

The Covid Entries

The 52 Covid Entries offer daily reports of the pandemic's harsh surge in New York City during the early spring 2020. Each entry includes text and a photograph – real time observations of the early weeks when disease and fear transformed the city.

3 Sample Entries:

Third Entry Tuesday, March 17th, 2020

Seventh Entry Tuesday, March 24th, 2020

Twenty-seventh Entry Monday, April 13th, 2020

CLOSED
FOR TWO
WEEKS
UNTIL
FURTHER
NOTICE

Covid Entry #3

Tuesday, March 17th, 2020 | wind-blown trash

Just before midnight, I stepped out onto West 21st Street. The still landscape and clear air reminded me of the late 1970s when a glimmer of manufacturing remained on this block. The nights were quiet then. There was simply no reason to be in this part of town, since very few people lived here. In those days, at about midnight, the taxi garage emptied itself. The oversized checker cabs lined the previously empty curbs bumper-to-bumper. That was before the clubs arrived, and long before any restaurants other than Greek-run diners.

I headed home, riding south down Seventh Avenue. The street was pretty empty, but I was not alone. At Greenwich Avenue, I angled southeast toward MacDougal Street, wondering if it could be as sparse as Seventh Ave. It was empty—not empty like your own bed if you live alone, but more empty than I had ever seen it, even at 3 or 4 in the morning.

The wind blowing trash around the empty streets evoked memories of previous times when something had gone terribly wrong in this city.

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March 24th, 2020 Sixth Avenue

Covid Entry #7

Tuesday, March 24th, 2020 | communicated with a glance

Belgium has made it illegal to go outside, while Italy has outlawed outdoor activities including/like jogging and biking. Iran, which so far has been hit the hardest of the Middle Eastern countries, has turned down American aid, saying the virus was manufactured by the USA.

The 9/11 Memorial is closed. One lone security guard stood inside the expansive area when I passed by in the late morning. A cheap white plastic chain sloped between black plastic posts placed thirty feet apart, creating a fence of sorts. Anyone aware of the thoughtful design work on the other side of this barrier would shudder at these materials. What is the benefit of this closure? Wouldn't it be a good time to visit a lost loved one or gaze into the subterranean pools?

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Not many people were out as I rode downtown. The emptiness of the streets seemed to heighten everyone's awareness of each other. Nevertheless, there was a noticeable paucity of human eye contact. There were opportunities for it, but...nothing happened. I have been noticing this trend for days, but each time I've dismissed it, thinking it was me, or that people were in a rush, or that they have other reasons not to connect.

The huge, white Calatrava "Oculus" which looks more like a dinosaur skeleton was washed in low-angled early spring sunlight. I turned west to follow its flank. It comforted me to be near a structure that is so totally unlike any other in the city or the country; it is more akin to the St. Louis arch than to anything else I can think of in the US, though one could never confuse the two.

Many more people were out near the river. I used my return trip to try

and connect with another human—anyone. I could not. I simply could not make eye contact with anyone, nor did anyone even glance at me. It was as though I, and everyone else, was invisible. Everyone looked straight ahead. Clearly, they were aware of their surroundings as they fluently navigated the waterfront promenade while always maintaining significant distance between themselves and others. If they turned their heads, it was to look at something, not someone. Most people gazed straight ahead.

The collective energy did not feel like the post-9/11 fear. At that time, there was a feeling that something else was going to happen—a lingering threat. No one knew if it was over or if we had just seen the first act. Today, in the slight chill of late March, amidst flowering trees, crocus, and snowdrops, people seemed mostly at ease as they walked their dogs – maybe the only reason they were outside.

This new way of looking without seeing or connecting haunts me; is this evolution? The lack of even the possibility of eye contact is not something I've experienced in the United States. Eye contact is a favorite medium of mine and the highlight of some of my days. The opportunity for a genuine encounter with a stranger in a fraction of a second is gone, fallen away as a side effect of the invisible enemy.

My suspicion came into sharp focus; I could no longer dismiss it. It was as though everyone—nannies, police people sitting in their cars, runners, standing guards, and moms—believed that the disease could be communicated with a glance. Is curiosity no longer safe, or has it become inappropriate?

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April 10th, 2020 Late Rent, Apt. 5A

Covid Entry #27

Monday, April 13th, 2020 | Covid dreams

I've been hearing people on the radio talk about Covid-related dreams. They are, apparently, quite common. One radio host shared her dream from the night before—something I am not sure I have heard a news commentator do. The dream was about breaking into a coworker's home in the middle of the night and stealing dozens of rolls of toilet paper, then lugging them home in a bed sheet.

Last night I had a Covid dream. Mine was fairly simple—to describe, at least. There were four of us who all had the virus. Somehow it was understood that only two of us would make it through, and it seemed to be up to us to decide who would and would not survive. I awoke disturbed, but in the dream, I was calm. In the dream it seemed that everything would work out, which did not place me into either group, just that everything would simply run its course.

We've all heard analogies comparing this pandemic to wartime, they are appropriate in many ways. But, this is not like other battles we have read about or seen in movies. Everyone in the hospitals now has the same ailment, and there is no apparent treatment for it. Doctors are not trained for these conditions. And the government is certainly not as prepared to fight this virus as they would be to fight a war.

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