

A Lost Small Town. Running Errands in the Wake of Emotional Violence, USA

By [Dr. Naomi Wolf](#)

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I live in a picture-perfect region — the Hudson Valley, memorialized by painters and poets; a patchwork of autumn reds and yellows, majestic hillsides, storied waterfalls, and little homesteads dotted picturesquely on the slopes of sleepy hamlets.

Towns in our area look like Norman Rockwell paintings: there is Main Street, Millerton, with its white 19th century church steeple, its famous Irving Farm cafe with the excellent curated coffee beans, its charming antiques mall, its popular pizzeria.

When you drive to Millerton, it looks like you are driving into the heart of archetypal America; everything that Woody Guthrie songs memorialize, everything of which American soldiers dreamt when they were far away — everything decent and pure, is to be found in Hudson Valley towns.

It sure *looks* that way, anyway.

But these days, I am obliged to maintain a fervent inner monologue, just so I can pleasantly go about my business in the local hardware store, in the local florist, in the post office.

Because an emotional massacre has taken place in these little towns. And now we are expected to act as if — this never happened at all.

But psychically, emotionally, there is blood flowing in the streets; and bodies are stacked up, invisible, in front of the candy stores, the high end wine stores, the pretty memorials to the World War Two dead; outside the farmers' market on Saturdays, outside the tapas bars.

So my quiet internal mantra, is: I forgive you.

I forgive you, Millerton movie theatre. Your owner, who was interviewed just before the

pandemic, saying lovely things in a local paper about how the revamped theatre would enhance the local community, posted a sign in 2021 saying that only vaccinated people could enter. You needed to really look for the fine print to see that you could walk through those doors, if unvaccinated, but only with a PCR test.

I forgive the young ladies who worked behind the popcorn counter, for telling me that I could not enter further. That I could not sit down, with other human beings in my community, to watch a film alongside of them.

I forgive the young ticket taker for telling me that I had to go back outside, onto the sidewalk. I could not even stand in the lobby.

I forgive these young people who just wanted jobs, and who had to discriminate in the most heinous and scarring way — scarring to me, and to them too no doubt — just to keep their jobs. I forgive them. I forgive them for the mortifying scene they had to cause.

I forgive the movie theatre owner for shouting at me defensively when I questioned this policy.

I forgive the elderly couple nearby in the lobby; the woman who started shrieking at me alarmingly that she was glad of the policy and did not want me anywhere near her. I forgive her. I forgive her silent, embarrassed husband for his silence.

I forgive the employee of the Millerton flower shop who demanded, “Are you vaccinated?” when I walked in — when I just wanted some nice-looking flowers, some artificial olive branches, perhaps, like those I had seen in a decorating magazine, to arrange in a vase in my study.

I forgive this employee for having to follow a script that must have been set out by the town, for all the small businesses to follow, in some bizarre, coercive methodology, as this out-of-the-blue, un-American and inappropriate question was posed all at once somehow, in store after store, in my little town, in the nearby towns, even in New York City, during a certain moment in the bad year of 2021.

I forgive these store owners for stripping me of a great benefit of a free society — the great gift of liberty, of America — that right to be dreamy, to have some privacy, and to be preoccupied with one’s own thoughts.

I forgive this employee for intruding on my privacy in a way that was startling, ill-mannered, and entirely beside the point, given the fact that she was simply selling flowers and I was simply trying to buy them.

I forgive her for the way this demand made my adrenaline levels jump, as they do when things are unstable around you; in 2021, you could not tell which stores would confront you, or when, with that urgent, bullying question — when you happened to wander in, just wanting some toothpaste, or a slice of pizza, or to look at some antiques.

Not — expecting an inquisition.

I forgive this flower shop employee for presenting me with this startling question that each time made me, with my clinically diagnosed PTSD from a very old trauma, feel ambushed, violated and humiliated. Surely this sense of ambush was felt by trauma survivors

everywhere.

Are you vaccinated?

Are you? Vaccinated?

Are you vaccinated?

Are you naked? Are you helpless?

Are you mine? My possession?

