

CAN YOU IMAGINE?

Los Angeles. April 25. 2020

Sumitra Nanjundan

Edited by Susan Maunu

It's impossible to imagine, until it happens.

It's like wanting to stop a tidal wave with your bare hands, but you can't. It just comes crashing. Like the crashing silence of this sudden confinement. But then too there's the innate longing to be swept into the healing part of our ordeal, in a heartfelt, positive way.

Can you imagine being confined to a small space, a prison cell, a hospital bed, a mental health facility, a cramped home in an abusive environment? Can you imagine that the only life you've ever known is on the streets, living hand-to-mouth, never knowing where you'll sleep that night? These days I think a lot about those who were already living in hardship before COVID-19. How are they managing now?

It's impossible to imagine circumstances we've never witnessed first-hand or personally endured. What might be inevitable can still be unimaginable until it happens.

Unimaginable until we are in the thick of it, face-to-face with the scrambling of what were once constants in our lives. Losing a loved one, when the solid ground falls from under our feet and brings us to our knees in grief.

Imagine if what is happening now had happened 20 years ago? Or 20 years from now?

Imagine being alone. Imagine being evicted. Imagine losing a parent. Imagine being separated from your partner, your children. Imagine walking on-foot for days and days to get to a safe place.

And this is happening—the unimaginable.

We find ourselves all in the same boat, and it feels like it's sinking. None are spared the fear, the pain, the chaos. We're all wide-eyed in disbelief. Whether it is ruining our lives or giving us a chance to regroup, we are not alone. We are in this together. Together.

At home, I'm regrouping. I have never been as grateful as I am today. I'm one of the lucky ones.

At home these days I'm on the phone more often, genuinely connecting with loved ones – family and dearest friends, scattered all over the world. Our conversations are heartfelt, real, joyful, and contemplative. We are all concerned, all grateful. We are fortunate. We are healthy, we have roofs over our heads, we are not alone.

And taking stock. Annie Lennox recently spoke about how it's time to take stock. Her words struck a chord, reminding me to take a good look at my own life. So I took a step back. I paused. I hit the 'stop panicking' button really hard! I decided, for just one moment in time's realm, to give it rest, to not freak out, to not frantically search for 'The One Hundred New Ways For Musicians To Create IGOs #inthetimeofcorona.'

When was the last time I felt like I actually made a difference? What could I do *now* instead of writing longer and longer to-do lists, spinning my wheels, and ending up on the couch binging on whatever?

Esther Perel shared that going for long walks alone has helped her to not lose her mind!

Here in LA where most of us, pre-lockdown, were in our cars sitting in traffic, it is strikingly apparent—people are out, safely social distancing, but out, on foot! Even smiling, under those facemasks.

That's how, on one of my own walks (alone) just last week, it came to me. Buried deep in that big pile of 'things from my past,' the long-forgotten dreams and scribbles, was a song. A song I wrote in another lifetime, but one in sync with what we are sharing now, together. The song, '*Can You Imagine?*' had slipped through the cracks, but was rediscovered as I walked alone, looking back on my cloudy past. And I thought of reviving the heart of this song. Then a few days later, doing dishes, another revelation! And it became more clear. Connect and involve my community. Bring the words to life. 'We're In This Together.' Give back, give thanks, spread a little love and joy, and send hopeful reverberations as far as they can reach. Thus, like a whirlwind it began. I sent a video message to my most trusted circle. To my lovely, beautiful, diverse tribe of friends, old and new, young and old, nearby and far-flung. I asked them to contribute, to come into the fold and help me build a message that I can share. The response was overwhelming.

And then I remembered something else: a folder in my inbox titled 'Tiny Desk Contest.'

For years I had been missing the deadline, or simply hadn't had an idea I deemed 'worthy' of a Tiny Desk submission. So I asked my contributors to record their snippets at whatever functions as their desk, their 'work space,' right now.

And I asked them to create and hold up a sign saying:

'CAN YOU IMAGINE? AT HOME TOGETHER.'

My husband Alex and I are racing against the clock. Working with care and great haste to complete in a few short days our best version of '*Can you Imagine?*' The Tiny Desk Contest has graciously extended their deadline (thank you!), and we are going to make it—I promise!

We now have a breathtaking performance, a choir of 30 voices singing in harmony, at home together. How I wish we could just keep adding more! We still have much to record, mix, film, edit and submit before the clock strikes midnight on Monday. Our espresso machine is working overtime. We are on-course. We are loving it. I am one sleep-deprived, yet energised, happy, excited, lucky, privileged and grateful girl ... on a mission.

Much like everything coming at us so quickly these days, so is the momentum of '*Can You Imagine?*' A spontaneous gesture born from the timeless nature of love. I imagined. And now it is coming into the light.

I give thanks, Sumitra

