

Covid 19 Dream Diary 2020

Tate Britain Trip 28.11.2020

There's a preamble to my dream: It had been announced that the Museum of London was collecting Covid 19 dreams. My friend Peter has a friend who was trying to manage his dreams. Twenty to thirty years ago I had been studying creative writing and media, part time, at Middlesex University and a dream diary was one of the assignments. I was determined to give it a go! I had to wake up whilst I was in the middle of a dream. Within a few days I did. I took note of the time and set my alarm accordingly. I was awakened the following morning whilst in the dream state. It worked! I mentioned this to Peter so he could pass my method on to his friend. I didn't try it this time! I didn't think I would come up with anything. I hadn't been dreaming recently. Was I wrong! I had a dream. I woke up. It was a late morning dream. I got up and switched my computer and central heating on. I have to keep warm due to my age and being in the middle of the Covid 19 pandemic. I got through The HIV AIDS pandemic and now there's a second one to try to live through. I sat down and started to dress as my computer was booting up. I wasn't going to have breakfast until I'd typed up everything I could remember about my dream.

I start to type up my dream and recall the telephone call I had from my friend Peter the previous evening. Is it relevant? More about that later. I have to type as quickly as possible to get everything down before I forget parts of it.

I am on my way to the Tate Britain Gallery. There is an exhibition of the work of the poet and artist William Blake. I haven't been there for such a long time. I keep losing my way. I ask people for directions as I hear their footsteps coming closer. I am on my way from Pimlico Underground station.

Now there is something I have to say here: I am registered blind which means I'm a cane user. I have my long, white cane with me, that I tap this way and that to some people's annoyance.

I continue to lose my way! I ask more people, for directions, some people are going there and some people are walking back to the Tube Station. It takes me some time to arrive. When I get there I have to find my way to the pay desk as there is an entrance fee. There is a queue so I join it socially distancing as best as I can. I have a little peripheral sight but no central vision to speak of. Twenty years ago or so I was afraid I was going to bump into someone, so I took the momentous decision to apply for a white cane. Before then I was, just somewhat cock-eyed. Sorry, if you find that politically incorrect! From then on I was well and truly labelled as being disabled, not that everyone saw it that way, they didn't. I displayed my white cane at all times. I didn't want a mouthful of verbal or a mouthful of fingers and thumbs should I actually bump into someone. The verbal happened on two occasions and I didn't bump into them. They approached me. They shouted at me less than six inches from my face. So close I could smell alcohol on both of their breaths.

There is now a novel way for charging the entrance fee. It is based on your annual pay. Have I brought evidence of my earnings? No I haven't. Am I a wage earner?

Yes, but I haven't been earning any money since the lockdown in March. Have I brought a bank statement?

"No I haven't, but I'm registered blind," I say, raising my white cane.

"Have you got your blind registration card?"

"No, I wasn't expecting I would need it. Besides I got it twenty years ago and I've no idea where it is now. I thought my cane would be evidence enough."

"No, people can get hold of a cane and use it to get into venues like this."

"Like this! Anyway, how are you going to get around the gallery socially distancing?"

"I have a little peripheral sight," I reply.

"So you're not blind?"

"Not completely, just blind enough to be registered blind. I've had my retina photographed to prove to the authorities I'm indeed blind enough to be registered as such."

"How are you going to get a sense of what is on show? His work is very small."

"Don't you have a guide?"

"You can't just ask for a guide you have to book three days in advance."

I'm feeling that every obstacle that can be dreamed up is being employed to stop me getting access to art. I'm also feeling that everything I say is being treated as a lie.

She looks up and says, "You're not wearing a mask! You shouldn't even be in here."

I am in a state of shock! I've been so abiding by the rules. Whenever, someone rings my door bell I have to shout out, "Wait a minute; I'm just putting on my mask."

How is it that I'm not wearing a mask, now? I'm panicking. I have come out without wearing my mask. I mean I really am panicking. So much so I wake up, trembling.

There is another dimension to this story. My friend, Peter, who I've mentioned above, lives in Leighton. He is eighty-two. I am seventy-three. He rings me up every night for a chat. I live in West London. We've only met once since lockdown. Last night he telephoned me and told me a joke that his neighbour, Scott had told him. They were of course, socially distancing as they conversed. The joke went thus:

A man wants to buy a pet dog so he goes to Battersea Dog's Home. He asks the receptionist if he can see some dogs so he can choose one to be his companion. After some vetting he is told to take a look in some cages where the dogs are held. He sees dogs with soulful eyes, cuddly dogs, fluffy dogs and shorthaired and other

types of dogs, too many to mention here.

Eventually he sees this Afghan hound. It is spectacular especially regarding its colour. It has a golden coat. The more he looks at it the more he falls in love with it. Now, I'm sorry about this, there is a kind of joke that I don't like: One that takes forever to recall and my friend Peter doesn't help. If he can think of anything that will delay its punch line he adds that in too – so I've edited those bits out.

Anyway, this chap goes back to the receptionist and says, "I would like to buy the Afghan hound. The receptionist says,

"You know the dog can talk."

"Really," the man says in disbelief.

"Yes, go and have a chat with it."

The man goes back to the Afghan hound and says,

"I've just been told you can speak, is that true?"

"As true as I'm wagging my tail."

The man's attention is drawn to its tail. He knows that when a dog wags its tail it's pleased to see his master or whoever. He's pleased to see me, he thinks. The wagging of its tail makes the Afghan Hound more endearing to him. He continues the conversation,

"Tell me your story; how did you end up in here?"

"I was in Afghanistan and won a medal for bravery when I attacked a man with a gun and knocked him to the ground, just as he was about to shoot a British soldier. Then I was retired from active service and became a sniffer dog at the customs department at the airport. I sniffed out so many drugs that I had to be retired due to the back-log of court cases.

After that I became a police dog. One day, I was out walking with my handler in a park when I saw a young mother lifting her young child over the bridge wall so it could see the quacking ducks. She somehow, let go of the child and it fell into the pond. I ran off and jumped into the pond and dragged it out by its clothing. Soon after that I was dismissed for not social-distancing. That's how I was made redundant yet again and landed up here."

"But that's terrible," the man says with a tear in his eye. He goes back to the receptionist and says, "I want to buy the Afghan hound." and asks, "How much is it?"

"£5.50."

"What! Only £5.50." the man says, "Why so little?"

"Because it's such a liar."

The point of all this explanation is that the story of the poor dog that couldn't tell the truth resonated with me as I recalled the dream. No matter how much I was telling the truth, the receptionist at Tate Britain couldn't believe anything I said because I didn't have the paper work to prove it. That in itself has been an issue recently. The housing association I rent my home from won't telephone me should they want to make an appointment. Yes, they send a letter but I can't read it. Why won't they telephone me? Because I don't have any notification on record that I am registered blind. They re-housed me in 1993 in a flat designed for disabled people because I was already registered blind. I think they didn't transfer all their data when they digitalized their records. And, of course my reader is no longer allowed to visit me due to Covid-19, so there is no one to read my mail.

In my dream, I was the dog that couldn't tell the truth! In my case it was because I didn't have the paper work to prove it. Funny how connections are made by the mind in dreams. I think it's due to the complicated filing systems in one's brain.

Now, I don't want anyone to get in touch because I've missed the obvious: the anxiety induced by the plethora of lockdowns.

© 2020 by Terry Miles.