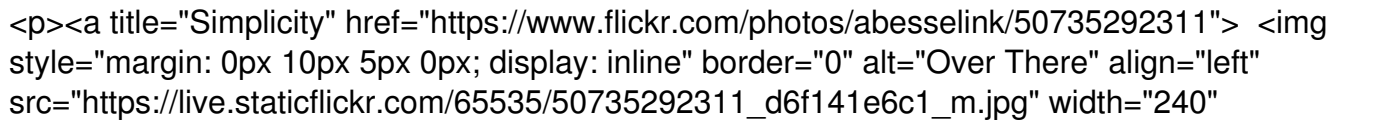


<https://www.flickr.com/photos/abesselink/50735292311>  There has been a lot of silence gracing the pages of this blog in recent months. My labor of love has been sadly sent to the sidelines of life, and for that I apologize. It hasn't been for a lack of thoughts to share, but rather a lack of time to do so. For those of you who have stood by my literary endeavors, I thank you for being patient and forgiving. Today, I set a course to rejuvenate the flow of words herein with greater regularity. There is no better time than now to do so. If not now, then when?

Needless to say, a lot has happened since my last post. 2020 happened - and that encompasses a lot. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness all seemed to take a hit this year. 2020 has definitely been a challenge emotionally, physically, intellectually, professionally, spiritually - you name the boundary, they have all been pushed mercilessly. Many of us have lost friends and family and colleagues due to illness, divisive politics, and harsh realizations of what was and what will be. Many of our relationships have not weathered these storms very well. Sadly, many of us have done this under the specter of social distancing and, for some, an exceeding amount of time alone with our thoughts and ourselves.

I've heard many say that they can't wait until normal returns. You know what? I don't want normal back. In hindsight, normal wasn't so great nor was it really good enough. Normal was, in reflection, racial and gender inequality that our blind eyes seemingly disguised as a plethora of other issues. Normal was doing things because, well, that's just how we do things around here. Normal was enabling the behaviors of those we love thinking that keeping the peace is the way we show our love to one another. Normal entailed, at times, the ignorance of science to support personal beliefs or agendas. Normal became the incessant drone of entitlement and the abdication of self-responsibility.

If that is what normal looked like before 2020, then I want no part in returning to it.

However, the true enlightenment of 2020 may, in fact, come from the awareness and ownership of these harsh truths. The lessons learned through 2020 are woven through the words of minds far greater than mine. Abraham Lincoln once said that there is no failure, only opportunity. In all its anguish and consternation, pain and suffering, 2020 provided us with a great opportunity - to reflect on the things that are truly important, to embrace and take ownership of them within our hearts, and to be and do better because of them. Perhaps 2020 wasn't a challenge so much as an opportunity to learn.

The wise words of Maya Angelou also ring true this year. When someone tells you who they are, listen the first time resonated on so many levels in 2020. I was once told that people come into our worlds for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. We may have a history with a person that will never change, for sure - a history that we may cherish forever. However, life demands learning and growth. Reasons change, seasons change. How we choose to interact with those same people in the future well, that can change. Healthy boundaries may be difficult or against the tide of perceived normalcy.

Although there is plenty of sadness to go around and far too many deaths to count, we can reflect on love, and empathy, and doing what is right. As Martin Luther King Jr once said, the time is always right to do what is right. We can make ourselves better so that we co-create a world that befits the visions and hopes and dreams of those we lost - physically, spiritually, and emotionally - along the way.

I found 2020 to be enlightening albeit often sadly disturbing. There was time to reflect. There was time to better understand both myself and those around me. And there were plenty of harsh truths which, when acknowledged, created some dichotomies that were admittedly tough to balance.

In my humble opinion, our

greatest challenge isn't solved by waking up to 2021 and leaving 2020 in our rearview mirror with the optimism of a vaccine and a return to normal. Our greatest challenge is to embrace what is (or was) and to acknowledge that we feel what we feel. But the enlightenment doesn't stop there. We must better understand what drives those feelings and responses and do something with that self-awareness to make ourselves and the world around us better.

Thank you, 2020, for giving me a huge kick in the ass, a reality check, and the inspiration to do better, to be better. It was a reminder to dream big, live large (or as large as a pandemic might permit if necessary), and follow your passions. Always. Be fearless. Walk every day with courage. As Canadian Gord Downie proclaimed - "No dress rehearsals this is our life".

Now, as for 2021 bring it on. Are you with me?

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