



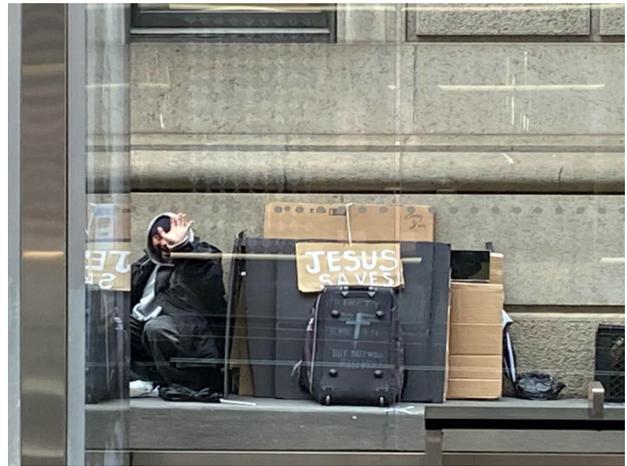
A desolate 5th Avenue near Rockefeller Center. A deserted subway entrance at 60<sup>th</sup> Street & Central Park, NYC. (Photographed by Sandhi Smalls Santini)

### By Sandhi Smalls Santini

I've lived on Manhattan's West 57<sup>th</sup> Street for over 20 years, a few avenues and a heartbeat away from Central Park, Columbus Circle, and the bustle of Broadway. *I love New York!* I have never taken this magical place for granted. But, I confess. I am one of those people who—until quite recently—complained about the congested, overcrowded, noisy streets. You know, the same old run-of-the-mill protestations--too many rude commuters crammed into Grand Central, Port Authority, Penn Station, and Herald Square...too many people getting in each other's way going to, and coming from work. And yes, I've avoided the Theatre District in Times Square like...well...like the *PLAGUE!* "*Be careful what you wish for*".

### **SURROUNDED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

This past Christmas, I went back home to Edisto Island, South Carolina. And I am so glad I did. With a few sad exceptions, our big family was, for the most part, all together. We ate and drank together. Laughed and talked into the wee hours. Two little ones were christened. And it would be my oldest sister's last Christmas. She passed away on January 28, 2020, surrounded by family and friends. When I told a co-worker I'd be traveling to the funeral by train, he suggested that I wear a face mask to protect myself from "the new flu virus". I shrugged it off. Besides, I'd gotten my flu shot back in September. No one on the train wore a mask or gloves. Not even the Amtrak employees.



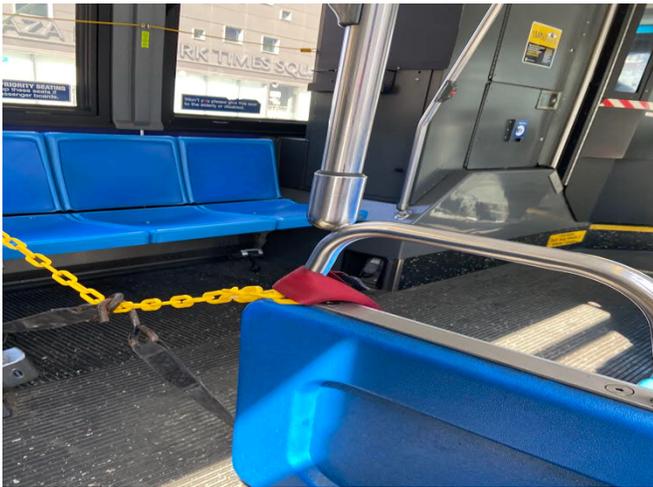
A tribute to Kious Kelly in the lobby of the building where he lived. A New Yorker seeks cover near a bus stop. *(Photographed by Sandhi Smalls Santini)*

### **KIOUS KELLY DIED ON MARCH 24, 2020 AFTER BATTLING COVID-19**

The day after I returned to New York, I ran into a friend in the lobby of our apartment building. We chatted briefly while passing each other. As always, he looked flawless. He was perfectly dressed in blue scrubs and a white lab coat. He was an emergency room nurse who had been promoted to nurse manager at Mount Sinai West, a hospital barely a stone's throw away from our building. It was the last time I saw him. Kious Kelly died on March 24, 2020 after battling COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. He was only 48 years old. Many of us in the building knew him as "James". He had come to New York twenty years earlier from Michigan. Like so many wide-eyed, limber-bodied dancers, he came armed with a big bright smile, a twinkle in his eyes, and a pocket full of dreams. Kious was a sweet, kind, and gentle soul—all admirable qualities of the esteemed profession that eventually claimed him. Though brought down while fighting on the front lines of this raging war, Kious "James" Kelly will forever be our hero.



Iconic Saks Fifth Avenue near St. Patrick's Cathedral, and Nordstrom on West 57<sup>th</sup> Street & Broadway, devoid of customers. *(Photographed by Sandhi Smalls Santini)*



Practicing social distancing on an 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue bus. A long table and tented sign block the entrance to a local pharmacy. (Photographed by Sandhi Smalls Santini)

### SIGNS OF THE TIMES WE NOW LIVE IN

As of today's date, April 1, 2020, I have been sheltered-in-place, inside my apartment for 15 days. Not since 911 have I felt so fragile. So vulnerable. So utterly human. In a world where social distancing and remote schooling have suddenly become signs of the times we now live in, I've been re-educated and reminded of the *finer things in life*. What makes my day are the phone calls and text messages from family, friends, and loved ones—those connections that are real, meaningful, and priceless. And while leadership at the national level has been both disturbing and unnerving on so many levels, from out of the ashes of COVID-19, two people have emerged phoenix-like, leading with strength, calm, and hope.



Restaurant Row on West 46<sup>th</sup> Street in Hell's Kitchen and The Theatre District in Times Square, both dark. (Photographed by Sandhi Smalls Santini)



Security at Trump International Hotel, One Central Park West. A ubiquitous sign of the times.  
*(Photographed by Sandhi Smalls Santini)*

New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo, has risen like a true leader, on the front lines, reassuring, and intelligently in control. In addition to having great bedside manners, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is the voice of reasoning, balancing truth and expertise.

The landscape of the world has changed. The landscape of the United States has changed. And the landscape of New York City has been profoundly altered. Oh, how I yearn for those days of over-crowded, noisy streets! Bring back the traffic, the congestion, and even those annoying tourists! Bring back *those* days! Our lives have been turned upside-down—reduced to the fantastical stuff mysteries and sci-fi movies are made of. It is all very scary. And all so real.

#