



Fear and Loathing

Dear Aunt Bossy,

I saw on your Facebook page that you just cancelled a five week trip to France including a month at a French school in Villefranche-sur-Mer because you would be near Italy. You mentioned that you were upset with yourself for making that decision. I'd like to know why you say that and also what I can do to lessen the paralyzing fear that has overcome me.

Scared Sick

Dear Scared Sick,

The answer to your first question is that I feel bad about my decision – although less so every day – because when I am afraid of something, I usually head straight for it. Besides, I had been planning this for a year. The answer to what you, and the rest of us can do to deal with the fear is twofold, addressing the physical and the mental.

If you are at all alert and aware, which it appears you are, you know what to do physically. Wash your hands a lot, using hot water and soap. Use hand sanitizer, but not as a replacement for soap and water. Stop touching your face. (My mother gave me a good head start on that

one.) Stay home if you do not feel well. Call your doctor or the hospital if you think you are sick, but do not go in unless they tell you to. Use common sense.

The mental part is the difficult part, but the good news is that the same skills apply to a successful life, so you either already know this, or can start practicing under pressure.

First: Think positively. No matter how corny that sounds, both science and common sense have proven that positivity makes an enormous difference. Negative thinkers are less happy, less successful, and much less pleasant to support and help than those who look for the good. Negativity, especially when it mutates into hate, is very bad for the immune system.

So what could possibly be good about this virus? First and foremost, it has created a race for a vaccine. It has also made governments more aware of the part they have to play to alleviate this monster.

We in the US are now very aware of how the supply chain, with a great dependency on China, affects us, as does our immigration and travel policy. Just stopping travel from China to the US in January has helped slow the growth of this disease. We can learn a lot by paying attention to how other countries have approached this. A small country, with a small bureaucracy, like Iceland, has done a great job. A country much smaller than ours, Italy, has a complex bureaucracy and loose border control. We can learn from their practices.

If you like solitude, you have the perfect excuse. Want to catch up on that book you have been meaning to read? Yup. You can clean out your closets, organize your paperwork, and do all sorts of things you have been putting off.

Download some exercise videos, check out the things you have missed on Netflix. You can now binge without guilt.

If you have kids at home, the challenge is more difficult, but you can get more involved in their schoolwork, help them get creative about entertaining themselves, enlist them in helping around the house. You can also learn how to discipline without losing it.

If you can't go to work, but can work online, you will learn a lot about how you structure your day and use your energy.

If you can't work online and don't have an income, get online (yes, most people are online) or on the phone and organize community help to help yourself and others. Establish food banks, delivery services, support groups. Even if you are working, you should do this as much as you can.

You can order anything online, at least at the moment. If you have a craft, get busy. Knit, crochet, pot, whatever. If you want to make some money with it, check out Etsy.

If you have a yard, start a garden. Order food for delivery from your local supermarket. Piggly Wiggly does that, as do Publix, Walmart, and others.

If you find yourself reading this and saying, "yes, but," find some resources on positivity and immerse yourself. I'm not saying this is a joyful time, but you do not have to give in and immerse yourself in hate and misery.

Discipline your mind. Attack the things you can control, and give little attention to what you can't control. Don't hug the thorns. Choose your battles. Keep asking yourself, "Is this moving me closer to being happier?"

No matter what happens with this marauding disease, you will be a better and happier person if you practice these skills. And, they are skills. And, they can be learned.

Now, go wash your hands and call someone who is alone and frightened.

Aunt Bossy