



Rockland Buzz

Isolation Percolation

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The Old School
Fellowship Education

Covid-Metro Show this week with Steve Betts, next week with David Gogel



This week reporter Steve Betts from the Courier-Gazette joined us on WRFR's Metro Show. Steve told us he has been busier than ever, keeping up with the unfolding crisis. His hard work has paid off with a great

deal of useful information, which he shared with us.

Next week our guest will be David Gogel, the new director of Rockland Main Street. In keeping with his job of helping us make downtown Rockland a thriving business center, David has been keeping up with the ways in which local business can weather the Covid storm. We look forward to our Metro discussion with him, and we invite listeners to call in with questions and comments. The number to call is 593-0013.

Our thanks to VillageSoup for inviting people to join in our Metro conversation. WRFR and VillageSoup have been collaborating to help in this time of need with reliable information and opportunity for civil discourse.

Please join us next Wednesday from 5 to 6 pm for David Gogel live on the Rockland Metro show, on 93.3 fm in Rockland, 99.3 fm in Camden, and online at WRFR.org. And you can check that website for information about the many great shows on our local community radio station.

Sergio Iavarone writes from Rome

Hi Joe,

My family and I are fine. Here in Italy the situation is getting slightly better. Cases and deceased are increasing less in the past few days. However, both cases and deceased vary enormously from one area to another: the virus affected mainly the northern part of Italy particularly Lombardy, then Emilia Romagna, Piedmont and Veneto. Just to give you the proportions: my region Latium, where Rome is, has had until today, 4.6.2020, 229 deceased; Lombardy, where Milan is, 9,202 deceased out of a total of 16,523 in Italy. Cases: 4,031 in Latium, 51,534 in Lombardy out of 132,547 overall in Italy, among them 22,837 recovered. In general there are less infected people in the south. More than 68% of the deceased are males, the average age is 78; most of them with at least one pre-existing condition. These are only some bare figures, but we have always to remember that behind each number there was a real person with relatives, friends, interests, a life.

We Italians were not prepared, I would say all countries were not prepared, including the other European countries and the U.S. The point is that a virus like this one requires a quick answer. Instead, at the beginning, when only China was facing it, most people thought: it's a Chinese question, far away from us, we are safe. Then after few weeks it started stroking Italy, and again the other countries thought: poor Italians, they have been forced to lockdown their entire country, but we are safe, it will not happen to us, at least we won't lockdown our country. And now one by one including the European Trump's twin, i.e. Boris Johnson, had to make a U turn. By the way, Johnson himself and his pregnant fiancée are infected, after a week of self confinement at Downing Street our Boris was taken to the hospital, indeed. He was the one, a few weeks ago, who claimed cynically the idea of the herd

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Down Main Street with Phil Groce Think Positive

Almost April Fool's Day, and it's not fooling that the virus makes Rockland look more like a ghost town every day. Restaurant-row downtown is closed, except a few have signs urging clients to order by phone and pick up at curb. I saw a car make a quick stop, and a restaurant employee emerged to make a quick exchange of meals for money. The therapist, Loren Andrews, occupies a comfortable upstairs office in a building next to the restaurant.

Pushing toward 60, he looks younger, and he's easy to talk to, always knowing that he understands. I wondered how this virus-scare affected his work. "Right now, I use video conferencing for about 60%, and if it worsens, it will likely be 100%. My office is big, and I can maintain a distance of 12 feet. That allows face-to-face, which I think is important."

How are your clients fairing? "I think every therapist would agree that generalized anxiety has increased. That's related to fear. And the next big thing is isolation. People feel safer being isolated, but we all are, basically, social animals. Usually, the anxiety is of most concern to people."

Do you work from a conceptual framework? "I sure do. I believe there are 4 critical elements in life: joy, anger, fear, and sadness. I work mostly with joy and fear. It is normal and healthy to feel all 4 of these, of course, but if the fear is increased, then you have anxiety. If you increase the sadness, then you have depression. It's Cognitive Behavioral Therapy."

How did you get into this field? "My college degree was in psychology; and I got a masters in psychology at the University of Vermont, and later, a masters of social work at UM." But how did you get interested in it originally? "I realized early on that I loved listening. I wanted to hear about other people's lives." Were your parents like that?

"Yes. My father was a great listener. After we moved here, he wanted to write plays, using what he learned from listening all his life. My mother was a good listener, too. We lost both of them in the last few years, my mother more recently." That must have been difficult, especially since it sounds like your family was close.

"I was with her when she died. That was last summer. She had developed dementia, and you know when that happens, you lose the person. It was okay that she died at that point, not tragic. I felt extremely lucky to have the opportunity to be with her when she took her last breath at Quarry Hill in Camden. She was comfortable, not anxious, not gasping. She just took her last breath, and I was there." His voice choked for a moment. "Just being there . . . that she was not alone."

