

Re-entering the Corona Carnival

By Janice Maves 04/17/2020

Blob or Duck?

The talk these days is all about restarting the economy as the “curve” of infections from Corona Virus plateaus. The acts of social isolation we have all practiced in the last weeks have clearly had an impact, and those in positions to make decisions about the next chapter in this epic saga are ready to begin taking some action. I don’t know if I will be following orders yet or not. I have always had a rebellious streak, and don’t think I’m going to begin cooperating just now. My life here in Maine has not changed dramatically since everything closed. But how I feel about participating in the new “afterlife” has many interesting facets, some emotional some logical. One question no one seems able to answer for me yet is whether I am a “blob” or a “duck”. This is very frightening.

Fear. That is the thing that is driving my decision making. Fear. I can’t imagine what the people making larger decisions; whether we should continue to stay home or venture back out into society, the decisions that decide the fate of so many others, are feeling. FEAR. And decisions based on fear are often not logical.

For example my inner rebel has decided that evenings alone in my lovely Victorian living room are quite comfortable. Afternoons spent alone in my yard or on my small deck, enjoyable. Mornings eating breakfast alone with Wallace the Airedale are quite cozy. I don’t need to be reunited with the world as it was before the current shut down. I am happy, or at least content in my own little world, rich in the mental stimulation that an overactive imagination gives me. My brain entertains me in these isolated times. But I only make decisions for myself, and that is probably a good thing, because sometimes I get a little carried away. Staying home feels good, but I’m not fooling myself, staying home is what I am doing because I am afraid.

Something that I learned about myself a long time ago, perhaps something that I’ve always known about ME is that I think in images. I don’t think in words. That isn’t to say that I don’t love words and use words in ways that sometimes turn out to be beautiful, but words are just tools for me to use to illustrate the images I see in my mind. So as we start thinking about rebooting our society, the images that I am trying to translate into words about how I feel about shifting back to being part of the pulsing crowd of our culture, are of two things.

The first vivid image is of that awful Corona Virus blob that is on every screen flashed across my vision. You know the one. It is the floating gray orb with red fuzzy arms all over it seen on

newscasts of late, everywhere. I see it behind my eyelids when I am drifting off to sleep and I see it every time I open my laptop or flick on my television. The second image that haunts me, I see in my mind's eye only. It is a line of "sitting ducks". The image is of the type of mechanical ducks one finds at a shooting gallery on a carnival midway being moved across one's vision on a clunking conveyor belt. This game of hit or miss at carnivals and fairs is played with an air rifle. Bright yellow ducks with small bulls' eyes on their sides clink across my inner vision with one occasionally being knocked backward to fall over with a loud ringing bell signalling its demise. In my imagination the duck is a victim of a viral bullet being shot from one of the red, evil arms on a virus blob floating around the midway of my active and awake 3 a.m. brain.

Strange images these two. And when I am continuously seeing them together in my mind, in many different scenarios, they become part of my current reality. For example, in my limited repertoire of present day social experiences, AKA grocery shopping, the blob comes towards me, going in the WRONG direction through the market. It is just one big virus germ, gray with red fuzzy bulb ended arms sticking out all over it, ready to attack me. I am the sitting duck, mindlessly walking in the RIGHT direction up my less than 6 foot wide grocery store aisle. I have nothing to protect me as I am thrust through the world on this conveyor belt of activities pulling me through life. I am literally a target for all viral infections to shed themselves on. There is no protection for my innocent, and insecure feathered body. I am the sitting duck. In reality that virus blob I imagine walking toward me is just a nice middle aged woman, a bit on the plumb side in yoga pants and a gray hoodie, with no noticeable red appendages reaching their viral infection toward my masked face. But I am a visual thinker, my mind won't leave me alone, those virus blobs turn up everywhere in the grocery store. Just look at them on the face of Uncle Ben as I pick out a box of rice, on the Quaker Oats guy, I'm sure I see some virus molecules on his benevolent smile. The Daisy Sour Cream cow, she's shedding virus all over the dairy case, and don't get me started on what those pesky Rice Krispies guys are up to in the cereal aisle. The virus is everywhere, and us ducks, we just keep going along on our mechanical treadmill, looking for toilet paper and baking yeast.

In reality I'm not even sure that I am one of the ducks. With no sure test of my Corona Virus status and my active imagination hyper aware of every sniffle, cough, snort, ache, pain or toot coming out of my body, could I be one of the virus firing blobs?

My mind takes a nasty turn, and suddenly I am the malevolent viral threat. My body, unbeknownst to me begins attacking the people I have contact with. They become the sitting ducks and I am the viral shooter on the carnival midway. As the shut down begins to be lifted, those sitting ducks become the people I love. My sons, whom I haven't seen since winter could be shot from one of my red spikes with the horrible germ that doesn't win any of us a stuffed animal from the carnival. My mom in her assisted living apartment is on a mechanical conveyor belt set at high with virus bullets aimed at the stream of elderly ducks she is caught in, trying to get across the carnival booth with their walkers. Virus orbs are lobbed at them with lightning speed and laser precision. How do we keep the virus blobs away from these lovely gray haired sitting ducks? How

do we keep those floating orbs of poison away from our daily life as it conveys us from task to task on a path that each of us is so firmly attached to following? The old normal is no longer a safe ride for any of us to take a spin on.

When these two images of ducks and blobs are no longer crossing my mind at odds with one another, when sitting ducks are no longer being aimed at and targeted by that surge of virus lobbing assassins, I will be ready to go back out into the world. If I must enter that world as either a duck or an attacking blob, the least I expect is that someone can help me distinguish which one ofR them I am. I assume that eventually that will happen through wide spread testing, contact tracing or an antibody test that says when my immune system will shield me from attacking blobs if I am one of the unfortunate targeted ducks. Until I am sure which image defines me, I am staying isolated from that midway we call life and remaining here at home. My visual brain will be working in my unclassified body, in my safe comfortable house, actively fighting imagined battles between blobs and ducks, and I will not be going out to the carnival.