

Hope or Despair, That Is the Question

Category: Choosing

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | November 1, 2020

According to the Bible, Eve bequeathed us freedom of choice once she opted to eat the apple from the forbidden tree. The consequences of her act were severe—exile from the idyllic garden. Robert Frost, one of my favorite poets, reinforces this connection between choices and consequences in his poem “The Road Not Taken.”

Since self-isolating in mid-March, I have thought a great deal about Eve, Frost, and the idea of choosing. While COVID-19 has stripped me of my normal life—teaching, ushering, socializing—it has forced me to make choices about the “new normal” that defines me.

I admit that my choices are not always optimal ones. Too often, I choose to open the refrigerator for a piece of cake or delve into the cookie jar for another sweet treat. Too often, I choose to lie on the couch, wrapped cocoon-like in a blanket, and stare at the television with its 24/7 cycle of bad news. Too often, I choose to think about my mortality—and how the pandemic is stealing years of quality from me.

Every day, therefore, I awaken to a self-challenge: to choose hope or to choose despair. I choose to walk for sixty minutes per day; as I circle my neighborhood and listen to my favorite Broadway tunes, I escape the mental and physical prison of quarantine. I greet people I do not know—and would never recognize in “real” life due to the masks covering their faces. Just as I admired the colorful flowers of spring and summer, so do I now rejoice in the radiant hues of the fall leaves.

I choose to eat fruit and vegetables as snacks, along with my baked goods and M&Ms, to bring balance to my diet. I choose to keep my Kindle powered up so that I can lose myself in the world of books. And I choose to watch as many virtual readings of plays as time permits.

Making these positive choices is not easy for me, an inherently negative person. However, should I choose to follow the path of darkness, I might as well end my life, for I would be making my life worthless. Instead, I refuse to let the current situation destroy me; I refuse to give up, even when every statistic about rising COVID rates tempts me to do so.

I choose my “less traveled road”—the one of hope and life.

Ronna Edelstein

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania