

# Walmart is the Opiate of the Masses

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Posted on [August 2, 2020](#) by [Fantasy Free Economics](#)



“Yes, resistance should have begun right there, at the moment of the arrest itself.

But it did not begin.”

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

The past couple of weeks have reflected some type of dystopian future that’s supposed to be the backdrop for a bestselling novel.

Everyone is acting normal. I’m at my middle son’s football practice. The adults are

quarantined behind a chain link fence talking amongst each other like you’d figure they would. On the other side are various age groups of youth, running obvious football drills. Kinda. The coach blows the whistle and my kid runs through a ladder drill, fakes to the left and shoots diagonally upfield. Flying through the air, the coach throws a bright yellow tennis ball in his direction. Will he catch it? Probably. I look over at my brother-in-law, Scott, “what’s with the tennis balls? Some sort of agility drill or something?” Maybe the point is that if they can catch a tennis ball, a football should be easy. Maybe that’s the point? What do I know? I’m not a football coach. “No,” Scott explained, “They’re using tennis balls because footballs are against the rules for now. You know. You can catch Covid from throwing a football, but not a tennis ball. It’s pretty stupid.” Meanwhile, the adults carry on, not saying anything, acting like “Yellow tennis balls. That’s normal. Whatever. I’m just waiting here chatting it up waiting for my kid so I can go home and cook dinner. I’m glad he gets to play.”

“How’s Pops?” Scott’s dad, my father-in-law was diagnosed with brain cancer over a year ago, went through surgery to remove a lemon sized mass, underwent an initial round of brutal chemo treatments and just went through a second, more maintenance kind of round. A few weekends ago, on a Saturday night he called Shelley about an excruciating pain in his gut and she rushed over there to find out he hadn’t been taking his meds as prescribed. Par for the course. His short memory is no longer what it could be, especially since the cancer. We have to keep on him. But sometimes he’s doing so well that our kids stay the night. Sometimes several nights in a row. It’s easy to take his memory for granted. Still. It’s not getting any better. Meds straightened out, she came back home. Sunday went by without any complications, but Monday morning, early before the sun, my phone rang and startled me. I missed the call. So had Shelley. It was Scott. I messaged back and asked if everything was ok and it wasn’t. An ambulance just came for Pops. The pain in his stomach reached unbearable. “Still no updates. I’m hoping he gets to come home this weekend.” Nobody is allowed to go see him at the hospital. We have real problems

getting updates from the staff. Pops' memory is going, so he can't remember to tell Shelley what the doctor said. She calls several times throughout the day. Several times at night. Sometimes she gets answers, sometimes she doesn't. Meanwhile pops is alone and surrounded by strangers.

Practice ends and we go home, but Shelley needs some supplies for dinner. Off to Walmart I go. It's the nearest grocery store. It used to be open 24 hours but now it closes at 8:30 so I gotta get there before they close.

Why don't I resist? Why don't I stand up and say something? Why don't I declare how blatantly ridiculous the idea of playing football with tennis balls is? Everybody knows that playing football with tennis balls is for chumps. But guess what? We're all chumps, going along with it. Obviously practicing with a football would spread Covid 19 and kill someone, but tennis balls won't. Why do we capitulate? We aren't idiots. Is it for the sake of our kids? Is it for the sake of ourselves? Do we not want to make a scene? We surely don't want to offend anyone, especially those militant people on Facebook. For all I know, you are one of them. Our kids need to get out and do something so bad that at this point, we'll take anything. Surely the suited bureaucrats telling us how to now practice football are right, aren't they? And have our best interest in mind, don't they? Surely they do! I could make a sign that says "Wake up! Playing football with tennis balls is stupid!" or "Playing with imaginary defenders is stupid!" Because that's a new rule now too. You can't have someone opposite you trying to keep you from catching the tennis ball. I am trading my common sense for what? What are we getting in return? I don't make my sign. I don't make a scene.

I did the math yesterday, August 2, 2020. There are 328,200,000 people in the United States and 151,265 people have died from the new Covid 19 virus. That amounts to about .0046% of the population. What you do with those facts is up to you.

Set markers six feet apart and crack the whip at the kids who don't comply. You comply, so you should teach the kids to comply. That way you have company in your misery. They can share in your complicity, so they learn that they shouldn't refuse stupidity either. They have tricked us into playing by rules we all know are stupid. A surveillant perched somewhere beyond view, wrings their hands, chuckles and reports to the superiors, "That was too easy. What should I try next?" Three months time is all it took to convince the nation that practicing football with tennis balls and imaginary opponents is sane and makes sense! "

But go to Walmart and you can put your hands all over whatever you like. Test run any ball, football, soccer, tennis, baseball. I can pick up and inspect tomatoes, bananas, onions and cilantro. I need some baby wipes but the box I pick up is partially crushed, so I put it back and grab the better one. I check out and touch the same screen that two hundred and forty seven people before me have touched today. I have a mask on though. So it's okay.

Karl Marx made a case that religion is the opiate of the masses. He was wrong. It's Walmart. He had no idea it wouldn't be religion. As long as I can go to Walmart my son can substitute a tennis ball for a football and play against imaginary defenders. My father-in-law can lay dying alone in a hospital but because I can go to Walmart nobody stands up. Nobody screams, nobody

says anything. Everyone watches as a mysterious and ghastly, subtle invisible entity removes your existence one football at a time.

You scour the house looking for something you know you had. It was here yesterday wasn't it? You ask the kids. Where did it go? The wife puzzles with you. How long has it been gone? We don't know. We weren't even paying attention. We wonder if we even owned such a thing that disappeared so definitely, so silently! When an intruder breaks in and my house is robbed. I immediately know the TV is gone. Nobody could ever take my phone. I'd notice that within minutes. Months go by and one by one you realize other things are missing. More and more, things you used to take for granted are gone. "Did I misplace it or was it taken with the TV?" You don't really know. They will take the TV and everything else from underneath you, leaving you in nothing but your undergarments, standing barefoot in the snow, loading onto a cattle car. You don't know how you got here. You don't know where it all went. You don't know how long it's been gone. All of a sudden you're alone and your only hope left is in the State. All your resources gone, no longer able to care for your business, community, family, yourself. As you despairingly ascend the ramp to be with the others, a guard with a sinister grin tosses you an old yellow tennis ball. You hold onto it because you should have known, it wasn't really all of a sudden. You felt it coming. You should have spoken up when you had the chance. The car jostles as it begins to creep down the track. It disappears into the distance, taking you with it never to be seen again. After all they know better than you.

It all started long ago with your son playing football with tennis balls against imaginary defenders, and your father-in-law dying alone in the hospital, and me going through the produce at Walmart.

In the background can hear the echos of a song when the wind blows it your direction . It's the Eurythmics. Sweet dreams are made of these... This is the Hell that's been coming all along.