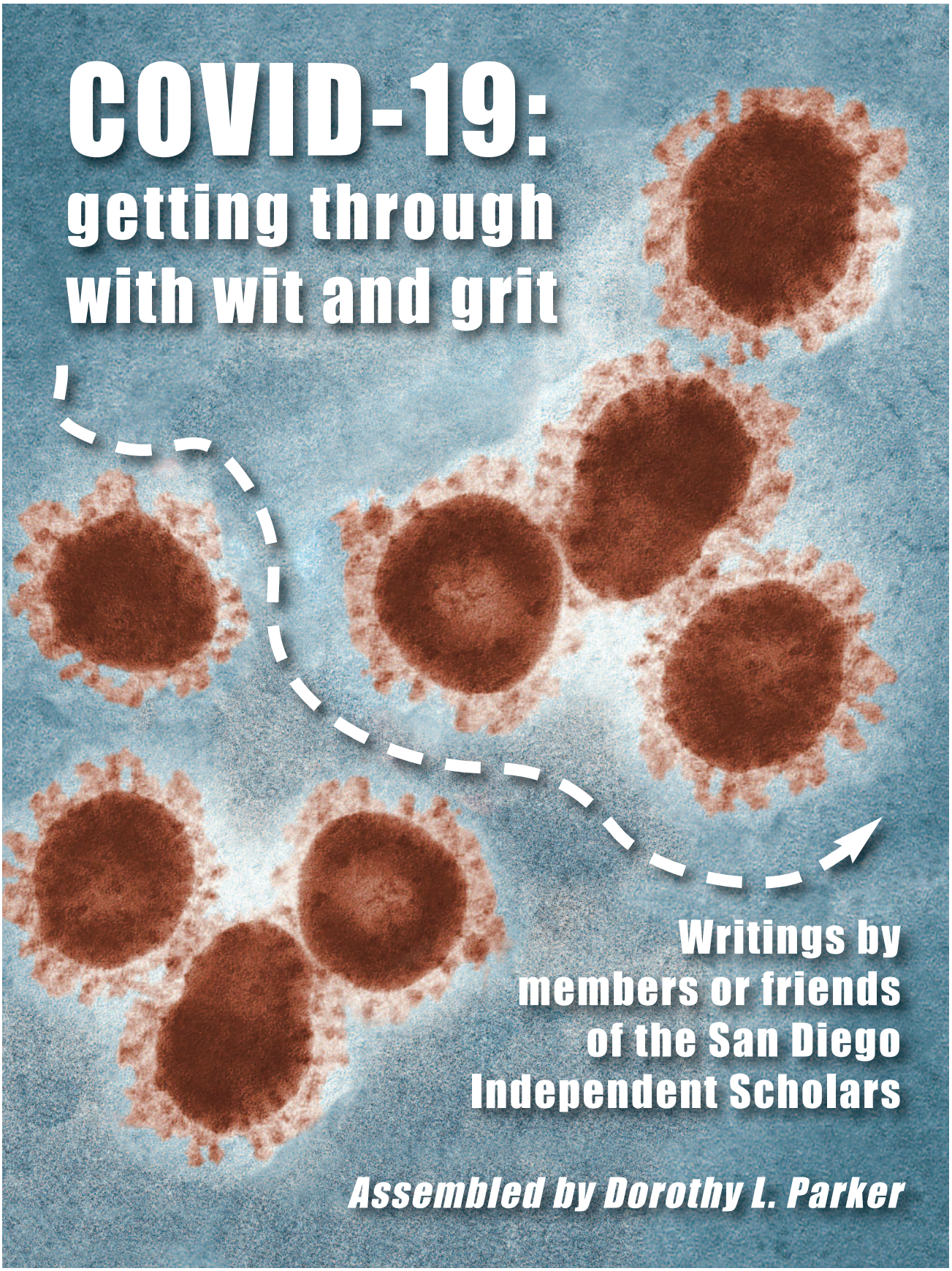

COVID-19:
getting through
with wit and grit
Writings by
members or friends
of the San Diego
Independent Scholars
Assembled by Dorothy L. Parker