The viral clip of the Pfizer marketing rep, admitting to the European Parliament that the mRNA vaccines never stopped transmission, should make every single one of these moments, into a source of deep embarrassment and self-criticism for all those people — all of them — who inflicted these violations of privacy on others, or who excluded in any way, their neighbors and fellow countrymen and women. They did so, it is clear now to all, on the basis of arrant nonsense.

But meanwhile, I forgive them. I have to. Because otherwise the rage and sorrow would exhaust me to death.

I forgive my neighbor who froze when I hugged her.

I forgive my other neighbor, who told me that she was making homemade soup and fresh bread, and that I could join her to have some, *if* I was vaccinated. If I was unvaccinated, however, she explained, someday she might consent to walk outside with me.

I forgive the monitor — what else could one call him — surely appointed by the local Board of Health, who told me that I could not go inside a church at an adorable outdoor town festival at the tiny mountain hamlet of Mt Washington, to see an exhibit, because I was unmasked. I forgive him for the steely look in his eyes as he remained unmoved when I explained that had a serious neurological condition, and thus could not wear a mask. I forgive the nervous lady at the table full of trinkets, who had apparently ratted us out to the Board of Health representative, when we were simply browsing outdoors, surrounded by fresh air, on a peaceful June day, our faces uncovered, at her table.

I forgive them for making a miserable scene about all of this in front of my then-ten-year-old stepson. The unmasked and unvaccinated are eternally accused of having made scenes, but the scenes were made, really, by the actions of those who were coercing and conforming.

I forgive them for driving us to leave the festival. I forgive their manifesting a pathetic and indefensible lesson in servility, and in submission to things that made no sense, to an impressionable American child.

I forgive the teller at my local bank for throwing a paper napkin at me to cover my face, when I explained respectfully and gently, from twenty feet away from her, why I did not wear a mask.

I forgive the staff at the Walker Hotel, in lower Manhattan, for warning me that they would call the manager, who no doubt would then call law enforcement, if I sat at the Blue Bottle

Coffee lunch counter with my unvaccinated self.

I forgive my loved ones for keeping us from the Thanksgiving table.

I forgive one of my best friends for her having left the country without having said goodbye to me; the reason was that she was “disappointed” in me for my stance on masks and vaccines. No matter that this was entirely my risk, my body, my decision, my life. Her “disappointment” led her to assume the burden of censuring me for something that had nothing to do with her. I forgive her, though my heart broke.

I forgive the friend whose daughter had a baby, and who would not let me indoors to see the child.

I forgive the friend who said he did not sit indoors with unvaccinated people.

I forgive the family members who pressed my loved one to get one more booster – thus leading directly to her sustaining heart damage.

I forgive them, because my soul instructs me that I must.

But I cannot forget.

Are we supposed to just pick up again, as if emotional limbs were not crushed, as if emotional hearts and guts were not pierced, as if with sharp objects? And that, again and again?

As if there has been no savagery, no massacre here?

All those people — now that athletes are dropping dead, now that their own loved ones are sickening and hospitalized, now that the “transmission” is known to be a lie and the vaccines’ “efficacy” itself is known to be a lie – are they — *sorry*? Are they reflecting upon themselves, on their actions, on their consciences; on their immortal souls; on what they have done to others; on their part in this shameful melodrama in American and world history – a time that now can never be erased?

I don’t hear it. I don’t hear any apologies.

I don’t see signs on the Millerton movie theatre saying, “Dear Customers. We are so sorry we treated many of you as if we were all living under Jim Crow laws. We did so for no reason at all.

There is no excuse, of course, for such discrimination, then or now. Please forgive us.”

Nothing. Have you seen anything like this? I haven’t. Not one conversation. Not one sign. Not one article. “My friend, I was a beast. How can you forgive me? I behaved so badly.” Have you heard that? No, nothing.

Instead people are reacting to the fact of their awfulness, of their profound *wrongness*, of their foolishness, of their ignorance and credulity, like sneaky, guilty dogs. They are sidling up.

In the city, they are quietly adding one to the guest list. In the country, they are stopping their cars in the sunny autumn air to have a little chat.

They are calling up just to say hi — after two and a half years.

Two and a half years of brutal, ignorant ostracism.

I can and must forgive all those I enumerated. But it is harder to forgive – others.

