



Stone Circle

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Accepting, Coping, and Living with Our New Normal

By Jan Herrick

My first instinct in pondering this topic, was to say under my breath, "NO...surely we will be back to the old normal before long!" As time has passed, I have had to accept the reality that it is highly improbable. Something as far reaching as a global pandemic is going to have far reaching effects for a very long time. I realized that we are actually grieving our old normal, the one we used to take for granted, and, in grieving how things used to be, we are also subject to going through the stages of grief. There are five of them: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, and they may or may not unfold in order. We can experience them one after another, or bounce from one to the other with no specific time limit.

This realization hit me as I watched television images of large gatherings of people on beaches and other venues seemingly disregarding any social distancing guidelines or even personal protective masks. Denial played out in reality for all to see. Just because we want this to go away doesn't make it happen. Bargaining! It won't happen to me! I'm young and it is just like a cold. Anger! Let's go out and protest to release restrictions set down by authorities. Depression! This is horrible and my life is a mess. I don't know if I can cope. And, the list goes on.

After all this, we arrive at acceptance. This is the way it is, and I can do nothing about it, but take care of myself and those around me. We are in this together, and what I do does impact others. We have seen all five of the stages unfold in front of us, and even within us. I know that acknowledging our own feelings is the fastest way to cope and finally accept the new normal. We each must find our way through the maze of the stages of grief. We have to accept the sadness that comes from knowing what we have left behind. What we once took for granted is now gone, and

our future is always a day away. We only have now, this moment, and this time. We waste these precious moments of "now" by resisting or fearing the reality that is the present. Our means of coping may be different, but the end result is the same, accepting and embracing life as it is now. Perhaps it will be better, as we have come to see what is really important and where our priorities truly lie. As we have whittled down the extraneous things from our daily lives, we have found the basics: family, friends, love, compassion and acceptance.

*Women have gathered in circles
since the dawn of history
for birthing,
to share story,
at cisterns for washing,
at fires for warmth,
at wells to draw water,
in embraces of profound joy,
in prayer,
in rings of sorrow and mourning.*

*With hands grasped, we gather our
collective wisdom,
energies and strengths
binding us and
guiding us into the future.
Each woman brings her gifts,
placing herself
as a stone in the unbroken circle.*

© Janet Herrick

Times they are a changing...

By Virginia Strait

I keep hearing everyone saying "I can't wait to get back to normal." What we knew as normal is going to be a sweet memory to most of us. We will never get to go back; our world is changing minute by minute...with each breath we are all *creating* our own new circumstances and environments.

So far, I have discovered I can pay most of my bills via the computer – sorry postal service. If I get bad off, Publix will shop for and deliver groceries to me – otherwise, I just follow the aisle arrows and nod with my mask in place. I have discovered I am not well suited for Zoom, I nod off and the snoring is found disrespectful to others – but I remind those that wake me I did pay for and reserve the space.

My darling niece created me a Facebook account – she does not realize I am fairly boring and will rarely post. I have become convinced I am more technically inept than ever because I do not know how to copy a post and stick it to my wall, included instructions were "don't share" I can hardly Like...people call or text my phone because I do not respond to Facebook.

Eventually I did give up my home phone with the built in-recorder and 50 foot curly cord. I saved some cassettes and have been known to listen to some great sentiments that were shared...voice mail does not have that storage ability. During my 30 years at the phone company, we designed and developed what I now use exclusively, the cell phone to call, text, and take pictures. A long way from the rotary phones that gave me my real job, "Operator, how may I assist you?" and "That will be 35 cents for 3 minutes, signal when thru please."

With a lot of deep breaths and more prayers we will all try to do our best with what we have to work with; it is after all our way of survival.

Affirmation Corner

By Margie Gray

Accepting, Coping, and Living with our New Normal

I love being in nature. It is one of the things that is most calming and grounding for me. I also learn a lot from nature. Some of the lessons are quiet and peaceful, while others are loud and violent. Being from Florida, I've had numerous opportunities to see the power and violence of the wind in action. The wind can uproot massive oak trees and lay waste to buildings and rooftops. One thing that oak trees and buildings have in common is that they are rigid and inflexible. They resist the wind.

I see that as a common theme in my life. When I am rigid, inflexible and resist what is going on around me, it becomes a battle that I must endure. The thing that I realized is that when I soften myself and become more flexible in my thinking, I am able to bend and let the storms blow through me without resisting them or how I feel. If I hold onto how frustrated I am with a person or situation, I become rigid and inflexible. I feel like I might break.

Accepting that this is what's going on right now has given me the ability to be with each person, situation, and moment that arises without holding onto it. Imagine holding a coin in your hand. Hold onto it as though your life depends on holding on to it. Now release your grip. As you release, the tension in your arm also relaxes. You are able to actually see it. It's the same with our brain. When I hold onto thoughts about a negative situation, I create a tension in my being that is not necessary. I am fixated on the situation. It is only when I relax and let go of the story I've created around that situation that I am able to see the rest of the context and have peripheral vision to see the possibilities that exist around the situation. I relax and become more flexible. I'm no longer the oak tree resisting the hurricane, trying not to be uprooted.

