

He ain't heavy Father, he's my brother

By Stephen Rusiniak



"I remembered a story from long ago that gently reminded me of what really mattered."

I had a momentary flashback and remembered how I used to feel, back in the day, dispatched to a life-threatening emergency, lights and sirens—a "Code-3" response, not knowing what I might find. I felt anxious, worried, and wondering what circumstances awaited my arrival, all the while aware that my life could be in danger. But still, I continued. It was my job, after all, I was a police officer.

It was like that this time too except I was no longer on the force, There were no lights and sirens, but still I was probably driving too fast, not knowing what I might find. I felt anxious, worried, and wondering what circumstances awaited my arrival, all the while aware that my life could be in danger. But still, I continued. It was my job, after all, I was his brother.

I can't begin to imagine how he must have felt, but if the comparison is accurate then I kind of have an idea. I remember the fever and chills, the coughing and congestion, the runny nose and fatigue, and of just wanting to crawl under the covers, pass out and not wake again until my flu had finally subsided.

It had been reported that many of the symptoms for COVID-19 were similar to the flu and only a test could determine one's positivity. This was early on, during the first few months into the pandemic, pre-vaccine, when everything closed down and a fear of the unknown was prevalent; when masks, plastic gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectants, and paper towels could no longer be found in stores, and when we wiped down every piece of mail delivered to our



homes, the groceries that we bought and the shopping carts we had used to gather our purchases—sanitizing everything as best we could. Much about this new virus was still unknown and the number of those dying daily, as a result, was staggering. Suddenly it seemed as if the sum of all fears as described in the book, *Andromeda Strain* was happening, but now, it was happening for real.

And so I can't begin to imagine how it must have felt for so many who were suffering from such severe flu-like symptoms who now had to leave their beds, get into their cars and drive to a COVID testing location only to have to wait in line for hours, all the while feeling perhaps worse than they had ever felt before; waiting until someone in a sterile Hazmat suit could record all of the pertinent data before inserting the business end of a couple of cotton-swabbed sticks up the congested noses of the potentially infected.

But this is exactly what happened to hundreds of thousands of our friends, our neighbors, and our family members who believed that they might have contracted this new and absolutely frightening virus—including my brother, Jimmy. He too had driven himself to a testing site at a local



college parking lot, feeling as though he were dying, which, as it turned out, he was closer to at the time than any of us knew, waiting hours until finally he was administered his test.

When the results were in, he tested positive for COVID-19.

I told him that whatever he needed he could always call on me for help. A few days later, he did just that.

I didn't recognize the voice, but my caller ID told me all I needed to know. Jimmy was in trouble. Understanding him was a challenge but not so were the two words that stood out above the others: *doctor* and *hospital*.

He was stubborn like our mom and dad had been when they were dealing with their own medical issues, and to admit that he needed hospitalization, well, that scared me because, aside from the sound of his voice, his admission revealed volumes regarding his failing health.

His house was only ten minutes from mine but the ride and the distance between us seemed to be both too long, while at the same time, too short. But minutes mattered and so speed was essential while conversely, a quick arrival would inevitably expose me to potential contamination, sooner than later, and admittedly, this frightened me. But just then, as I was nearing his home, I remembered a story from long ago that gently reminded me of what really mattered.

In 1918 a boy with polio was abandoned by his mother at Father Flanagan's Home for Boys. Walking was an almost impossible struggle, and so others living at the home would often carry him. Father Flanagan, upon seeing one boy doing just that asked if it were difficult to do so, and the boy replied, "He ain't heavy Father, he's my brother."

I got my brother to the hospital.

Afterward, back home, I immediately disrobed on our enclosed porch—eventually depositing my clothing directly into the washing machine. A shower followed and so too did my uneasiness—did my blue throwaway surgical mask do as I had intended? My sanitizer? Had I exposed myself to the virus while helping Jimmy to and from my vehicle or during our ride to the hospital?



Later that night, content that for the moment that I was healthy, and that Jimmy was now receiving the best possible care, I began to realize that my possible exposure and contamination mattered far less than Jimmy's hospitalization and ultimate wellbeing. While the virus was raging, outside, around the world, my thoughts were neither global nor out-of-doors. Instead, they remained within the quiet comfort and safety found within my home and in the not-so-far-away hospital room where the doctors and nurses were doing all they could to keep Jimmy from dying.

Before going to sleep that night, I offered a short prayer—the final words, so fitting, and now, so familiar: *He ain't heavy Father, he's my brother.*

(backstory continues)

the backstory:

Admittedly, I harbored concerns regarding this emerging unknown—a virus for which much had yet to be learned. It's not hard to worry about something that we don't understand or the things that we don't know. But suddenly, a virus that could quickly and efficiently infect and then strike down its victims was certainly something worthy of my concerns.

And so too is my family. I worried about the potential consequences of knowingly exposing myself to the virus through my brother but that was less important than his immediate wellbeing. And in the end, he recovered and I suffered no consequences regarding my exposure.

So great, however, did my respect and admiration grow for all those who labored in positions that put them directly in contact with this demon virus. I had the opportunity to briefly witness first-hand the immediate care rendered my brother, I have spoken with medical professionals working the front lines and witnessed via news reports the sacrifices suffered by so many who have placed their own lives on the line daily for the sake of others.

For them, enough can never be said except God bless...and thank you.

by the way:

This piece ends without any definitive conclusion concerning Jimmy's illness. As it turned out, he was, according to his doctors, perhaps only a few days away from succumbing to the virus—the result of various issues instigated by his infection. Fortunately, those that were life-threatening have long since been rectified while what remains is being addressed.

Party time with Uncle Jimmy,
nephew, Michael and niece, Sandi

