

Inquiry Into Social Isolation and Loneliness

Thank you for this opportunity to share my experience. Personally, I would not wish social isolation and loneliness on anyone but what I have been through, what I have learnt, has given me the courage to forge on and believe that the world indeed has hope if it has, as a pointed fact, inclusion of all people in its spectrum. It does seem easy to include some in 'what is important in the world', while others hardly rate a mention, even though they are the majority.

I experienced isolation quite early in life. This was not the fault of anyone, just the circumstances I found myself in.

I was in third year in primary. I needed to repeat the year because I was young for the grade. Not a problem. I started the year, seemed to be fitting in (I think). I don't remember, which will be clearer as I write.

Within a moment my life (and that of my family, relations, friends) changed. As a pedestrian I was hit by a car. It was quite a severe hit as it left me in a coma for a month, hospitalisation for following months until my parents made the decision that they could care for me at home. I had multiple appointments at the outpatients' ward, which my parents took me to.

I returned to primary school the following year and because the school was not large, I managed, due to assistance from all the school's head department who would work with my requirements.

High school was different. Move to a larger environment, human nature takes over, look after yourself. Some people happen to be easy targets. I happened to be one of those. I had a limp, one eye half-closed and really struggled to be seen as 'normal'. Would not wish this on my worst enemy. As much as I hated the bullying I loathed when others were picked on.

Help came in the form of friends who would ask me how I was feeling, offering a listening ear. It is strange to also note that being in a group of people who gather together was comforting, as long as I wasn't expected to say anything dazzling.

Talking now about experiences years on (married now, had kids, kids grown up), my high school experience was a terrible part of my life, but the help of my support group got me through. It was not one group that I clung to for dear life, but options that presented so I felt like I was making a choice.

Later on in life, my counsellor became my great friend and I could talk over anything that came up. Writing has also helped. I write in my diary most days, keep a journal and even write essays which I share with anyone who is interested. I am now working on my fourth. I would say to others who have the inclination towards writing, use this tool. Also, I would encourage people to let the feelings go through talk, writing, activities so they don't dominate your life. These experiences form the way you are and may be beneficial to others in the same circumstances. We often hear about people who have got it all together, and now they can talk about their past, but those of us still working through, we are still of value. We have experience.

Barriers that we face: a perception that there is a perfect way that we should present ourselves. We are individuals. Each different, different gifts from God. Our experiences are different but are so valuable to a society that is able to work together. Try to listen to each other, learn from each other, don't take a 'right or wrong' view of the world. If we ever hope to get it together, we work together. If the pandemic taught us one thing it is that our world is constantly changing. People, don't think because something is working at this one moment it will always be like that. We never stop learning.

I would say "Don't look back, don't wish to change the past". Point blank you can't. But you can change what you do now.

Catherine Margot Collins

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