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Contents

Introduction and Acknowledgments		v
Beaumont, Barbara	Perspectives from Several Continents	1
Cumming, Jack	Benefits of Crisis	3
Currie, Rigdon	Reaction to the Covid-19 Pandemic	6
Freidenfelds, Lara	During Covid, We Need to Grieve, Find Perspective and Seek Safe Connection…	8
Gilbert, Arlene	Flower Walks	10
	10 Things I've Learned During the Pandemic	11
	What? Me Cook?	12
Gilbert, Nina	Report from a Musical Gig Worker: Choirs in the Time of COVID-19	13
Girsh, Faye	COVID and our Morocco Trip	16
Glick, Robert	Microcosm	20
	Harmony	21
Groseil, Yvonne	Dark Days	22
Hillgarth, Nigella	Backyard Birding	24
Holt, Linda	Letter to Princeton Research Forum	27
Horwitz, Gerry	Hello, Virus	29
Knauss, Kevin	Covid Hiking Break	30
Krauss, Kenneth	Six Plaguing Pieces in the Shape of a Poem	
	Villanelle	32
	Unheroic Couplets in Plague Time	33
	Sestina: Primo Lazaretto	34
	Notes by a Shut-in...	35
	The Shriek of the Sheltering Shopper	36
	On Endings and Beginnings	37
Liden, Inga	Two Differing Stages of the Pandemic	
	May 2020	38
	September 2020	39

Mahadeva, Vidur	Medical "Go bag" for COVID-19	42
Mokashi, Ashwini	Ancient Wisdom Leads to Happiness In the Time of Covid-19	45
Norris, Teresa	My Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic	46
Offer, Judith	Three Poems	
	Pandemic	49
	You Can Be Whatever You Want…	50
	Gone Batty	51
Oselett, Nanette	Underwater Photography Meets Weak Generative Computer Art	52
Parker, Christopher	Covid-19: 2020 Personal Chronicle	54
Parker, David	When Social Distancing Almost Caused Tragedy	59
Parker, Dorothy	Coronavirus-induced Computer Dependency Disorder	62
Pollak, Oliver	Pandemics and the Longue Durée	65
Rose, Beatrice	Lockdown Thoughts	71
Sage, Michael	Plagues in Ancient Greece and Rome	72
Signoret-Paar, Kim	Photography as Solace in a Pandemic (With photographs by Barbara Bank, Liz Bonkowsky, Martha Dennis, Nancy Groves, Janet Goff, Nigella Hillgarth, Thespine Kavoulakis, Ursula Moede, and Kim Signoret-Paar)	76
Swaim, Jill	A Travel Leader's View of Covid-19	77
Vakilian, Tiffany	Nine Months of 2020	79
Wills, Christopher & Liz	Monarch Butterflies as Therapy for Covid-19	81

Appendix

Nicholas, Randall	Plague Journal 2020	83-112

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, along with the first "stay at home" orders because of COVID-19 in California, the San Diego Independent Scholars (SDIS) asked a question: "What could we, as a group, do to support each other during extended periods of lockdown, so that we would have the strength to follow physical isolation guidelines, help limit the spread of virus, and minimize deaths?"

Strengthening communication among ourselves and with others seemed a key to this goal. Although implementing virtual meetings helped, we rapidly realized that certain meaningful experiences and thoughts cannot be adequately conveyed over the internet, even with newfangled programs.

We therefore have also turned to the more traditional method of exchanging written descriptions of our impressions, problems, and solutions during the pandemic. The resulting booklet refers to events between mid-March and the first day of October 2020. We hope that it can serve as: (a) a historical record of individual experiences during the unusual year of 2020 and (b) a means of focusing and sharpening our own understanding of both our and others' reactions to this crisis.

This anthology contains 31 sections that are organized in alphabetical order by the primary author's last name. Assigning a topic to a piece is difficult because many authors consider several issues, sometimes in one essay and sometimes in multiple ones. It is possible, nonetheless, to find themes that appear in several works, as attempted below.

