

Reaction – Be Happy October 2nd 2020

In January 2020, The existence of a new strain of influenza virus sent the World into a chaotic variety of reactions against an imaginary super-foe.

The reaction of everything from The United Nations to National Governments such as the UK, PRC, US and NZ right down to The Hong Kong Homeschool Meetup group and Clackmannan Bowling Club, have reacted in the way we would expect if ET had landed on the white house lawn to take over the World.

The “people” by which I mean individuals, went about their daily lives unperturbed until Donald and Xi took over their portable devices and whipped up a frenzy of enthusiasm for this new cause. Experts came crawling out of the woodwork and used all manner of science and statistical analyses to prove that they couldn't answer our questions “but we have a lot of PhDs so you should do what we tell you.”

There is nothing imaginary about the cause of the new strain of flu. It can be seen under a not very sophisticated microscope, but like any new form of life, think plankton or insect, we don't know much about it. Is it dangerous or venomous, how does it reproduce and can we make money from it? Will it make us extinct? This new life form has been christened **Covid19** (I am not inferring it is a christian).

Well today is the 1st October and Covid19 is no longer “new”. Homo sapiens show zero signs of becoming extinct and I, a very ordinary “people” have had an interesting few days “with Covid19”. So I thought I'd tell the story.

On 19th, I decided to try and redeem my airline credit for flights cancelled, the virus, in February by the airline, although I was quite happy to fly. I booked for 5th October at 18:30. It was a reasonably painless experience, only taking 4 hours through a call centre in Cebu, or Mexico or possibly both.

On Thursday 24th we heard that the HK government **may be** going to add the UK to the “High Risk destination list from 1st October, to be announced later,” so we decided to try and change my flight and was amazed to get a seat for the 26th. Rebooking only took a couple of hours so I strongly suspect the experience is so stressful that most people will not even make the attempt.

On Thursday, I had a call from an agency asking me to teach Friday afternoon and on the 25th, Friday morning was added, with 30 minutes notice. I hastily grabbed my markers and masks and set off for the Secondary school. Meeting maskless students on the way in, I diplomatically asked if they had to wear masks. “Oh no. Nobody wears masks here.” I double checked with the receptionist before being whisked off to the classroom by another administrator.

My teaching experience is another subject, but for this report there were no masks being worn by anyone anywhere, if there were any special Covid notices or bottles of hand sanitizer, they were most inconspicuous. The seating arrangements, numbers and student misbehaviours were normal and any foreign visitor would just assumed that, like rabies, the virus had not yet reached the United Kingdom.

I asked about this in the staff room and was told “We don't have any special measures here except the school is divided into two bubbles, a left bubble and a right bubble.” I asked the question I have been asking new acquaintances for months. “Do you know anyone who's had it or anyone who knows someone who's had it?” “No. Nobody in this school has had it and I don't know anyone who has. That's the question I always ask.”

That same afternoon, because of my flight the next day, I visited the bank to advise them of an imminent transaction. A man at the door asked me to put my mask on. I told him I didn't have a mask and he replied. If you are not wearing a mask, you can't come in. It's the law.” “Since when?” I replied recalling my classroom experience that morning and that I had just come from a supermarket, sans mask where I'd bought bread. “Since Boris said so last Tuesday.” Came the reply, in a tone that suggested he believed “Boris”. I didn't argue, just left feeling unlucky that I'd stumbled on one of the few people in the World, who believes anything the UK PM says.

My journey the next day, Saturday 26th, was uneventful. I dutifully wore a mask on the train, tube, in the airport terminal and aircraft as advise on the various websites as a condition of carriage. The airport terminal was empty but the plane was full. I only saw one empty seat. On board, there were a few passengers in the

full HASMAT outfit slightly more in plastic raincoats but most just wore masks. The in-seat entertainment seemed more than usually un-entertaining. The “meals” were noticeably different, being in large navy-blue cardboard boxes which rattled like a gift from a cut-price Santa and were very rapidly delivered. I was unaffected because I started taking sandwiches on long haul flights decades ago and having been warned about delays on arrival, had copious quantities of cheese and tomato, cheese and ham, cheese and cheese and boiled egg.

Arrival in Hong Kong is worthy of description because some Europeans and most English speakers may not have experienced anything like it. Getting of a plane arriving back in China is generally busy. “Remain in your seats with your seatbelts fastened until the plain has come to a complete stop.” Is drowned out by overhead lockers opening, vocal claims on bags and luggage and good natured failure at attempts to get to the exit was the unique experience.

