

From “Never Again” to “It COULD Happen Again.”

by JoAnn Farb

Growing up in the 1960s I was among the first kids whose Jewish education emphasized the horrors of the Holocaust. This left me with a couple of burning questions that never got answered: “How did so many seemingly average/good people fail (in the beginning stages when they still could) to speak up? How did so many not object to the propaganda, and to the insidious progression of little injustices/oppressions that we now recognize paved the way for such an enormous tragedy?

My mother always said things happened so incrementally that people just accepted them – never dreaming how bad they might get...until it was too late. But her answer never explained HOW people failed to speak out against things that were so wrong in hindsight. It wasn't until 2020 that I came to understand what I never before could – which I will explain in just a moment.

Most of us upon learning of atrocities like The Trail of Tears, slavery in the US South, internment of Japanese Americans, or Tuskegee, believe we would never have gone along with things that so obviously harmed others – even if those around us appeared to be okay with them. That's why I vowed to myself, decades ago that I'd never ignore injustice happening to others. And it's why, in direct response to the horrors I observed happening to animals while working as a pharmaceutical industry microbiologist in the 1990s, [I became a vegan.](#)

For two decades, as part of a national vegan activist community, I felt reassured to personally know so many outspoken, passionate fellow social justice advocates, because during this time I was also a parent raising vegan children, breastfeeding longer than society approved of, sharing a family bed, and giving birth at home. I had heard about cases where parents' custody had been challenged for straying from society's norms, and I always felt better thinking about all the amazing people in my vegan community, who I believed would fight for my rights alongside me if ever I found myself in a class of citizens facing injustice. That's why 2020 was especially disturbing – I realized how many of us were vulnerable to the very same fear tactics and social pressure that have manipulated and [silenced dissenting voices](#) that might have averted so many past atrocities.

When officials began recommending face masks, I was caring for my two elderly parents in hospice. They did not want to go into a nursing home, and I was doing all I could to keep them in their own home. I oversaw a half-dozen caregivers, plus filled in gaps in care myself.

As fear of COVID became more widespread, my family felt that negative consequences of several public health measures outweighed the benefits. They also didn't reflect our family's values, and they were making life harder, at an already difficult time. My parents didn't have long to live, and we wanted our remaining time together to be as close and connected and unencumbered with additional challenges as possible. Masking and isolation were not the direction we wanted to go. Furthermore, as I was the person doing all their shopping – and because the media-promoted-fear, and public health measures impacting supply chains led to shortages, I was going to multiple stores almost daily to find supplies. It was my view from the beginning that masks were counter-productive to preventing spread. I watched

people touch their mask, right in the spot most likely to be contaminated and then touch products and money with the same, unsanitized hand.

Because it was hard to understand people talking with a mask on, many were leaning in close to each other in order to communicate, also negating the theoretical benefit of masks. It was obvious, too, authorities were going to extremes to discourage affordable, readily available nutritional therapies like vitamin D, vitamin C and zinc, as well as widely available inexpensive preparations like Ivermectin, and inhaled nebulized [budesonide](#), all of which have shown great benefit among clinicians using them. (I have since learned that the current vaccines could not be deployed under Emergency Use Authorization unless no other viable treatments were available. So vaccine industry stakeholders including the NIH, CDC and Anthony Fauci had plenty of incentive to disparage the alternatives or suppress their study.)

But even more chilling was observing so many of my most educated friends being scared to question what we were being told -- perhaps because they were reading [Forbes](#) or the [New York Times](#). When I read in [The New England Journal of Medicine](#) that the greatest benefit of masking may be its ability to function as a “talisman” that could calm anxiety – I began to ask myself, “Could mask wearing essentially be serving as a sort of ritual, accustoming people to be compliant with public health directives and paving the way for them to submit to the new experimental vaccines with unknown long-term consequences?”

Few of my medically trained friends seemed to be concerned that mask mandates were put in place before any published science showed masks prevented spread of respiratory viruses, even those who knew that viruses are orders of magnitude smaller than the pore size of the mask. “Well we have to do SOMETHING!” they argued. The rationale seemed to be, “It can’t hurt and it’s no big deal, so why not?” Unfortunately I learned that’s simply not true. Mask wearing does involve some not-insignificant [health consequences](#). Then there is what is happening psychologically to an entire generation of children, forced to wear masks and fear the microbiome of others.

It got worse. The media encouraged hate against people who dared to be in public without a mask. Sexual-assault survivors and people who got headaches or acne from masks be damned! I witnessed shoppers verbally attack strangers unmasked in grocery stores. Angry masked people got right in the bare face of strangers to spew hatred. I found this ironic; because mask wearing was also being framed as a way to show care for others. I couldn’t help but reflect upon how early Third Reich propaganda, sought to stir up hatred of Jews by creating fear of them because they were [spreaders of disease](#), and I remembered the stories of non-Jews suddenly turning on their Jewish neighbors.

Then the media began disparaging anyone who questioned what was going on as Trump supporters, Q-Anon followers or terrorists putting everyone at risk. This effectively silenced the majority of my liberal friends, who understandably didn’t want to be seen as spreading conspiracy theories. While I shared that valid concern, my own deeply held values of free speech and personal sovereignty would not allow me to abide the censorship and authoritarianism they were turning a blind eye to. I was stunned.

Perhaps more bewildering, friends of mine whose parents were Holocaust survivors became the most outspoken people I knew demanding the government “lock us down!” I found this especially surreal,

given our shared perception of Donald Trump as a would-be demagogue. The last thing I wanted was increased authoritarianism, while a president I saw as nasty, vindictive and disdainful of the rule-of-law was running the country. But my “lock-us-down” friends didn’t seem to be concerned about that or restrictions on speech, public assembly, or religious freedom. My dismay turned to horror as I watched people sit silently as the informed consent requirement for medical procedures vanished before our eyes. My friends were okay with all of that in exchange for feeling a bit safer from the virus.

[Psychological literature](#) suggests that victims of oppression/abuse may unconsciously behave in ways that contribute to harming others...could their generational trauma explain my friends’ inability to see how they might be facilitating oppression? Could this have anything to do with the fact that Israel with widespread generational trauma from the Holocaust, is leading the world in restricting personal freedoms and coercing citizens to accept an experimental medical treatment without informed consent – a direct violation of the Nuremberg Code?

And so 2020 has finally allowed me to understand HOW people could have allowed the little injustices that paved the way for Hitler’s final solution, HOW law abiding Japanese Americans could be ripped from their homes and put in internment camps, HOW researchers seeking to advance science could lie to African American men who had syphilis, and intentionally deprive them of medical treatment, HOW vaccine developers could experiment [on mentally disabled children](#), and so many other obvious injustices that good people *just like us* went along with again and again in history because they were scared, or because they believed they were supporting some kind of “greater good.”

That’s why the scariest thing for me about 2020, was not that a novel virus could take out myself or a loved one, but rather it was seeing how incredibly susceptible we all are to the very forces that have allowed the masses to go along with past injustices that inflicted horrific suffering or death. I heard it said once, that with war we are always preparing based upon previous battles and this can blind us to the current threats – and I think there is a parallel to that when it comes to recognizing injustice. The forces that load the gun for human caused tragedy don’t necessarily have to be triggered by race or ethnicity as many past one’s were. The next human-caused tragedy could appear motivated by dramatically different aims (seducing those who would oppose injustices they recognize as linked with race/ethnicity/sexuality/disability) and still cause egregious suffering and loss of life. It COULD happen again.