Let us begin with the broad perspective. Linda Holt discusses the origin of the word "pandemic" and ponders what that etymology means for the current situation. In *Pandemics and the Longue Durée*, Oliver Pollak describes a series of major "Natural and Manmade Population Catastrophes," starting with the Antonine Plague of 165 (perhaps smallpox) and continuing through more than a dozen instances of bubonic plague, cholera, influenza, or HIV before ending with Coronavirus. Michael Sage (*Plagues of Ancient Greece and Rome*) discusses how stories in the *Iliad* illustrate ancient beliefs regarding plagues and how additional insights can be obtained from detailed records of the war between Athens and Sparta during 431-404 BC. Pertinent thinking of ancient philosophers is emphasized by Ashwini Mokashi in *Ancient Wisdom Leads to Happiness in the Time of Covid-19*.

Jill Swaim recounts how the death of her great grandmother in 1918 from Spanish Flu affected her family. Regarding polio in the 1940's, Kenneth Krauss composed *Primo Lazaretto*, which he dedicated to his older sister, who cared for him in their quarantined home when his polio-stricken brother, accompanied by his mother, went to the hospital.

Another poem by Krauss -- the sonnet *On Endings and Beginnings* – contemplates historical cycles and the changes that follow major calamities. This topic also interests Jack Cumming, who proposes that the increased prevalence of virtual communication, including telecommuting, and decreased automobile usage forced by the pandemic will persist into the future and trigger positive societal adaptions (*Benefits of Change*).

Not everyone is equally optimistic about the advantages of increased technological, as opposed to in-person, interaction – or at least finds humor in it. These tongue-in-cheek

misgivings are expounded in *Coronavirus-induced Computer Dependency Disorder* by Dorothy Parker and *Ten Things I Have Learned from the Pandemic* by Arlene Gilbert.

Although most essays in this compendium pertain to California, Yvonne Groseil vividly portrays the *Dark Days* of the first Coronavirus surge in New York. Barbara Beaumont, who lived in France for 16 years and only recently moved here, contrasts American attitudes with those in Europe and Asia. Jill Swaim gives the example of her husband, who was trapped in Cambodia at the beginning of the pandemic, still remains there, and enjoys a life much less threatened by Coronavirus than ours. Faye Girsh recounts her eventual success in obtaining a flight out of Morocco after it shut down from the pandemic, as well as events in Morocco and during air travel, when masks were still rarely used.

A common underpinning of many pieces is fear -- of infection, of its lingering after-effects, of dying alone, of seeing others die *en masse*, of encountering persons without masks, of overcrowded hospitals, of societal collapse.

Nonetheless, like many Californians and especially privileged ones, most authors had not contracted COVID-19 themselves at the time of writing. A notable exception was Vidur Mahadeva, MD, whose medical practice serves largely uninsured or underinsured low-income workers in Reno, Nevada. Despite suffering two months of illness, Dr. Mahadeva devised a simple "go bag" and telemedicine strategy that constantly monitored patients at home and brought severe cases to the hospital as needed.

Loss of livelihood was most prevalent for the younger authors here. For example, Nina Gilbert suffered a greatly reduced schedule as a gig-working musician and explains the problems faced by community choirs or stage productions. Jill Swaim lost her beloved job as a tour guide. She fears for the survival of non-profit travel programs like Road Scholar.

Christopher Parker describes how he stepped up to help with the activities of his Special Needs brother, whose adult daycare school was closed because of COVID-19, a situation similar to that of parents whose children are enrolled in online education but who must still work while supervising family members. Parker, who had already telecommuted for 8 years, also provided reactions and advice for others who have begun doing so only recently.

In *During Covid, We Need to Grieve, Find Perspective, and Seek Safe Connection and Fulfillment*, Lara Freidenfelds applies her experience in handling chronic illness to the management of stress during COVID-19. Similarly, Randall Nicolas weaves the themes of progressive illness and COVID-19 into the set of 28 poems comprising *Plague Journal.* Teresa Norris, knowing that she would be home-bound anyway, utilized the isolation time to recuperate from knee surgery.

Beatrice Rose, a wise 105 years old, unflinchingly meets the issues of pandemic- and age-related isolation in *Lockdown Thoughts*. She describes how being alone since early February 2020 has given her time to be present with her thoughts, allowing her to explore and understand them. In *Hello Virus*, Gerry Horwitz, another long-time SDIS member, also looks inward. She compares the situation of America in 2020 to being on a "Bridge Over Troubled (Roiling) Waters" [apologies to Simon & Garfunkel] for which the end is uncertain, partly because of infection-related anxieties and partly because of social disparity and unrest. On the other end of the age spectrum, Tiffany Vakilian expresses both the personal and public concerns of a pregnant woman and new mother, in her poem *Nine Months of 2020*.

