

Marty
Division Four Humanities
Short Story Series
Due 04/03/2020

Story One: The Assault On Safety Has Natural Consequences

“You Idiot! My life is more important than your stupid companies,” I shouted. David shot back, “You’re my employee, and you’ll do what I’ll need.” His ignorance and perception of my role were painful.

At the time, I was working for a small advertising agency. David, the owner, had a really poor meaning of what it meant to have employees, or moreover how to manage people. I was going through a really tough time, a single mother, with a young kid who needed to eat. The work was mostly interesting, and the money decent, so I stayed. I was a broke graphic designer, not able to risk leaving.

The issue was, we were not living in a normal time, we were living in the era of the national plague. People all around us were scared, closing down their offices, figuring out what to do, how to mitigate the crisis. Of course, there were people who were becoming ill, and eventually dying.

So what did my highly-intelligent-seriously-awesome-totally-sane manager do? David stood in the middle of our dusty, cramped, farm of cubes burning with the aroma of personal hand sanitizer that we were forced to provide ourselves and announced that it was all a sham. The plague was a political scheme made to make people believe in some alternative deep state. There was no risk, we were all safe, and certainly, the whole rest of the world made up of fairly intelligent people were all just living a scam.

Obviously, this didn’t resonate well with me, or any other of the twenty five or so young people crammed into our disgusting office. In fact, we had the ideal habitat to launch a plague. Unsanitary, compact, warm, and musty.

While David’s understanding of the plague and his response was set up to get more work out of his employees, it did not go quite as he hoped. As the outbreak progressed, we all kept going into the office. We all needed to eat and feed our kids. Nobody who worked with me was rich, other than David, and then, more than ever, we all had bills to pay.

One after another, people started showing up a bit late to work, coughing, or otherwise just looking plague-ready. By the end of the week, David stopped showing up to work. We did not know why. We waited, hoping that he would come back, as we needed to get paid, but nothing.

Finally, on the Friday of the second week since the start of the plague, I came in early to open the office. One of the responsibilities of the design team was to rotate through opening the office early. I came in and sat down at my desk, the rest of the place empty, punk rock blaring.

All of the sudden, I turned around to shouts, "Police! Police! Anyone home?" So I shouted back, and announced my presence.

The New York State Trooper who was standing at the door with a box of tissues in hand seemed confused by the single girl blasting punk at 6:45AM. However, I asked what I could do for him. He asked to sit down and seemed a bit uneasy. He was blunt, saying in only a few words that David had died of the plague and contracted it at work from another employee who I thought had quit.

The results all made sense. My greedy, selfish boss, who wasn't thoughtful enough to let his employees go home died.

The story reminds us that our implications can have larger impacts. The agency closed, and because he had no family, the employees ended up inheriting the company, and turned it around. The results however, were obvious. Stupidity breeds stupidity, and ego is always expensive down the road.

The Amish Outbreak: Small Communities Can Do It

It was the Spring of 2009. Some people might remember the time as *Swine-O-Nine*, or the year of the H1N1 Swine Flu outbreak around the world. While not remotely as deadly as the now infamous novel coronavirus *covid-19*, at the time it was expected to be, and treated as if, it was quite serious. This story takes place in the flatlands surrounding Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in a rural, Amish community with a sizable population.

Our story follows Erica, a thirteen year-old girl living in an Amish community, along with her mother, Joanne, a nurse, and the manager of the crisis for the closed, Amish plantation. Because the community was closed, they knew they were at particular risk for outbreak. Joanne knew that in order to save lives, they needed to take decisive action. For one, the community was isolated. If they were totally isolated, they'd be safe from all elements of the plague. That being said, if anyone in the community got infected, everyone was doomed to fall.

Being the planner she was, Joanne spring into action locking down the community. Residents were not allowed to leave the community or over-socialize with others. The thinking was that if people did not interact, there would be little room for the infection to spread, and all would be well. Like all of the best laid plans, these too had their issues.

In no surprise to people everywhere, not everyone wanted to obey the new restrictions on how they lived their lives. People were leaving their homes, acting disobedient, socializing, and thoroughly putting everyone else's lives at risk. Reminders to obey were met with resistance. It's a free country after all, and some do not like to be told what to do. Frustrations rose. External cases increased. Joanne knew that her window for drastic action was shrinking. Soon, the H1N1 swine flu would invade the community, and it would just be a matter of time before lives were lost.

In an act of strength, new rules were enacted. It wasn't just unacceptable anymore-- it was punishable. At first, nobody listened. Then, the first person was held accountable when a big fine was enacted. All of the sudden, it was as if someone started playing the music. By holding someone accountable, people believed that the rules were real and needed to be followed. Everyone stayed home, and due to that, the infections passed the community, saving them many lives in the long term.

So where does that leave us with this tale? Well, it's pretty simple. Rules only exist once they're enforced.

Recovering After The Pandemic

There was once a school that had a wild norovirus outbreak. For the uninitiated, norovirus is a rather unpleasant stomach sickness that involves a solid 24 hours of no fun. The school was a summer school set on the grounds of a camp. Like one would expect, more so than any other community on earth, a camp is an ideal location to spread sickness. It's compact, people live, eat, sleep, and socialize together, and the norovirus finds its way around the community like nobody's business.

It started off as a small outbreak. A few kids were sick. The next day, when students came in, things were different. New protocols were put in place. Everyone had to constantly disinfect their hands, with the staff deep-cleaning every inch of the rustic building at every possible moment. The nervousness and fear were in the air. Students no longer felt comfortable in their own community. The dining hall was locked down, students could not touch any of the utensils, the bright green face-shield laden salad bars were gone. English teachers attempted to emulate the food distribution, walking ground with large, heavy, trays of food in quantity, rationing it out to the masses.

Things, however, did not improve. Within days, you could walk through the campus and spot the tell-tale sign of outbreak. Kids going about their normal life would stop, sprint over to the nearest trash can, vomit, and attempt to stumble to the medical center for some needed isolation. It was like watching a Vietnam war movie with people getting suddenly shot off the battlefield one by one, people dropping from hardcore invincible basketball athlete to vomiting child in a matter of seconds. It was just totally and completely unpleasant. Nobody was having a good time.

Even with the most draconian measures, there was no home. It was just going to spread. The good news was that once someone got the disease, it seemed as though they were safe from getting it again. One-by-one, each person fell victim to the ailment, renouncing their strength to a trash can. One by one they rose again, cleaning off their wounds, and returning to life. With time, the plague passed, and a conversation started, "How did this get here in the first place?"

On the last day of school, a young student stepped forward to one of the assistant principals at breakfast, long after the disease had ripped through the community. She pulled the chief disciplinarian of the school aside, and said four words, "I brought the bug."