

Slow Walk

Written by Jack Sparacino

Tuesday, 12 May 2020 13:36 - Last Updated Wednesday, 13 May 2020 06:50

Many are afraid now.

Do not demonize your fear, and also, do not let it rule you.

Instead, let it speak to you—in your stillness, listen for its wisdom.

*What might it be telling you about what is at work, at issue, at risk, □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
beyond the threats of personal inconvenience and illness?*

*As the health of a tree, a river, the sky tells you about quality of your own health,
what might the quality of your health tell you about the health of the rivers, the trees, the sky,
and all of us who share this planet with you?*

Stop. Just stop. Be still. Listen.

Ask us what we might teach you about illness and healing, □

About what might be required so that all may be well.

We will help you, if you listen.

- A Letter From Covid-19 To Humans (Kristin Flyntz, Spirit of Change Magazine) □

What's it like to survive a horrible fire just in time for a global pandemic to strike? What's it like to do this while just crossing the threshold, however dubious, between senior and *elderly*? If you'll let me, I'll turn introspective and try to do that at 15,000 feet. As an old helicopter guy, that shouldn't be too hard.

Almost everything is in slow motion for me now. This is a two-sided coin. On the one hand, I still do things (or at least try) at a "normal speed." Morning preparation stuff seems to fall into this category. Getting out of bed (do the log roll the physical therapy guys taught me, *oof* try that again), hit the bathroom (let's skip shaving today), make coffee. Cream, two sugars.

Check my phone for God knows what, including over a hundred e-mails a day, every day and sometimes more. "Help us, Jack...; We're Almost Out of Time!... Only You Can Save These Precious Children... Ditch Mitch," etc. It is simply ceaseless. Like the earth rotating on its axis. Or the perpetual, high beam grin of Roberto the ebullient server at Boston's *Frenchier* restaurant on Tremont Street.

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Wading through this stuff on my phone is like mowing the lawn on a breezy fall day under the oaks. No way you're ever going to have a leafless yard so sit the heck down, take a deep breath and think of something else to do. Something really constructive that, you know, adds *value*. Jeepers, talk about sounding like I've still got a couple of toes in the corporate world. Value within the supply chain with all possible waste driven out of the business process. Like *that*, fellow business wonks.

Now I make breakfast, still on "normal" human speed. Bagels, eggs, sausage, oatmeal, orange juice, what else do we have on hand? Are there any more grapes around? Where's that cream cheese hiding, and that wonderful strawberry jam? Did I put on clean underwear yet, oh yeah that's later, after my shower and the hour it seems to take to change my burn wound dressings. Standing in only my socks, wincing when the ointments get applied to the open areas, feeling relieved when the blessed Aquaphor greases the still flaming red donor sites on my right leg. Oh that feels good, can we slow down the clock? Just a little slower, slower, like mold growing on the porch, like a spider inching up a drainpipe. Like your first real kiss with a new friend. Slow. Down. Just a little. Please.

Time to get dressed and my motions slow down again. Where's that pile of clothes I laid out? It's not here where it should be, or there. Oh yeah, here it is. Now put everything on without wiping away half the Aquaphor. Careful, line up your arms and head with the t-shirt sleeves and head hole. Slow and steady does it. That's it, good for you old man. Now the sweatpants, and sneakers. Way to... go.

Let's check the phone again, answer some messages, create some new ones. Check the news, blasting through the headlines. At last, some real speed! Skim this story, blow by another half dozen, skim another one. Sweep, skim, repeat.

The sun has risen and ah, the burn site itching and pain are under control. The itching that often sets in as a bad burn heals falls under the "How would you rate your pain now?" banner. Health care providers ask you about it regularly. I might say 5.5 or 3 or 6.5. Do they round the fractions up or down? What's the difference, the itching hurts or it doesn't. Up to a point, and that's where the fire ants march in like Hitler's army pummeling Poland in 1939. Then we're up to a solid 8.

Fire ants are nothing like regular picnic ants and one of them has a pen knife, the little bugger.

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He stabs it in my thigh for ten... long... seconds. Then he pulls it out. Whew, glad that's over, then owwwww, the little son of a beach does it *again*! Atarax or Benzadril and ibuprofen sometimes help smother the ants. CBD oil helps a little too; take *that* you little wretches. Monsters!

Ah, ok, time for some fun. Let's go outside. I like my USS Shark hat, in commemoration of the very young men who were on our first submarine in the Pacific to be sunk by the enemy. February, 1942. Wearing that hat slows me down pleasantly. People often ask me if I was in the navy. What ship did I sail on? See any combat? I think about that for a moment.

Dixie and I stroll up Old Colony Avenue and through our South Boston neighborhood. The sidewalks are cracked, pitted and uneven. Just like in my last neighborhood. Go slow and watch your feet so you don't trip and fall. The forsythia, magnolia and spring flowers tip their hats hello. It's just too early for them to shout. They need time and sunshine. Small businesses are struggling to stay open. Many look abandoned. Take a picture, take some more. Slowly, carefully. And what do you really see, Shark wannabe, old helicopter guy? Do you see the lovely church spire above the blooming trees, do you hear the sparrows and finches, the gulls and doves? Do you smell something burning . . . maybe beef, maybe just a filthy grill warming up?

I think about reaching out to Kristin Flyntz. Maybe her eerie poem is the lady fantasizing, trying to let her ego defend itself against her anxiety about the vicious viral enemy that surrounds us. Strangles. Maybe a sharp and speedy sixth grader wrote it for her, or her mother for that matter, and who really cares anyway?

Forty-five years ago, I wrote my doctoral dissertation at Chicago on the Type-A personality and heart disease. In effect, does the "hurry sickness" person mess up their heart by running at top speed all the time and multi-tasking? And thereby drive up their blood pressure? Now I wonder whether there comes a point in one's life when it's not only ok but *necessary* to slow down, savor each step along however many miles or maybe just feet you have left.

We shouldn't need any virus to tell us that.