Social instability and differing cultural attitudes are the focus of poems by Judith Offer, especially: *All Gone Batty* and *You Can Be Whatever You Want in the U.S. of A.* Those issues also dominate in some of Kenneth Krauss' poems, such as *Unheroic Couplets in Plague Time,* as well as *Notes by a Shut-In on the Final Night of the Publicans' Irrational Contention*.

Especially noteworthy is the variety of often ingenious adaptions used to find emotional nourishment during this sad time. These endeavors often involved being absorbed in the creation of art, as with Robert Glick's painting *Harmony*, accompanied by the poem *Microcosm.* While playing with her computer during quiet days of the pandemic, Nanette Oselett discovered a way to convert her underwater photographs into striking pieces of abstract art, shown in *Underwater Photography Meets Weak Generative AI.*

In several cases, the restorative power of ongoing natural cycles was an important component of writings that also contained arresting photographs. For example, Nigella Hillgarth took charming head shot portraits, in-flight closeups and other views of migrating or resident birds that frequented her garden (*Yard Birding*). Liz and Christopher Wills, who planted milkweeds in their yard to provide habitat for Monarch butterflies, produced a detailed video of all stages of that butterfly's development and include an accompanying description of Monarch migration patterns (*Monarch Butterflies as Therapy for Covid-19)*. Rigdon Currie organized an extensive collection of travel and nature videos, placing them on the web with a public link listed in his *Reaction to the Covid-19 Pandemic.*

However, the "return to nature" strategy did not always end as expected. When David Parker and his wife Dorothy sought virus-free solitude on a wilderness camping trip, David lost his way on a challenging trail and had to spend a chilly night alone without shelter in harsh wilderness (*When Social Distancing Almost Caused Tragedy)*. In another incident, Kevin Knauss became disoriented after smoke obscured a mountain trail; he endured some hair-raising moments before finding his way back to the trailhead (*Covid Hiking Break*).

Others chose strolls in their own neighborhoods, where they observed previously unnoticed flowers and sights, as in *Flower Walks* by Arlene Gilbert. Inga Liden noted many striking features of nearby streets but was particularly taken by how considerate passersby were in early phases of the pandemic, when they wore masks and shared greetings while stepping out of the way of others, but how some had become more slipshod by September.

Members of a cellphone photography group led by Kim Signoret-Paar captured snapshots of items inside their homes or along nearby streets, met by Zoom to view each other's creations, and eventually combined several photos into a collage that accompanies *Cellphone Photography as Solace in a Pandemic*. Contributors to that collage are Barbara Bank, Liz Bonkowsky, Martha Dennis, Janet Goff, Nancy Groves, Nigella Hillgarth, Thespine Kavoulakis, Ursula Moede and Kim Signoret-Paar. The cooperative spirit of that collage represents the group feeling that we have tried to engender in assembling this anthology. Its description therefore brings this introductory summary to full circle and a close.

The successful completion of this project required the imagination and sustained effort of many people. I especially wish to thank all participating authors for their patience with my frequent emails and for providing such artfully written, interesting copy. Gail Bamber generously contributed her professional artistic skill in designing the book cover and suggesting how best to translate the title's meaning into visual symbolism. Jill Hansen and David Parker suffered many hours of careful proofreading, attending to details and

bloopers that most of us would have missed. The booklet's advisory committee (John Alexander, Arlene Gilbert, Gerry Horwitz, and Kenneth Krauss) and the SDIS Board (Donald Bamber, Joan Casale, Edwina Curtis, Alvin Halpern, Jill Hansen, Barbara Heckler, Kenneth Krauss, David Parker, and Thomas Samaras), as well as NCV liaison Inga Liden, endured endless discussions and phone calls, especially in the beginning when this initiative might have taken several different directions. Later on, Jack Cumming stepped in with stimulating procedural and technical advice. Kim Signoret-Paar and Nigella Hillgarth helped with questions regarding photographic resolution and other issues. Thank you. Without any one of you, this project would have foundered!

