

“How will we tell the story of our time?”

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How will we tell the story of this time?

How will we tell the story of our role in this part of history?

How will we let others know what happened in these early weeks of the second administration of the dictator?

Each of us will have a narrative of this time.

Some will be blessed to be able to share that narrative with the next generation, or the one after that, or perhaps even the one after that.

I often wonder what became of the stories of those who survived other dictators in other parts of the world.

Those who survived Mao and the cultural revolution

Those who survived Pol Pot

Those who survived Noriega

Those who survived Stalin

Those who survived Hitler

Those who survived Mussolini

Those who survived the Marcos

Those who survived Idi Amin

Castro

Ortega

Kim Jung Un

Xi Jinping

Those who survived the Shah, and the Second Spring

Those who survived bin Laden.

We know that most of the stories from those eras have been lost to time, and like the survivors themselves, intentionally reduced, denied, diminished, erased.

We know about the camps in Germany because there were thousands who survived, even as millions were exterminated.

Who will tell the stories of those who survive Putin?

Who will tell the stories of life under Viktor Orbahn?

Who will tell the stories of life under Donald Trump?

The World Population Review¹ reports that 66 of the world's 195 countries are currently ruled by dictatorial regimes. That's a third of the nations on the planet.

That list does not yet include the United States.

We know what life was like for those imprisoned in the death camps of Germany, because a number of folks who survived were able to describe their experiences there.

¹ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/dictatorship-countries>

Viktor Frankl was one of the most famous of the camp survivors. He was a trained doctor when he was rounded up, and his education kept him alive because he was useful to the Reich.

But what about those who just ... survived?

What about those who didn't survive?

We know the story of Anne Frank, who stayed hidden in an attic with her family for years, hoping for the war to end, before being discovered and sent to Auschwitz to die like millions of others.

Those are the two most familiar narratives of those years – the diary of a young girl who did not live beyond her teens, and the reflections of a physician and psychologist who survived unspeakable horror.

I do not have to tell you that the really scary stuff is already beginning, right?

That a dozen Inspector Generals at the US Justice Department were fired late Friday night?

That our nascent dictator shut down all of the federal offices that supported Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion across US Government services?

That Idaho has asked the Supreme Court to reverse its ruling on same-sex marriage?

That an amendment to the constitution has been proposed that would allow presidents to serve more than two terms?

The President's cabinet is being filled with sycophants and brown-nosers, people utterly without any integrity of their own, who are willing – *eager* even – to carry out cruelty on behalf of the guy with the spray tan who wants to be king.

How on earth will we tell the story of these times?

Who can even think long enough to put together a grocery list, never mind chronicle the downfall of an empire?

Who tells the story and how makes a big difference, of course.

Typically, the history of conflicts is written by the victor.

What are we doing now?

Who are the scribes of our time?

Whose words are likely to survive the necessary years or decades to come to light when the dust settles?

We have many intelligent people who are reporting on the daily events, but the pace of the 24/7 news media prevents any kind of comprehensive examination and interpretation of the history as it evolves. Reporting by corporate media in the US is generally a lot like some places on the Susquehanna River – a mile wide and a couple inches deep.

Journalists are so busy trying to keep up with the firehose of tragedy that they simply do not have the time to dig deep.

This is also a result of the emerging Oligarchy of our nation – a handful of sinfully wealthy man-babies are pulling the puppet strings to run government for their own benefit.

Local newspapers and television stations have been bought up by larger corporations, who cut costs to maximize profits.

Local reporters who covered local news are mostly gone – no longer are there regular stories about the antics of school boards, planning committees, town councils, and county commissioners. When I was a young reporter, my bread and butter was made with those regular items. I knew the players and their agendas, I knew what policies they favored and which they opposed, and whenever they did something spectacularly ridiculous, I wrote it up and my editors slapped it on the front page.

Because back then, the local press covered the local news, and people wanted to know what was happening in the schools, in the police departments, and in city hall.

But here we are – with a zillion tons of information available in our phones, but no analysis, no long-view interpretation, no *context* for what is happening. It feels like we are in the spin cycle of a load of laundry, and moving so fast that we are mashed together, paralyzed, unable to connect. We are flooded with information but starved for wisdom.

I remember what happened after the 2016 election: many of us rallied behind the Indivisible movement and caused an uncomfortable amount of pressure on some of our elected officials.

Some of it worked, and some of it didn't.

I think what is problematic now is like what was problematic during the civil rights era, and in Germany, and Cuba, and the USSR, and China and all the rest – those of us in the opposition have internal moral compasses. We know what is right and what is wrong, and we care, even a little bit, about what others think of us. We are capable of shame.

And we have a real block when it comes to imagining human beings who are incapable of shame – people who may know right from wrong, but simply don't care whom they hurt, people who are unashamed when they are called out in public, on a big screen.

"Oh well, that's what I said then. This is now, and here is where I am."

This is not a change in principles, a change in values, or a change in philosophy. It is the revelation that there are some folks who are incapable of empathy.

Empathy is what separates us from most of the rest of the animals on this planet – we can imagine within ourselves how another person feels in each

situation. We can feel it, see it, know it, and act on it. We would not want for others something that we would not want for ourselves.

How aware are we of the time we are in?