I can see how your positive family molded you into the caring therapist that you are. What were your family connections in Maine? "My grandparents lived in Cushing and installed a camp on Gay's island in the 1920's. The family still has a camp there. We live on the mainland. My wife and I have two teenagers."

What is most difficult in your professional life? "Suicide watch. Most people think about it at some time in their lives. It is either Active: the person might imminently do something to end his or her suffering. Or Passive: the thinking that something might just happen to end her or his life, and that would be okay."

Do you think there is any room in a person's life for either depression or anxiety if that person views all of us as one? He thought for a moment. "As long as that 'one' is not a negative one." I hadn't thought of that.

"It's all about having a mutually caring relationship with someone with whom you can share life, talk about it, solve problems. In such, there is much less anxiety and depression." That's a growing relationship, I observed. "Yes, and if a person goes along with the individualistic ideal in this country, then it makes it even harder to have the growing relationship as you just mentioned. That individualism really pulls a person away from the natural comfort of close relation.

"The other side of that is having a person's individualism lost in community, like we all deserve that same." Sort of like in communism? "Yes, and that's not human nature, either. I believe it is better when people bond together and find happiness in life together." Lots of political fallout in those ideas. "One thing is right at the top: The health care system in this country needs improvement. Everyone should have access to good care."

Do you have goals in life, or are you doing exactly what you want to do now? "I want to continue as a therapist. I want to continue teaching, as I do at the school of social work at UM; and I also teach a class in policy and legislation. I greatly enjoy being on the School Board of RSU 13. I also have a U-tube channel. Everything goes together. I feel lucky to have work."

School Board, I groaned. Many people look on it as a sentence. "Not to me, I think it's fantastic, and we have a great group, positive, involved, and active. It's a privilege for me to be able to be chairperson." How would someone find your U-tube series? "Go to Loren Anderson, Maine. I have 19 episodes so far."

You are right in the middle of downtown Rockland. I have talked with merchants who have complained about how city government handles downtown. "Not me. I have no complaints. I love Rockland. In fact, our landlord has given all of the businesses in the building 2 months of free rent—April and May, and he did that even before this virus thing appeared big."

That's not fooling.

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letter from Rome, cont. from p. 1

immunity for his own country, even though the Brits would've had to face the losing of some of their elderly loved ones. It could not be a better nemesis.

If you allow me to give you a free advice follow what Anthony Fauci, the Director of infectious Diseases and now spokesperson for Health issues and the Pandemic, Trump's advisor, says. He is a serious scientist, he knows what he is talking about, he maintains the social self confinement. That's the reason why he is menaced by conspiracy theorists and now he is under police protection.

In the end we have to make a choice: is it more important the human life or the economy? If we choose the second one, are we ready to pay an enormous toll of human lives? All our world leaders are opting for the first choice, because it's also, after all, the less expensive in the long run.

The lockdown in my country is very heavy for the economy. About 65% of all business affairs are closed. In Italy they have calculating that about 20 million people, in a way or the other, are supported by the government because of the lockdown. An effort like this cannot last for ever, this is clear. An effort like this requires a strong help from the European Community, not only for Italy, of course, but for all those countries, for example Spain, that are heavily facing the pandemic. I am pro Europe 100% against the national isolationism, they now call it souverainism. But I ask myself: are ready the leaders of Germany first and the other Northern European states, through the European Bank, to support countries like Italy that are on the front line against the coronavirus? What will prevail a true solidarity or the mean selfishness? It is like to be in a building where there is a fire in the apartments on the first storeys. People leaving there are trying to extinguish this fire, but the flames are catching the rest of the building. Meanwhile, the residents in the penthouse think that it's not their business, it's not their fire. Not yet, but the fire sooner or later will reach them and the building will collapse, in the end.

What I want to say with this metaphor? In this little world we are all connected and only solidarity and mutual help can save all of us. The ancient Romans had a proverb that goes: "Homo homini lupus", "A man is a wolf to another man". I don't believe in it, I always think that we are human beings, after all a little bit more civilized than a wild wolf.

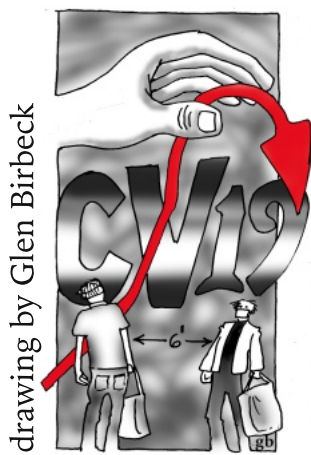
With love,
Sergio

Editor's note: Sergio is an old friend who has hosted me many times in Rome, and has been our guest here in Rockland. He had hoped to visit us this summer, but now we are thinking maybe 2021...

