What does Freedom mean to me?

Since the recent event of the death of an African American man George Perry Floyd Jr. who was killed by police during an arrest in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020. and the Black Lives Matter movement. I have decided that I would like to write for myself what does exactly FREEDOM mean to me from the moment I was born and to the present me.

When I hear the word freedom I would always ask myself „Are we really living a life of freedom?“.

If everybody was to live in the true spirit of freedom, there would be nothing but chaos. Freedom that we assume we have, is not really freedom. We are constrained in so many ways. Society imposes unwritten restrictions on our freedom. When we are little, it is our parents. When we become independent adults, it is our families. Then it is our significant other. As citizens the governing bodies restrict our freedom by the innumerable laws that are written. Many that we don’t even know. And we are told that ignorance cannot be a plea. We are supposed to know every possible law that may have a bearing on how we live.

In fact, every written and unwritten code of conduct is attempting to put us on the straight and narrow. Yet that still feels like freedom to us. We are in straitjackets, and we don’t even realise it. Merrily going along thinking we are actually free. Whilst actually we are practically walking a tightrope and we never know when we shall fall in the deep abyss right below us.

Freedom is almost an illusion, that those of us living in democratic societies think we have. We would have realized that more so now, considering that the governing bodies have put entire populations under strict lockdowns across the world. We are principally free but are under this strange kind of house arrest. Now, that straitjacket has been squeezed that much more and our movement has been completely limited. At the same time convincing us that it is all for our own good.

Freedom is merely an illusion. An illusion that masks our shackles. We are shackled from the day we are born, right from the umbilical cord to the death certificate and then even beyond that.

Our desires are also our shackles. And it would take great courage and effort to set ourselves free from those.

Freedom is a way of life that we have to cultivate with great effort, if we really want it. Freedom is an attitude. Freedom is faith in ourselves. Freedom is not judging everyone we meet. Freedom is a commitment. Freedom is not living in fear. Freedom is a reward for living a life filled with courage. The courage to have that right attitude, courage to have faith in ourselves and the people we love, the courage to deliver on our commitments, the courage to get up every time we get knocked down. The courage to live a life free of fear.

Fear is the one thing that definitely holds me down. I am afraid of hurting all those I love. I am afraid of making mistakes. I am afraid of getting hurt. I worry about my social skills when I enter a room full of people. I hesitate to pick up the mike and talk. I feel like Gulliver tied down by the Lilliputians. So many things holding me back. Like Gulliver I can easily break free, but I struggle to break these weak strings that hold me back from living a life of freedom.

“The only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom from fear.” — Aung San Suu Kyi

I have always accepted that change is inevitable. This gives me the freedom to be adaptable. Freedom is possible when you drop the ideas of stability and predictability. The current pandemic has turned our somewhat stable and predictable lives upside down. And I am most definitely struggling to adapt to this drastic change in our lives, even though I had always accepted that change is the only constant. But this change is too much even for me. Am I really free?

We are hostages to what we know and to our current circumstances. At every stage we fight to get freedom from where we are stuck.

I feel enslaved by my feelings, my upsets and my emotions. They limit me from living my life fully.

Our entire lives are spent in wriggling to break free. Free from lack. Lack of money. Lack of love. Lack of air. Lack of space. After all these years I am still trying to find that free version of myself. To discover who I truly am. To find the Jonathan Livingstone Seagull hiding somewhere inside me. To really understand what freedom means to me.

 From May 28th to June 5th 2020, Martina Peitl