I came across a TikTok video this week by a creator called @hannathawriter. In the video, she describes her grandmother's experience as a little girl in Vienna in WWII when she saw an armed motorcade come down her street.

Hannathawriter described a writer's principle that says your characters cannot know the nature of the book/movie they are in. The guy in the horror movie goes down to check a noise in the basement, but he's not worried because he doesn't know he is in a horror movie. To him, he is just a guy in a house.²

Your character cannot know where they are in the trajectory of the story, either. They cannot know whether they are coming in at the preview, beginning, middle, end, or postlude of a particular story arc. They are just trying to live until the next page, or next chapter. For them, the situation began when they happened upon it.

For her grandmother, that is when the war started – when she saw the motorcade in Venice. That certainly was not the beginning of the war, but she did not know that. That is when the war began for her. She probably understood that the genre of her own movie at that time was “war movie,” but she could not know where in the movie her part began – beginning, middle, end, or in the minor credits.

The story she tells her grandchildren is limited to her experience in that time, just as we are limited by our understanding of our time.

² @hannathawriter (TikTok)

Is this the beginning, the middle, the end, of something national, global? We can see ourselves in the genre now of late-stage capitalism, with fascism emerging, but where are we in that arc?

I dare say that we are still in the early-to-middle years. The camps have not been built yet, but they're coming. The atrocities have begun slowly, but we believe them to be the actions of "a few bad apples."

Who will tell the story of these years? How will they be recorded, and how will they be remembered? Will one story be presented by the victors while another lies hidden and dusty in the attic where people hid from those who would do them harm?

In accepting a fancy literary award for lifetime achievement, fiction and fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin offered the following comments:

I rejoice in accepting it for, and sharing it with, all the writers who've been excluded from literature for so long — my fellow authors of fantasy and science fiction, writers of the imagination, who for fifty years have watched the beautiful rewards go to the so-called realists.

Hard times are coming, when we'll be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine real grounds for hope. We'll need writers who can remember freedom — poets, visionaries — realists of a larger reality.³

That award ceremony was on November 19, 2014. Hard times are coming, indeed.

Stories of fiction and fact will be written about these years. Some will tell of brave resistance; others will describe unruly agitators. Both will be describing us.

Us, or at least my hope for us. It would break my heart if we never made enough noise, enough resistance, enough *good trouble*, to be mentioned in

³ Le Guin, Ursula K., Speech in Acceptance of the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, Nov. 19, 2014

history books. I'd love it if we are the ones who win this thing in the long run, but that's not a guarantee.

Political scientists will sometimes say that fascism always falls. I don't know if that is exactly true. What I do know is that a third of the nations in our world are run as dictatorships, where civil liberties do not exist and where the broad spectrum of human expression is oppressed with strangling power.

We have the power to direct our own end of this play, of course. We are the ones who are in control of our own narrative in this moment.

What will we do with it?

What story will we tell?

What will be remembered as truth a hundred years from now?

That is up to us.

We know that we are whole, and holy, and powerful. We know that love always wins out over hate. Eventually.

How long that victory might take is still under consideration.

It will depend on our ability to resist, to fight back, to dismantle the systems being constructed right now to target and oppress the most vulnerable among us. In the 1930s, that was Jews. Today it is LGBTQ folks.

In the 1930s, it was Jews and gay men and sex workers and Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses, and lesbians, black people, the Roma, the disabled, political dissidents, and Poles. Today it is LGBTQ folks, immigrants, and people with brown or black skin, or whose first language is not English.

Victory will only come when we are willing to say no. No. You will not do that to my neighbor, my friend, my family, my school, my kids, my ... whatever. You will not do that to US.

Fascists always pick the easy targets. The ones who can't fight back. The ones who don't have popular champions to defend them. The ones that lots

of people would kind of like to avoid or have removed to some place where they can't be seen.

After the easy targets are gone, then they look around for the next easiest targets. The disabled, perhaps. The addicted. The unhoused. The mentally ill. The freaks and geeks and social outcasts.

Perhaps radical students or professors or politicians. Like Bernie Sanders. Like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Journalists like Rachel Maddow and Joy Reid and Nicole Wallace, who keep shining a light on their bad behaviors.

Then they come for the next most vulnerable ...

You know how this goes. We all do.

We just have had the dubious comfort of believing that it would never happen here.

That comfort – or its illusion – is gone. We know that now. It is happening here. It will continue to happen here.

Unless we do something to stop it.

And stopping this nightmare depends on how much we will tolerate. How much will we tolerate for our neighbors and friends? How much will we tolerate for the homeless guy who lives between the railroad tracks and the park? How much will we tolerate for others ... until it becomes how much we will tolerate for ourselves.

Will we tolerate evil done to others for so long that our capacity for resistance is exhausted and we are unable to fight back?

God, I hope not.

The first thing we need to do is connect with others. It is only through relationships that we will succeed. We need to reach out, connect, build bridges, build relationships.

I know this is hard stuff.

And it comes on a day when we are struggling with hard stuff of our own. I get it.

And we cannot look away. We cannot.

Because somebody, somewhere, someday, will write the story of these years. It can be us, and those we help survive, or it can be the fascists. The choice is ours.

Let us not miss our moment to do something that could save the world.