

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF NANCY CRAMER

One of my most admired books is Aleksandr Solzenitsyn's sobering book, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich." Published in 1962, the book tells of his harrowing experiences as a political prisoner in the Soviet gulag labor camps in the 1950's. I liked the book so much that when teaching an accelerated class of fifth graders some years ago, I obtained official school permission and parental approval, and I used the book for a group of my advanced readers. They liked the book immensely, and it created some surprisingly mature discussion by the students who were only ten and eleven years old.

So what does the book have to do with a day in my life? Nothing really, and at the risk of denigrating the dreadful life those prisoners endured, I borrow the title to describe my life which is quite the opposite. I acknowledge I am not a political prisoner in a gulag camp, and do not suffer the consequences. Though my discomforts exist, they are not anywhere near those the author describes. That is the message I am trying to convey.

I am free to come and go with the limitation of not having a car to drive any more. However, I am further limited by the restrictions created by the COVID-19 virus such as not frequenting most restaurants, movies, theater, church and other gathering places. As for this particular day, I slept late because I have an annoying habit of waking up in the middle of the night to perform certain necessities. Most of the time I can fall asleep immediately, but last night was not the case. I got up, looked around. What to do? Read, wash the supper dishes, wipe off the spots left by dirty shoes on the carpet?

No, I began writing this essay, and as I was writing, I realized how fortunate I was, despite the pandemic that rages through our nation. I am retired, so I don't have to worry about losing my job. I have a modest pension, so finances are not a concern. I have health insurance which covers most my needs and expenses. And perhaps best of all, I, a single person, am not beset by the loneliness that can arise from living alone and being isolated from people.

Instead, I have a friend whose car is usually available when I need to make essential trips. This includes the grocery store, pharmacy, doctors' offices, and perhaps one other stop. We refrain from exposure to groups of people, including our church services and my Tuesday night ladies' group. These latter two I visit via the new Zoom technology, using my valued computer as the means. What a marvelous invention, especially in times like these. It has become my second best friend.

Occasionally we purchase a "pick up" meal from a fast food place. We take the food and drive directly to our apartments, where we share the tasty and sometimes greasy food. Most of the times I cook meals or make use of the good selection of frozen food items the local grocer offers. This latter convenience source of tasty food keeps me from spending hours in the kitchen, as I did when first married, and had to cook "from scratch." We eat lightly and simply but our meals are nutritious and enticing.

In the evenings we watch the political newscasts and often end the evening with several games of Chinese Checkers, of which he is the master. I have won only two games from the many we have played, but I love the ever changing challenge of strategic moves that pop up unexpectedly. He is a good winner, so it is easy for me to be a "good loser."

In a summary of my day and its meaning, I find that I am comfortable, in good health for my age of 89 years, and I have someone with whom to share parts of my day and my life. I spend a portion of each day writing stories or books, which gives me great pleasure. It is as if all these words have been stored in my memory for 80 years, when I had the time to spend writing and rewriting. I am writing a memoir now of how I lived through my grief when my younger son died in a car accident 45 years ago. I have tried three times before to write the memoir, but it was not the time for me to do so. Many of my stories are published in a weekly newspaper, and I am free to express my opinion if I choose. I keep within the boundary of conservativeness the newspaper maintains. Any other limits I find are posed by my inability to find the word I want or to make the sentence flow freely.

We use the Zoom programming to view the programs our church pastor and leaders provide, as well as for me to “attend” the monthly meetings of the Church Council, of which I am a member. All of these privileges and opportunities satisfy my emotional, mental, and physical needs in this period where restrictions and caution dictate much of my activity outside my apartment.

I certainly can't complain. I can only be grateful for the ability to lead the kind of life I do. There—that's what I have been illustrating in this essay. A word that describes my condition. That word is “gratitude.” Yes, I am grateful for each of my days. What more can a person ask for? I don't know, do you?