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## Pandemic Blues

by Lesley Dawson

In times of crisis we must all decide again and again whom we love. It isn't always easy to work out what your responsibilities are in a pandemic. Should you isolate to keep yourself from infection for your own sake and because your family were telling you horrendous stories of people your age dying? Or should you consider responsibilities you might have to other people who are vulnerable and need your help and you want to demonstrate your independence?

Suddenly I was told that I was in the vulnerable age group and therefore not allowed to meet with other people. I could only go outside my house to buy food (thank God for the local Co-op round the corner) and to exercise (when I walked to the sea front and back, by myself, with a mask on and avoiding everybody I met). I had plenty of offers to shop for me and those who offered were surprised when I said "Thank you but I would prefer to go myself as long as I can" I think some of them were quite shocked that I was so foolish.

What was there to get up for? I might just as well stay in bed. What was the point in going out walking if I could not talk to anyone? It was easier to sit at home watching day-time TV. I had told myself that I would turn the shed into my art studio and I would paint the days away. I did manage a couple of landscapes but soon grew bored and stopped.

Zoom meetings, Whatsapp and Facetime became a regular part of life in which I was advised, requested, instructed, ordered (the level of engagement being dependent on the closeness in the family and the distance in miles from where I live).

I kept a close eye on COVID numbers in my locality and also in Yorkshire where the rest of the family were. The figures in the north of England were much higher than national averages and friends in the south told me not to go anywhere outside of Sussex.

Between first and second lockdowns I had visits from two of the younger family units in my family and enjoyed them very much, while being quite glad when they left and I was able to revert to my previous lazy state.

Second lockdown seemed much easier as we now knew what to expect and had got used to rules changing from one day to the next. I was keen to get out and about as my fears of possible infection and nightmares about ending up on the intensive care unit at the local hospital faded.

I knew that the younger staff and volunteers at the Drop in Centre where I volunteered, were just about on their knees because of seven day working and the loss of so many elderly volunteers due to self- isolating. Eventually I got so fed up I went to find out if I could help. I knew that the Manager had set up strict rules for social distancing, masking and hand sanitizing and because of this they were able to serve take away meals at breakfast and lunch times. I was told that my safety was my own responsibility, but I was welcome to help in the kitchen as long as I followed the rules. Thus satisfied that I could do something useful, was fit and well for my age and convinced I wouldn't get COVID, I began to emerge from my solitary chrysalis. Life became more fun and there were good reasons to get up in the mornings.