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS), and each of its constituent partner groups boosted this project by mentioning it in their newsletters, inviting their members to contribute pieces, and generally offering encouragement. Special thanks to Amanda Haste (President of NCIS), Barbara Williams Ellertson (NCIS Partner Group Liaison), Yvonne Groseil (NCIS Membership Officer), Linda Holt (President of the Princeton Research Forum, PRF), Karen Reeds (Newsletter Editor of PRF), Margaret DeLacy (President of the Northwest Independent Scholars Association, Oregon and Washington), Ann Harlow (President of the Institute for Historical Study, Berkeley, CA), Shirley Randell (President of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia), Lucy Brusic (President of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum), and Linda Baines (President of the Forum for Independent Research Endeavours, United Kingdom). It is indeed a pleasure to interact with such vibrant Independent Scholar communities worldwide.

We send our appreciation to the UC San Diego Oceanids, as well as North County Village. We are fortunate to have these organizations as friends who have cooperated with us in many endeavors, including this booklet.

We hope that you will enjoy this small attempt to document the 2020 pandemic.

Keep learning. Act wisely. Stay safe and well.

Dorothy L. Parker, San Diego, December 2020

Perspectives from Several Continents

by Barbara Beaumont

In March of 2020, most Americans' lives came to a screeching halt. The virus that we'd heard was killing people in China suddenly came to our attention as we learned that it had arrived here. I was proud to be a Californian when Governor Newsom was the first to order a lockdown, yet we all assumed it would be short term. Little did we know of all the problems we would have.

First, there was the chronic underfunding of public health in the country, which meant that we were starting from behind. There was the fact that "an estimated 5.4 million American workers lost their health insurance between February and May, according to a new study" (Time magazine). Then there was a complete lack of national strategy on how to deal with the virus. Sadly, the U.S. disbanded its pandemic response unit in 2018. It would have helped.

There was chronic underfunding of public health in this country.

The need to convince everyone to wear a mask outside of their home suffered a blow when our President refused to wear one and indicated that he thinks masks are for wimps, and a sign of weakness.

It's interesting that in East Asian countries people always wear masks if they have a cold or respiratory illness – to protect others. In fact, Hong Kong had huge success because 97 percent of Hong Kong residents wore them. (The city gave them away for free.) Hong Kong closed their Disneyland in response to 52 new cases; in Orlando where there are many more cases, Disneyland is open.

That makes me think of Western European countries (such as the one I lived in) where people are used to taking directions from the government – in return for all the benefits they gain. Some did better than others, but all did better than we have done to date. Of course, they all have universal health care.

In Asia, where education is highly emphasized, they counted on expertise to tell them how to deal with this. (The vice president of Taiwan happened to be an epidemiologist.) They did very well. Early intervention and quarantines were the key, along with rules for social distancing.

Based on Asia, early intervention is the key — so are painstaking tracking, enforced quarantines and meticulous social distancing — all coordinated by a leadership willing to act fast and be transparent.

The countries that have done the worst (ours included) relied on gut instinct. We created a panel of experts to advise us and then began to criticize them. We waited far too long to inform the public, and when we did there were many mixed messages. Rules vary from state to state and there is no clear Federal response.

It looks like we will be living with the virus for a long time.

The Author. Barbara Beaumont has returned to San Diego after 17 years living in the south of France. She is a graduate of the College of William and Mary in Virginia where she majored in sociology and then did graduate work at the University of Hawaii. She earned the credential to teach ESL at UC San Diego. In France she taught English for the Court of Appeals in Aix-en-Provence, with private students and in several companies. She most recently worked with foreign students at UC San Diego.

The essay above was sent to SDIS in August of 2020. © Barbara Beaumont

Benefits of Crisis

by Jack Cumming

Late in 2019, the world found itself facing the potential of a pandemic. By early March 2020 it was evident that the pandemic was spiraling out of control. Scientists recommended isolating people to reduce the risk of contagion. It seemed clear to them, early on, that the contagion potential of the new pandemic virus was beyond what a normal flu might unleash. Moreover, unlike the flu, there was no vaccine to protect the population from the new virus.

The Crisis.