That personal, internal forgiveness of deluded individuals, or of coerced small business owners, which is my own internal labor – work I do daily between myself and my God, just so that I won't turn to stone with my burden of rage and fury – has nothing to do, of course, with the wrongdoers' need on their side of the relationship, truly to self-examine and truly to repent; and it certainly does not forestall or avert the grave and terrible accounting of crimes, and the enactment of true justice, for the leaders and spokespeople and institutions who committed evil, that is now utterly necessary.

Without accountability, and truth and reconciliation commissions, and terrible, commensurate levels of justice served to suit the crimes committed, as South Africa, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Germany have all learned to their cost, there is nothing at all to ensure that the exact same crimes won't be committed again. And that process of investigation, accountability, trials and sentencing, when one half of a nation abused the other systematically, is painful and severe and takes years to reach its conclusion.

(And yes, I added this clarifying paragraph in response to Dr Emily Oster's ignorant, self-deluding and dangerous plea in *The Atlantic* for "amnesty", an essay written after this one was published. Let there be no misunderstanding. "Amnesty" for crimes of this severity and scale is not an option. There was no group hug after the liberation of Auschwitz).

It is hard to forgive the high school in Chatham, that forced a teenager to be mRNA vaccinated against her wishes, in order to play basketball, and thus hope for a college scholarship. The officials must be held accountable.

It is hard to forgive the doctors, the hospitals, the pediatricians, who knew and knew and knew. And bowed their heads, and plunged the needles into the arms of innocents, and committed evil. The doctors who today say, of the horrific side effects brought about by their own hands, their own collusion — "We are baffled. We have no idea."

When did Western doctors, before 2020, ever have no idea?

The doctors and hospitals and medical organizations must be held accountable.

It is hard to forgive the Mayor of New York City, who drove the brave First Responders who did not wish to submit to a dangerous experiment, to have no income with which to feed their families. He and other political leaders must be held accountable.

It is hard to forgive the Ivy League universities, who took the money and forced all the members of their communities to submit to a deadly or dangerous experimental injection — one that will damage the fertility of who knows how many young men and women; one that will kill who knows how many community members.

They took the money and there is blood on their hands. Have you, parents of college age children, received a letter of apology? "We are so sorry we forced your son/your daughter to submit to an experimental injection that can harm him or her, that may cripple your daughter with bleeding every single month of her childbearing years, and that may lead

your son to drop dead on the track field. And one that, it turns out, has nothing to do with transmission. We can't apologize enough. (But the money — it was just such a lot.) Really sorry. Won't do it again, rest assured."

Did you get that letter, America's parents?

The deans and trustees who took the money and 'mandated' our kids, must be held accountable.

It is almost impossible to forgive the churches, the synagogues, who took the money and stayed closed. Or who took the money, and then locked their doors at High Holy Day Services against the unvaccinated. To this day. (Hi there, Hevreh Synagogue of the Southern Berkshires. Shalom. Shabbat Shalom. Good Yom Tov.)

"Please note that we require proof of vaccination upon entry for all High Holy Day Services. Please bring a copy with you. Masks are optional and encouraged for all who are comfortable wearing them."

The rabbis and priests and ministers who took the money and practiced unlawful discrimination, and abandoned their spiritual calling, must be held accountable.

These are great, great sins.

But meanwhile, you have errands to run. You have books to return to the library and flowers to pick up from the florist perhaps - you have to go to the kids' soccer game, you have to go to the movie theatre; the hardware store. Back to church. Back to synagogue.

You have to pick up your life again.

You have to step around the bodies decomposing invisibly in the charming streets of our nation. You have to pick up again as if we were not annihilated in spirit. Or, you have to pick up again if you were the abuser.

Will you apologize, if you did wrong?

Will you forgive, if you were wronged?

Can this nation, which fell so far short of its true identity and its founders' intention, ever, ever heal?

Can we heal — we ourselves?

Forgiveness on an internal level — of coerced or deluded individuals — may help us or heal us as private individuals.

But only the gravest of reckonings, the truth pursued to its limit in every single case, investigations and trials launched according to the beautiful rule of our law, and somber justice then served to leaders, spokespeople (hey, Dr Oster) — and institutions — will ever allow us to heal, or even move safely forward together— as a nation.

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