Not any more.

Passengers were disembarked in batches of about 25 by seat number starting at the front. It was getting a bit disorganised by the time it got to me in row 30, but it went quite smoothly. After getting off the ramp into the terminal, the lengthy walk, to the start of the quarantine process rather than immigration, was devoid of the usual competitive urge. The first step was to show your QR code which proved you had done a self-health check before leaving Heathrow. Mine was on my lap top not my smart phone which caused some confusion, but I was waved through losing only a few places. The next queue was social distanced, in those parts where the yellow tape hadn't come off, and led to Step 2, an ID and passport check where we were directed to a desk and invited to sit down. We were checked off on a list and given a card with a handwritten number on yellow paper, to hang round our neck. We were given a large brown envelope and plastic bags, the latter being the test kit, and I think we had our temperature checked. We then proceeded to Step 3 where we had our QR code checked for tracking. Here again, my antique phone caused some consternation since they couldn't track it (the QR code) but they were up to the task! At the second attempt they located someone by phone, who knew me and confirmed my mobile number (address). I was given a yellow slip of paper with the number, and directed to Step 4.

I had now worked out that a yellow piece of paper meant “Official” and idly wondered if the colour was changed periodically and to be prepared with various coloured paper for leaving.

Step 4 was another seated process where I was fitted with a bracelet with a chip, and another electronic device to simulate the smart phone I didn't have. I was also given 2 black boxes with an antenna to read and transmit my chip and strict instructions not to unplug it when I got home. I was then directed to Step 5, The Test.

I walked the full length of the airport building, past a “sin bin” area where a few people were forlornly sitting, to the rows of numbered battleship-grey cubicles where you self administered The Test. This consisted of making a gargle sound to harvest saliva from the back of your throat and then, using the paper funnel provided to spit it into a small bottle half full of liquid. This was then placed in a labelled bag and then placed in another plastic bag. I then walked all the way back, past the “sin bin” to a collection point where I deposited it in a plastic bottle crate. I then returned and was directed to the sin bin where someone told me, from a distance, that we were waiting to be sent to a hotel. Step 6 consisted of being led to the carousel, collecting our bags, being put on a bus, taken to a hotel, given a plastic bag of food and a single use electronic door key and sent to our room. Breakfast was hung on the door the next morning.

Release was something of an anticlimax. At 12 noon, the phone rang (it actually *rang*) and a voice said, “Your test is negative. Please vacate your room as quickly as possible and check you have all your belongings with you.” In about 5 minutes I was out and normality reigned. The whole plane load had been released at the same time. The passage was thronged, so I took the lift up until it stopped and filled up with people going down. Someone took my yellow room number and key and I headed for the choked exit and pushed my way out one side. There was a queue of taxis but I headed for the MTR (underground). I was home in 30 minutes. I had a call an hour later to check where I was but they then found my transmitter on the system.

Reflection. I am not afraid of the Covid19 virus. I know it exists just the same as the cold, cholera and dengue, two of which I have contracted along with many other viruses. Over the years I have experienced other “scares” such as Asian Flu, AIDS, Legionnaires disease, SARS, Bird Flu and this one, is just another. There is no evidence to suggest it (covid19) is much more hazardous to our health than other viruses and a lot of evidence to suggest it is much **less** dangerous than many others including Polio, Cholera and Influenza which turns to Pneumonia with lethal results.

Put in simple terms against which there is **NO argument**, if there was a disease out there which was going to kill or disable my family, I would know about it. I would know about it because I knew people who had seen it or heard it by word of mouth. I would know the way I knew about Polio, because my school mates were buried or had iron bars strapped to their legs, real social media not artificial social media.

Put in simple terms against which there is **NO argument**, we should not be suddenly making draconian changes to our way of life, the effect of which we know even less about than the virus, which we know quite a lot about because we all (not just experts) have experience of many other viruses.

I don't know why, but political leaders, experts and others with a public voice seem to enjoy spreading fear and despondency when they should be telling us the **truth**, which is that **most of us are not going to die of anything but old age.**

<https://apnews.com/hub/understanding-the-outbreak>

<https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-flu-archive-7dfd5192afb64adc70c4305fde4d05af>

<http://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak>