

My Birthday

April 10, 2020

Manila, Philippines

# Lockdown 101

## Lessons in Midlife.

It is my birthday today. I wake up to the happy chirping of the birds outside the window. I feel they are having a convention of some kind and reveling in the fact that there are less humans around. I guess the same thing is happening in every corner of every forest, mountain, ocean or sky on the planet. I want to come out and greet the birds and let them know that I, a human, am still around but that I need to hide for now, together with other humans who are afraid to be extinct. Just a few months ago, I saw a volcano explode. I realized that there was really nowhere to run because there was nowhere to hide. So I just took what I could and said goodbye to everything else. But before I said goodbye, I said thank you for everything that would have possibly been destroyed by fire and ash. My life has literally moved from one lockdown to another. In one lockdown, I found great fulfillment in helping others in need, being an instrument of the generosity of others. In this new lockdown, I find a simple satisfaction in the company of only seven humans and three canines. I am in a cave of relative comfort with only two channels to the outside world. And yet, in my seclusion, there is laughter when we cook or eat and there is music and gratitude when we congregate. Everything else outside moves like a shadow play of darkness and light, dismay and hope, anxiety and kindness, all happening at the same time.

Today seems a bit different from all other days. I realize that I never had a midlife crisis as described in most literature as an emotional roller coaster ride. What I find myself in is that I am now in midlife and I live in a crisis. I can't even leave my cave to share my delight in the company of other humans except those nearest and dearest to me. While I can still view nature with the green leaves of my garden and a few colorful flowers on the trees, my heart sinks when I look at the dying cactus that refuses to be saved. Something tells me that to be inside is to save oneself and be of service to others. This is not what I have learned all these years. How can this be undone?

In my life, I have learned some lessons which need a bit of review. One is that every problem has a solution.

Problem, lockdown. Solution, accept. In fact, obey. Of course, it is easier said than done, especially when other humans refuse to believe the reality of an aggressive disease that can ravage their breathing mechanism and send them to throes of near death experience, with pain and desolation as companions. But we accept even the folly of others as a reminder to trust in our own instinct to survive.

Second lesson, to live one day at a time. A day is all I have, until the next. I claim every waking hour as my own, alone or to be shared with the humans who depend on me. I aim to make each one busy and happy. I used to have big goals but now I have only one - to get through my day and survive.

Third lesson, to stock up on gratitude, lots of it. I wish I could convert the rolls of paper in my bathroom into pages of thank you notes to all the humans who populate my heart. There are lots of them, near and far, friend or stranger, young and old, strong and meek. I find myself even thanking those who are difficult to thank. I am glad I can do it silently without ever having to see them in my lifetime. It is enough that I tried.

Fourth lesson, to let go and let God in. I stare at pile upon pile of things that are important and what are not essential or worthy to keep and pass on. I must say that the process is therapeutic. Like releasing an old love. Bury and say goodbye. Forgive without forgetting. Emptying is simplifying. And then the age-old maxim, to give is to receive may ring true. It is still my belief that a Higher Being is in control where I am not. So praise and pray is what I must do.

Lastly, on the day of my birth, I would like to impart a lesson of hope. That this world be born again into what it was supposed to be before we humans came. That before we are released into the earth, we learn to respect nature and not vanquish it. That we learn to be tolerant of our differences and celebrate the common good. That we hold our heads high for what is right and refuse to swallow what is wrong. That we never tire of each other so we can still love and cherish.

As for me, I will just sing me a birthday song for twenty seconds until I am cleansed.

Written by SMJA