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SLICE *of* LIFE

While We Wait for the Storm to Pass

A CHANCE TO EXPAND OUR CIRCLE OF FRIENDS | BY CRAIG GRALLEY

We've heard the warning siren, seen the dark clouds gather on the horizon and now we've climbed into the root cellar. How long will we be hunkering down? A few weeks? A few months?

Like everyone else, I'm heeding the alarms, staying away from others—practicing social distancing. I'm listening to the experts and even if they were open, I'd be staying away from restaurants, movie theaters and our beloved local church.

Still, amid all the gloom there's a shaft of light piercing the rainclouds. There's one magical and comforting fact revealed by my steadfast search for soap and hand sanitizer: My life is deeply intertwined with the lives of countless others, and no amount of separation can sever that profound and wonderful tie.

For ill or good, we can affect another's well-being merely by being present in their life. Like a virus, our positive influence on others is both unseen and undeniable—and while we can measure the malevolent spread of germs that can harm us, the life-affirming impact we have on one another is just as real, and can

ripple far beyond our immediate circle of friends.

Five years ago, Janet and I had just arrived in Auckland, New Zealand after an exhausting 19-hour flight. We'd been instructed to wait by a small kiosk just outside the airport for a van to take us to our rental car. As the terminal's sliding glass door opened, we were met by an arctic blast and a penetrating rain. By the time we reached the kiosk we were drenched. I was about to open my luggage and dig deep for our rain gear when we were approached by a Maori woman. She stopped and without a second's hesitation, took off her coat and handed it to Janet. "Here," she said. "You need this more than I do." We were too stunned to respond to this stranger who was now hurrying, coatless, through the rain. We've been trying to repay that single act of kindness to others ever since.

When we emerge from the cellar after this storm, it's likely we'll see a changed landscape—and with it, new opportunities to be present in the lives of others. It's not too early to consider how to deepen our ties and allow the ripple to spread far beyond our community of friends. é