

Unpacking our fears in the time of COVID-19

By Junie Joseph, Boulder City Council

When I was growing up in Haiti, I heard about a faraway blessed land where people are fearless, individualistic, and of great moral character. Its inhabitants are the kind of people who chartered new territories and made new discoveries. This is what I learned about United States and the American People. A few years later, I find myself living among them and becoming one of them.

Today, in the time of Coronavirus, our faith and what it means to be an American are being tested. Our sense of curiosity, and our spirit of economic individualism are being tested. We are no longer free to roam the streets, cities, the States, let alone the world, and make new discoveries. We are confined to our own thoughts and the physical spaces of our homes. This unseen and novel illness has not only challenged and threatened our existence but our very way of life. It is reordering the social fabric of our community without our consent or our input. COVID-19 strikes at the core of what it means to be an American: an individual who is brave and free to charter his/her own course.

We are forced to stay home and lock our doors in fear. Yet some community members are defiant. I watch the news and see community members who are skeptical and careless and go about their lives as if “de rien n’était”. I see long lines outside of the grocery stores and people not adhering to the six feet guideline. In these acts, I see the fear of losing the past and a failure to acknowledge the present. But also, when I see people hoarding toilet paper and hand sanitizers, I notice another set of fears. A fear that can only be understood if you have had the opportunity to travel between worlds. I was fortunate enough to have lived in the most remote parts of the world where sanitation and toilet paper was a luxury. I remember countless hours of deep anxiety. I understand the fear of being unable to take care of our most basic needs in a dignified manner.

Even with all the indignities and the challenges that come with COVID-19, I am hopeful. COVID-19 is a small challenge compared to the great challenges we have faced over the years as a nation, whether it was the civil war of 1861 which cost the lives of over 620,000, which was then about 2 percent of the American population, or the Stock Market Crash of 1929, which led to the great depression, or the attack on 9/11. For sure, there were some who professed that America would never rise again after 9/11. I too, was very scared at that time. I feared that the spirit of America had been broken into pieces and left in the dust at the site of the two towers. At the time, I was a child and did not understand the resiliency of the American spirit. Over the years I have seen the American spirit soar like an eagle. I know the America that I live in. I know the American people that I have come to love and admire as friends and neighbors. I know the strength of the Boulder community and its commitment to caring for neighbors.

This current situation is an opportunity to regroup and reconsider the life we were and are living as we unpack our fears. We will prevail once more! We will roam the world again, hopefully with greater awareness and vitality. Until then we have to show our bravery and resiliency in a more subtle and humble way. We have to stay at home and roam the recesses of our own minds to discover the beauty within.

If you are following Boulder’s efforts to combat the Coronavirus, or need assistance, or want to volunteer, please visit <https://bouldercolorado.gov/coronavirus>.