Joe Steinberger



photo by Steve Carroll



drawing by Glen Birbeck

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STAYING IN TOUCH, by McCabe Coolidge

I'm on the back of a Peace Corps owned Vespa skipping along the red dirt path up a long hill catching a glimpse of a small community, fenced in by 12 foot high wire fence.

The driver, Will, is a Peace Corps volunteer assigned to this Enuga region near the town of Nsukka where I am staying for the summer of 1965. The university here is brand new and I am with 30 other students gathered from the Big Ten universities for a summer internship in Nigeria. I met Will my first day here and we hit it off and he invited to accompany him on his 'rounds' through the central highlands of Nsukka.

Will slows the light blue Vespa down and I jump off, confused by what I am looking at. About 45 Nigerians are on the inside of the fence and twice that number are on the outside carrying on their weekly Sunday conversations.

What I don't know is the disease. Will pauses and turns his back to me and says this is how the government contains leprosy. There is no treatment that will heal them and folks here think you can be infected by touching.

Blistered faces, infected sores, some feet missing with men and women using limbs from a tree to limp around. Will and I walk toward the fence and a man waves at us and walks near, keeping his distance. The two of them exchange pleasantries; the man bows and offers Will such an affectionate smile I want to bend down and cry. No embracing, no touching...even between wife and husband or parent and child.

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While living in Asheville a friend and I took on a remodeling project. We were converting the attic of this big old house where Karen and I were living into an extra bedroom and a small pottery studio for me. We usually met at 8:00a.m. to discuss the projects for the day but on this particular August morning Ed came in without his nail belt. My face reflected my question: What's going on?

"Sorry to tell you this but I have been charged with growing marijuana and I am going to the Federal Courthouse in Raleigh to plead my case. We embrace each other and he lets out a yelp, his tears coated with fear. Ed is married and has a baby and a three year old at home, just down the street from where I live.

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Ed was convicted and was given a mandatory 2 year imprisonment. He started off in the county jail in Hillsborough (which was near his farm). I went to visit him and soon found out that we could speak only through phones separated by an inch thick glass wall. We talked about his family and mine. He didn't want anything. Not even a book. His face was drawn; the sparkle in his eyes had disappeared.

Within six months, in 1997, he was transferred to a much larger regional prison in Asheville where the noise was deafening. We met in a space separated for visitors but still out in the open. Ed wore an orange pants and shirt, plastic slippers. We only lived a mile away but now it felt like another world. Embracing, touching of any kind was forbidden. Sitting three feet away the pain in Ed's eyes seared my heart. For he told me his family was moving to Charleston, South Carolina to live with her family. She had no plans to return for a visit.

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Two weeks ago, Karen and I drove from Greensboro to Chapel Hill to 'visit' with our daughter Molly who lives in a group home. Only medical personnel and staff bringing groceries back are allowed into her home. Our 'visit' was on the front steps of her house. No hugging or touching even though we hadn't seen each other for more than two weeks.

We brought a 'care package' for Molly, her housemates and staff. I made a loaf of bread, added some honey, a container of popcorn kernels, some coffee and iced tea from the take out at Panera's and for Molly a puzzle and a word book. Molly had made a card for Karen (for bringing her favorite puzzle and the wordbook) It is a blue sheet of paper, covered with purple hearts, lettering: 'To Karen From Molly.' She gave me some photos that were of the two of us when she was a little girl. I told myself not to tear up because then she would too and we would want to embrace each other. I politely thanked her and we waved good bye as one her staff members stood by chaperoning us. As I walked away, I heard the lock on the door turn closed.

Every day now I go out walking for an hour or two. When I see someone I know, like this morning, Steve who owns Scuppernong Books we do a little dance that keeps us about 5 feet apart. The greetings are cursory. And we go on our way. I am grateful to have a partner that craves 'skin touch' as much as I do. But then I image Molly eating dinner 6 feet away from a housemate at the dining room table and when those two are finished, two more housemates come into the dining room to eat. It looks like a bus station where strangers are keeping their distance. Yet I am thankful that I could see Molly and not just come to a window and wave and send air kisses which would camouflage my broken heart.

Today Karen and the staff learned how to 'zoom' with two I phones and I saw Molly. She commented that I had some new wrinkles on my face and I commented that her hair was getting longer and that I saw more red than brown.

She replied: "Well, dad! That's the way I like it." And so it goes with a dad still acting that his daughter cares what he thinks. I have to remind myself that she is 49.



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The Buzz is composed and printed by the Fellows of The Old School at the WRFR studios, 20 Gay Street, Rockland. Email: wrrf93.3@gmail.com