being a potential danger?

Police are starting to patrol the streets.

It’s difficult to trust our leaders.

There is talk of selections; who would be allowed scarce respirators?

And even if not we, will our families, from whom we are separated, for whom we yearn, for whom I have a pain in my shoulders through the empty embrace, will they be alright? It’s difficult to see them having to adjust to this abnormal world, the likes of which we hoped to spare them.

But then the pendulum returns. Of course it’s not true. I am oversensitive to the images that trigger childhood memories. It’s not happening again.

And we child survivors of the Holocaust are at the forefront of those who can provide perspective. No, this is not an Apocalypse, and no Second World War. Men are not sent to the front. They are sent home to be with their families. There will be no bombs destroying houses and facilities. If we are short of food, that is because of panic buying, not because supplies are scarce.

Yes, we have to keep physical distance from others, but not emotional distance. We don’t have to wait months for a letter to know if a relative is alive. Modern media bring them to life within seconds.

In those days, the Nazis had unlimited power and their reign seemed to be endless. We were their ultimate victims and nine tenths of us died. Now we are not being persecuted. We are part of the general population fighting a common enemy. We are not being scapegoated. In fact most of the population is sacrificing to keep *all* vulnerable people safe, including us.

Lastly, there is an end in sight and we know that we will win. And then, in the euphoria of survival there will be pent up energy to renew, to enjoy. There will be a baby boom alongside an economic one, and who knows, people who have learned that the world can cooperate and hurl itself against common dangers will tackle old problems like climate change, nuclear build-ups, and national rivalries.

So yes, features of this pandemic remind us of our early trials, but the differences are large. That’s why, should the pandemic remind us of our early fears, we can reassure ourselves that no, it’s not happening again.

After reassuring ourselves we can reassure the world.

*Paul Valent founded the Child Survivors of the Holocaust Group in Melbourne.*