

Two Months of Solitude

by James Fajarito

In my workplace, or at least in my circle of friends, we had not anticipated that the lockdown would come swift and sudden. Though there were forebodings, as early as January, of looming class suspensions, and there was even a workshop on on-line instruction to prepare us for the then-probable lockdown, we did not see it coming that the lockdown would actually be in effect in the dying weeks of the semester (in our case, month of March).

So fellow professors and I scrambled to finish our lessons on-line, somehow managed to correspond effectively with students on how they could finish their final requirements, and wrapped up the semester by finalizing students' grades and submitting semester-end faculty requirements.

However, it was only after the busyness of accomplishing workplace requirements that I ran smack into the harsh realities of the Luzon-wide enhanced community quarantine (ECQ).

First, you get this growing paranoia that any person could infect you with the coronavirus. So you endeavor to limit your trips outside your home to minimize your chances of possible exposure to the virus.

Second, you go to the supermarket to buy your week's supplies, but you evade being physically close with anyone, lest he infects you with the dreaded virus. Practically everyone could be a carrier, so conversations must be done on a need-only basis. No chit-chat or small talk, as this simple activity could later on turn out to be deadly.

Third, as your mind swirls on how to survive this pandemic with meagre, slowly disappearing finances, you still have to deal with fake news. For example, before March ended, rumors ran rife that our province would soon implement total lockdown, and though I did not take the rumors seriously, many did. So I was dumbfounded upon

arriving at a mall to do my groceries: the queue was so long I had to endure waiting for more than two hours. Though I did not intend to engage in panic buying, I must have bought more than what was originally planned, if only to compensate for the long wait.

Fourth, you worry that you or any family member may need to go to the hospital for reasons other than Covid-19, but you are thinking ahead that hospitals may be too full to accommodate non-Covid patients. And even if you are accommodated, you would be anxious that your very presence in the hospital might only expose you to the virus.

Then, you drive on virtually deserted streets, getting accustomed to barricaded roads that remind you of *The Walking Dead* episodes. You drive past gasoline stations announcing absurdly low (and still falling) oil prices, but there seems to be no buyers, because who would want to travel in this day and age? Even if one wants to, he can only travel as far as the nearest checkpoint.

Thus, in this Luzon-wide lockdown, which was initially planned to last a month, many of us have felt alone and lonely, because of, among other things, drastically reduced physical interaction. This ECQ for many has become two months of solitude, and they cannot wait for the lockdown to end.

Yet, there is one silver lining that one could deduce from this historic lockdown: your family is your daily reminder that you are actually not in solitude. Your being with your family gives you the drive to survive amid depleted finances, mounting global death tolls, and a bleak future. Yes, you try as hard as you can to prove that two months of solitude with your loved ones would help you beat the odds—even those of a dreadful pandemic.