The virus was quickly identified as a coronavirus. Soon the health authorities had given it a specific name, COVID-19. The term "COVID" denoted "coronavirus disease" and the 19 referred to the year 2019 in which it had first manifested itself. Scientists realized that they had to respond quickly to this developing contagion lest the entire global population be adversely impacted. In the United States, this led to the lockdown of many cities.

Because the elderly are particularly susceptible to the disease, the lockdown has affected that age demographic more than any other. This led to widespread loss of life and to a growing sense of isolation among the most vulnerable population. In summary, the impact of the virus has been grim.

The economic impact of the lockdown has been dramatic. Still, there is much positive that is resulting from the response to the crisis. In fact, as a rule, crises create a climate in which cultural evolution is accelerated with positive results. It's hard to understand why that might be. Most likely, however, is the fact that the changed circumstances – the lockdown in the case of COVID-19 – open people's minds to accepting change.

Openness to Change.

Most of the time, most people are resistant to change. The resistance to change increases with advancing age. Where young people see positive prospects in progress, the old people may feel that they are becoming less relevant and, therefore, unneeded. It's not surprising, therefore, that most entrepreneurs tend to be young. It's also not surprising that old people often yearn for the good old days.

The COVID-19 crisis is unlikely to be any different from earlier crises. For example, the crisis of World War II led indirectly to the proliferation of the single-family home through ventures such as Levittown, as it led more directly to dramatic new advances in scientific medicine and the unleashing of a source of energy like none the world had ever seen.

Growing Tolerance.

The physical dislocation of World War II may also have led to a new acceptance and respect for alternative cultures, ethnicities, and practices among people who otherwise might have lived out their full lives within a narrow geographic compass. That new intercultural tolerance may have been one of the factors allowing the civil rights movement to catch hold during the 1960s.

Now we are facing another crisis not unlike the earlier crisis of World War II. We are already seeing an acceleration of change brought about by this crisis. For instance, many people have now learned how to use virtual conferencing platforms. That new literacy, called by some "Zoom literacy," will enable much more efficient learning and gathering opportunities. It's unlikely that this will be discontinued once the fear generated by the virus has faded.

Impact on Housing.

Other changes are more difficult to foresee. For instance, housing, which we've already noted was dramatically changed as a result of World War II, is likely to change again. In the years between World War II and the COVID-19 crisis we've seen a great increase in the number of two-earner families. People no longer have the time and leisure to prepare elaborate dinners, to do housekeeping, or to provide at home childcare. The need for childcare has long been evident. The response has been slow in coming.

It's likely now, though, that new housing models will evolve which incorporate childcare in a collective living environment. This is quite a departure from the social isolation of the single-family home. In a multifamily, collective living situation, children can readily find their playmates within the neighborhood of the collective living community. That is positive. Imagine play dates that don't require a parent to drive.

Integrated Living.

If we continue to consider how this collective living (Integrated Living) environment might develop, we can well envision communities in which food services are readily available on the premises. Already many corporate working environments include employee cafeterias on their premises. Those workers who are able to grab their lunch without having to leave their worksite would also be well served to have similar food service opportunities available to them at home. One can picture restoring the traditional family dinner with everyone eating gathering at the family table to share takeout from the eateries included in their living community.

That could be a good beginning. It still leaves open, however, the challenge of healthcare. If a healthcare program can be built into the collective living neighborhood then the two-earner family can rest assured knowing that sick childcare can be readily available on the premises. Moreover, the physicians and other health workers serving the local community can get to know the residents in a way that is not possible today with the quick-in-and-out visit model that has characterized healthcare in the latter decades of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st. Relationship Medicine can result in a healthier population at lower cost than what we have experienced heretofore.

Automobile Dependence.

Thus, one of the changes that might be accelerated by the COVID 19 crisis is the possibility of integrated living. The single-family home concept of suburbs was made possible by the automobile. Returning veterans from World War II, settled easily into the idyll of suburban life. Homes tended to be located in land plots removed from shopping and from work.

Now we have come to see that the automobile has been a mixed blessing. The roads, driveways, parking lots, and more consume our land and dominate our lives. Collective living, integrating services to empower those who choose that form of life reduces dependence on the automobile, helps the environment, and eliminates many of the hassles of today's living models. It can also promote a healthier lifestyle.