- ♥ I recognize the love in our world NOW!
- ♥ I relax and care for myself and the world around me NOW!
- ♥ I send positive energy into the world NOW!
- ♥ I am healed and send healing into the world NOW!
- ♥ Positive change is happening NOW!

Prayer Circle

Del
Linda
Jody
Julie
Arline
Kelly

Please let us know the names of those you would like to have included in our prayer circle.

Calendar of Events

Upcoming events and gatherings have been suspended for the time being. We will keep you posted as to when we can meet again in person.

Living with our New Normal

By Jody Donovan

When I first read the Newsletter theme, I immediately had the thought I've had every time I hear those words 'new normal'. To me there really is no such thing as 'normal'. I have never been accused of being that... "normal." In addition, our 'old' normal, **IF** Joe and I ever even had one (after 66 years in relationship), has changed every minute or so it seemed, now the 'new normal' will be another interesting, different routine!

As some of you know we have not been well in the last 2 years, way too complicated to go into, and it's really boring anyway, but it does make you think of what is 'normal'? ...every-day, routine, surprising, difficult, funny, different, which brings me to our current place. There's a saying, having lived in the northeast: "...if you don't like the weather, just wait a minute..."! That also could be said for the state of the world, our nation, and now, right here in our own backyards.

None of the accepting or coping has changed much in tackling any issue, big or small through the years, but accepting has to be the first step, or the coping and living don't happen. If you feel you can't 'accept' then get help. Admit that to your Doc, your close friend, your family, and ask for their ideas on how to do that. Then move to next step.

Part of my coping since Covid 19 for the most part, was to work at not losing touch with the many people, including family members all over the country, the friends from the past, those in Stone Circle, in our regular Wednesday Night Study Group (15 years here in our home), and our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. We miss them all.

So, what I did was begin a letter via email capability entitled "Connecting"! It was supposed to be called *Wednesday Wonderings* but again because life gets in the way, it became *Thursdays Thoughts* or *Mondays Musings*. It has worked out very well. Actually, I heard from all kinds of people local and long-distance, which has kept us all 'connected' and living in this current, odd, 'normal' way.

Be Well. Be Safe. Be Smart.

Still Cleaning

By Mary Columbo Reichert

You'd think that after three months of isolation I'd be done with all the big projects and on to creating comfort in my new life but you'd be wrong. I'm still cleaning.

True, the house is sanitized and redecorated; the guest room is now a gym; the closets are clean; the garden is growing both herbs and flowers; and the wild birds, bunnies, and squirrels are all well-fed. But I still have to clear out the baggage.

I'm not talking about the cases I use for travelling; I mean the stuff that saps my energy. Here's what I'm getting rid of now:

- *People who constantly require me to listen, affirm, and console them but take offense when I speak honestly and are unable to be supportive when I reach out.

- *Frustration when my best efforts don't lead to the success I imagined.

- *Impatience with people who seem to repeat the same message over and over again as if saying it will make it true.

- *Unreasonable fear about things I don't or can't control.

As I clear out the baggage, I'm making room for healthier things like:

- *Deeper friendships that lead to emotional strength for both of us.

- *Acceptance that allows me to celebrate even the smallest successes.

- *Compassion that helps me to act with grace; and

- *God, whose understanding and power are infinite.

Acceptance

By Joan Macias

Accepting this pandemic has been a hard lump to swallow for me! It seems like a sci-fi movie! Seeing shopping mall and strip mall parking empty. Unbelievable but true.

During the first weeks I saw cars parading with streamers and balloons for drive by birthday wishes. Masks and gloves required for necessary groceries. No hugging, touching, or getting too close to one another. Very hard for me—a huggy person.

Things have lightened up a little. But still not the freedom I took for granted. I have attended mass the past three weeks. Must register, be escorted to pew where tape marks the spots to sit, don't forget your mask and spritz of hand sanitizer! All in all, glad to be back at mass.

This situation will be around for a long time; so we will all be living this new world!

Patient Trust

by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything

to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress

that it is made by passing through

some stages of instability – and that it may take a very long time.

And so, I think it is with you;

your ideas mature gradually – let them grow,

let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time

(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will)

will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself

in suspense and incomplete.

Step One - Trust

By Dorie Croissant

I am sorry, folks. There is nothing normal going on right now. It is not normal, it is not an *old* normal, and it is not a *new* normal.

My definition of normal has always felt like it was different for each person because I believed that someone's *normal* was based on his or her upbringing, beliefs, feelings, past, present, and a perceived future. Frankly, I don't think we can ever, any of us, go back to what we thought was our normal way of doing things or progress to what we would like to call a *new* normal.

I feel what we have is a *new reality*. The reality is that things have changed. For all of us. Who would have ever thought we would be asked to wear a mask and practice "social distancing" to protect ourselves and others because the air we breathe might not be healthy? To say nothing about being given "stay at home" orders or having schools, businesses and other public establishments shuttered so we can save lives and stay healthy.

