

### ***One is not the loneliest number, By Lynne Elkes, age 52***

Sometime in the middle of January 2020 I became aware of a health crisis brewing in a far off province in China. I shared with my students the methods used by officials there to contain the alarming expansion of the deadly virus, now finally named as COVID-19. The empty streets of Wuhan province haunted me as I went about my normal life: making summer vacation plans at the beach, my daughter's upcoming high school graduation, and her move to college, leaving me on my own for the first time in 28 years.

There was no sense of impending doom as the travails in China were literally a world away. And then March arrived and with it the quick closure of my university, pivot to virtual teaching, and then the eventual closure of all public facilities and organizations.

The loss of knowing one could freely attend a meeting, a religious service, a gym, or go out to eat was not an easy concept to grasp. I think it took a while before the idea of "stay home" really took full force. Then, as our elders started dying in great numbers the reality took hold.

The isolation was liberating at first! No rushing in traffic to commute to work, no need to dress up, the joy of cooking, and taking long walks with my daughter. Yet, this exhilaration was short lived. Being cut off physically from my Baltimore community of friends, colleagues, and the rituals of life that I had taken for granted, plunged me and many others into a state of despair. The fear and endless horizon of this deadly disease with no cure seeped unknowingly into my outlook.

The Baltimore community, and specifically the Jewish community, went into overdrive to meet the needs of all of us. Food for the hungry, medical care for the sick, and most importantly, pivoting quickly to provide emotional solace, religious connection, and a modern way to maintain the ties that bind.

As Passover approached in early April, I received a robocall from an Orthodox rabbi begging people to not gather for seder. I am not Orthodox but was truly grateful for the care and concern that was evident in the call; the exhortation to stay safe, to stay healthy, and yet to celebrate and enjoy the retelling of the Exodus story. It brought home for me that no matter our beliefs, or how we choose to believe or even observe our faith, that we as a Baltimore community of Jews is connected at our core. I felt part of a larger entity and that, even if I was not part of this particular rabbi's congregation, even if in normal times my way of life is unacceptable to many of my fellow Jews, that we are one. Anachnu Echad.

No one was going to look after us, care as much about us, as our own Jewish community. No one was going to work so hard to make those who live alone feel less lonely and isolated, be cautious but caring, effective in surreal times. How blessed are we as Jews to put cha'i, life, before anything else.

Now in the summer of 2020, seven months removed from the first whispers of a global pandemic that has changed the landscape of the world I once knew, I am buoyed by the knowledge that no matter the length of this crisis or its severity, I am not alone. My daughter, soon to be 350 miles away from me, will not be alone. This is all due to the simple fact that we are Jews, and no matter where we are, if we embrace the spark that drives us to survive and thrive, we have lived up to the expectations our community demands and expects of us. In turn, we can depend on our community to coalesce, show strength, and face the future, as uncertain as it is, with a shared purpose. Anachnu Echad.