

June More Voices: Alone

Category: Alone

written by Paul Gross | June 1, 2023

Dear *Pulse* readers,

One autumn evening when I was twenty-two years old, I boarded a bus in New York's Port Authority bus terminal and headed off with my guitar. Dreams of musical success swirled in my head—new songs I would write, places I would perform—and beckoned me forward.

Over the next several months, I pulled into towns where I knew no one (Columbus, Indianapolis, Cincinnati) and took up a solitary existence. I'd find a cheap place to stay and spend my days alone, waiting for inspiration to strike, practicing the guitar and scoping out places I might play.

I went on walks alone. I visited museums alone. I ate Thanksgiving dinner alone. Eventually, I returned home to my parents, and then set out the next year on another solitary trek—to Toronto, Chicago, Madison and Minneapolis.

During long walks in Chicago I recall passing homes with bay windows through which I could see brightly lit television screens. I imagined families enjoying cozy warmth while I trudged through evening chill.

Was I lonely? I supposed so, although I'm not sure I would have framed it that way. I was on a quest, and I believed that rigorous, manly solitude was the price one paid for this noble encounter with Art.

Years later, in my late twenties, I met my life partner. At our first meeting, I didn't know that she would become that, but here's what I did recognize early on: that a long drought had ended and I was laughing again. It was like a cloudburst on parched soil. As if someone had opened a treasure chest—of silliness, of childish joy, of exuberance—that I'd buried while maturing and dessicating.

I'd forgotten how much I loved to laugh, and how nice it was to feel understood by someone else. How exciting it was to see that special person walking down the street toward you, smiling.

It turned out that I enjoyed being with someone more than I enjoyed being alone.

There are studies showing the health benefits of connectedness. People in relationships—with people or pets—do better than people who are alone. In a stroke of brilliance, I once asked a very solitary patient of mine, who spent his days sitting alone on park benches, whether he'd ever considered getting a dog.

"I don't like animals," he grumbled.

Oh, well. He wasn't all that fond of people, either. As his doctor, I wish I

could have cured him of his solitary ways.

I have patients who are alone—or who feel alone—and I feel for them, although my efforts to get them company (a senior center? a support group?) usually fall flat. I hope that they feel a little less alone when they come to see me. I do my best to listen and make them feel accepted and understood.

Meanwhile, my wife and I look at our grown daughters and enjoy casting our eyes back at the path that brought us here. As for the future, well, that's a bit scarier.

There's an old joke in which a wife tells her husband, "If one of us dies, then I'll move to Paris."

We enjoy sharing that quip. It softens something tender and alarming—the fact that one of us will one day re-encounter the solitude we each knew when we met those many years ago.

I suppose one of us *could* move to Paris, but wouldn't we feel strangely alone there?

June's *More Voices* theme is [Alone](#). What's your experience of being alone or encountering others who are alone? We'd like to know.

Share your story with us using this [More Voices Submission Form](#). For more details, visit [More Voices FAQs](#). And have a look at last month's theme, [Coming Undone](#).

Remember, your health-related story should be 40-400 words. And no poetry, please.

We look forward to hearing from you!

With warm regards,

Paul Gross
Editor