Step One—Trust. Step Two—Trust. Whatever that looks or feels like today. Right now. This moment. It is sometimes so easy to give into the worry of uncertainty and the anxiety of chaos. However, when I take a proverbial step back and then spend time with a slow inhale, slow exhale, slow inhale, slow exhale, and again repeat, I am more at peace. So, my version of this moment in time looks like a routine of meditating, praying, reading, watching tv, playing word games, phone calls, emails, exercise, and letter writing. Oh, and sleeping, cooking dinners, baking fun things, and keeping up with a few chores.

As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in his "Patient Trust" poem states, "Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete." Patient trust. Repeat Step One – Trust.

Struggling with a new normal called uncertainty.

Dr. Betsy Williams

I cannot say I am accepting, coping, or living with the new normal, only struggling. Initially, there was fear. Fear of the virus becoming rampant; fear it would kill loved ones and kill my aboriginal patients who all have multiple complex medical problems. Also, the fear for my kids in Cambodia and the fear I would never be able to return to be with them. Fear rocks me completely. I feel overwhelmed and unable to work with it. It reminds me of how little control I really have over my life and my choices. I become immobilized. But as Hafiz a Persian poet once wrote, "Fear is the cheapest room in the house. I'd like to see you in better living conditions."

Then there is anger, I can't say it is a better living condition than fear, but it has given me a lot of energy. I have anger at all of the stupidity. Australians hoarding toilet paper and other necessities. All medical services shut down for the Covid epidemic that has not yet come, leaving diabetics to die of complications, people to die of heart disease who never should have, had they had usual medical care and so many other diseases out of control, including other infections. Frightened old people locked in their houses, dying of simple pneumonia or other simple ailments. Then there are no specialists, and almost no GPs in a regional center. There is an empty hospital and everyone running for Covid swabbing when it isn't here! There are shortages of common medications like penicillin injections, asthma medicines, and hormones as everything comes from overseas.

Then, there are the poor decisions by the government leading to businesses closing, massive unemployment, the economy collapsing, suicides and a rise in crime and poverty. Government handouts, \$750 each unemployed on the dole, have so far only fed alcohol and drug abuse. I live near the clinic where I work, so am surrounded by broken glass, break-ins, and fights on the streets. I am angry as so much of this is so unnecessary. There has been almost no Covid in South Australia since the epidemic began in March and yet look at the collateral suffering it has already caused.

But as the Buddha puts it, "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else, you are the one who gets burned." My anger does not change the health system, the government or anything else. I simply have no control over the ridiculous decisions being made at this time. All I can do is see patients, one at a time, putting flu shots into anyone who is breathing, trying to optimize their health problems to the best of my ability, allowing for the fact that patients do not always choose to follow my advice or to take their medication. But as the Bhagavad Gita reminds us, "you have the right to work, but for the work's sake only. You have no right to the fruits of work. Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive in working. you are only entitled to the action, never to its fruits."

I think it is human to want control in your life, to have some sense of security, something to hold on to and believe. All of this has been destroyed this year by Covid, leaving only uncertainty in its wake.. I have to let go, to accept that I have limited choices and limited ability to even help others. Control and security were really only illusions anyway.

So, how to find any peace with all of this? How do I live with the struggle of the new normal? I need to look at my unrealistic expectations, many of which are fed by our culture. Lama Yeshe says "If you expect your life to be up and down, your mind will be much more peaceful." So I meditate, practice yoga and go for a walk on the beach early mornings before work, much better than tossing and turning in bed, unable to sleep. I breathe the ocean air, feel the breeze on my face, and listen to birdsong as dawn breaks. Sit in silence, soaking up what is.

Finally, I offer a practice I have found helpful and paraphrased from Jack Kornfield:

Breathing in, I calm my body,
Breathing out, I calm my mind.
May I be balanced,
May I be at peace.
May you be balanced,
May you be at peace.
May all beings be happy,
May all beings be at peace.

With love to all of my sisters living in the US, where you have had to face Covid directly and may have lost friends, family, and so much more.



Oh, how
we miss
seeing
each of
you!



Note from Jan: As you are all well aware, we have not been able to meet for our monthly gatherings, or for other Stone Circle events for quite some time. This means that in addition to not having face to face gatherings we have also not been able to regularly fill our donation bowl. However, a number of our monthly expenses continue, like keeping our website and our blog on line, and producing and mailing our newsletter. If you would like to help please mail your donations to Stone Circle at 2549 Clarinet Drive, Orlando, Florida 32837.

Thank you, in advance, for even the smallest gifts can help. Hopefully we will be back together again soon, sharing and supporting one other. That is what Stone Circle is all about! In the meantime, stay safe and well until we meet again.

Having strong relationships is
one of the single greatest predictors
of wellness, happiness and
longevity. And our connections
flourish when we take time
to get to know ourselves,
and others better.

By Jeremy Hunter

Submitted by Jan Herrick



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Stone Circle operates as a nonprofit entity whose presence seeks to enhance the feminine milieu for women of the 21st century. We truly rely on the generosity of friends and those who participate in programs.