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Life is hard and then you die?

“One day I went back to bed and lay under the covers again once the children had left for school,” said a friend of mine, single parent to three children and academic career woman who has been hit for six by burn out.

“Suddenly it occurred to me that life is actually quite pleasant. I have my own home, I am warm and my stomach is full, my loved ones are safe, and when I get up, I am able to move around and function like others do. All the important things in life are fine for me.”

It was a familiar story. I have experienced days that I would gladly switch for another. Because that wasn't possible, I had to focus my thoughts on what had to be done there and then. Right now I am cooking, now I am writing this article, now I am breathing in and out. Distress crystallises the essential things in life. I am healthy, I have my own home and loved ones, and I have a meaningful existence.

I wonder whether the enormous strides made in science, technology and the economy have obscured our view of reality of which previous generations had first-hand experience. Life sometimes deals you a tough hand, and catastrophe can strike at any time. Nevertheless, upheaval does not mean the end of the world.

My family lived for centuries in a village which is now part of Russia. Every so often, the village had to be rebuilt following a destructive visit from the enemy. People hung on to their homelands tenaciously, until 65 years ago they had to leave, not knowing where life would take them.

The children had to be fed, and a new home had to be built from any materials people could get their hands on. After the war, life was tough for everyone. Even so, people were cheerful through the working day, started families and built communities. Happiness didn't depend on the circumstances around, rather on outlook on life.

When you follow the media nowadays, it feels like the crises and illnesses are wholly unnatural. These things certainly cause pain when they happen, but once they are over, life must go on. Do we have to dedicate unlimited column space to horror scenarios and pessimists of the worst kind?

Leena Laitinen
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Antti Mannermaa