

Keeper of memories

One of the realities of the “new normal” brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic is to be caught off-guard by death. Many say it is frightening. Essentially, it has proven that death is indeed the proverbial thief in the night.

Reading the news and hearing reports of deaths associated with the deadly disease amid this pandemic have become part of our daily media dose. The death counts reported by the Department of Health each day have seemingly reduced these “victims” to a soulless tally. Beyond the numbers, we also see faces of death in the obituaries and tributes for these fatalities, posted and shared in various media and platforms. Some were called heroes, even as the national government continue to dilly-dally in the delivery of much-needed personal protective equipment to our frontline workers.

When precautionary measures (staying at home, social distancing, and the Enhanced Community Quarantine) were put in place, the grief and pain brought about by this mischievous thief seemed to have doubled. While death encountered on any given day could be an inconsolable experience for most of us, seeing it now during the COVID-19 outbreak appeared to have become even more devastating. Some patients died alone without saying goodbye to their loved ones, let alone seeing them. Funerals are limited and, in some cases, not allowed. Cremation is being done abruptly. Hugging or consoling of the

bereaved kin is practically impossible. Family and friends cannot even hold a proper ceremony for their departed loved ones. Grieving has been put on hold. What else will this virus take away from us?

I find it heartbreaking to be in the shoes of those who lost their loved ones during this pandemic. I may not personally know the deceased patients, but whenever I read or hear tributes about them, it feels like I’m one of those who directly lost a mother or a brother or a friend. This crisis has cultivated a lot of undesirable emotions that threaten to jeopardize our mental wellness.

I realized that beyond death, what is reassuring at least is the capacity of our mind to keep memories and remember these people even though they are no longer around. No virus can stop us from doing this. We mourn for our dead even as we celebrate their lives and our experiences with them. We remember what we have lost when they left us, yet we also remember what we have once had when they were still with us.

The idea of remembering someone, I believe, is shaped by two factors.

The first one is centered on us as ourselves – our motivations and actions. Who are we? How do we want to be remembered by others? We are remembered by what we make of our lives and also by what we perceive of ourselves as individuals. Personally, I want to be remembered as the keeper of memories, hoping against hope that my deeds truly mirror my in-



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tentions. As an archivist, it is my fervent desire to safeguard our society’s collective memory.

The second one is centered on us as others – our perceptions and views of someone. Who is this someone? How do we remember that someone? As part of the others, we remember someone based on what they have shown and made us feel. These things serve as the building blocks of our memories of a particular person. For instance, we remember someone for being a good friend and mentor because when they were alive, they never ceased to respond to all our questions, no matter how petty they might have seemed.

In these trying times, may we find time to reflect on how we will want to live our lives amid the new normal and how will we want to be in somebody else’s memory should we meet death in our own time. May we also find comfort in the thought that when we remember our dead, they continue to live in our hearts and minds.

Let us be keepers of each other’s memories.

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