Crystal Ball.

Will these changes be the consequence of the current crisis? No one can foresee how the future will eventuate. Much of this will require the vision and resources of entrepreneurial thinking backed by smart capital investment. Still, past major crises like COVID-19 have accelerated change for the better. We can expect that the world ten years from now will be stronger than it might otherwise have been because we have been opened to the possibility of change by the necessities of our response to this crisis.

The author. Jack Cumming lives in Carlsbad, CA. He is an actuary by examination and vocation and was educated as an historian at Princeton and New York Universities. He has also qualified by examination as a Certified Aging Services Professional.

He is a member of San Diego Independent Scholars and participates in discussions with the National Coalition of Independent Scholars. Mr. Cumming publishes regularly, primarily on topics affecting the senior living industry and the lives of older Americans.

The essay above was sent to SDIS in August of 2020. © J.B. Cumming

Reaction to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Rigdon Currie

It took a couple of weeks for the impact of the pandemic to hit me. I had concluded that I could weather a disease like this. I felt that a vaccine would be forthcoming promptly, as it had every fall with a flu vaccine.

I finally woke up in early March when the reality of this potentially deadly epidemic hit me, particularly when I discovered that my age would affect my and my wife Trish's vulnerability so profoundly. When ordered to self-quarantine, we promptly did so. As family purchasing agent, I was pretty well prepared with most items. Neighbors, even unknown ones, came to our aid and brought us essential groceries.

We adapted quickly and began to enjoy our isolation. I jumped at an opportunity to edit my travel videos, some of which had been lying around for years. I hired a recent graduate from San Diego State University whose work was familiar to me. Together we published several video records of birding trips I had made around the world. It is questionable whether I will be able to take more of these trips but now, at least, I have records of almost all of the ones I have taken. These travel logs are available to the public and have had over 200,000 hits thus far on my YouTube Channel: (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4JVuogvAkBKQ8Q_GtOa).

We also edited several video programs of family events and trips and I posted these on my YouTube channel. They are not public but can be seen by anyone I give the link to.

I missed my three YMCA Light Exercise ("dance") classes, and it was several weeks before I found out about a Zoom class bring conducted by Sue Grant, one of my favorite Y leaders. That class has gone very well. I also arranged to do home physical therapy via Apple FaceTime sessions with my favorite therapist. As my therapist and I became more trusting, I have started to go in for hands-on sessions. Walking our dog Dudley every day has completed my exercise needs.

- I jumped at the opportunity to edit my travel and birdwatching videos.
- I spent more time communicating with new and old friends.
- I became more active with neighbors.

I spend more time communicating with new and old friends, mainly by email. This has been a particularly rewarding payoff from the pandemic. The use of Zoom has also brought us closer to many with whom we would not have spent so much time, a real plus.

We have become more active with our neighbors. I organized a physically distanced get-together in our street every Saturday evening and it has become a regular and pleasant event for several of us. I now know several neighbors in a way that would not have happened without this cursed virus.

Last, I have limited my birding activities to chasing birds that I have not seen in California previously. Since my California list is over 500 species, these are few and far between but most rewarding.

The author. Rigdon Currie resides in Carlsbad, CA. Education: BIE, GA Tech, 1951; MBA Harvard, 1956; Aspen Institute of Humanities, several seminars; Military: Captain, USAF Reserve, Korean War; Career: pioneer in digital technology, real-time, internet; TRW, Xerox Corporation, independent venture capitalist and consultant; Volunteer: politics; church; conservation; community; disadvantaged.

This piece was sent to SDIS in September of 2020. © Rigdon Currie.

During Covid, We Need to Grieve, Find Perspective, and Seek Safe Connection and Fulfillment

I wrote this letter to the editor of my local newspaper after my community experienced a Covid outbreak from a teen party, resulting in a school closure and much acrimony.

Lara Freidenfelds

To the Editor:

This has been a difficult year. Even those of us who have not lost family and friends to Covid are grieving: this year we have lost beloved traditions, from prom to in-person religious services to the opening of the fall sports season. Our expectations for what is normal and right in our lives have been upended.

Grieving involves sadness, but also anger and denial. It is tempting to ignore Covid so long as it hasn't affected us personally. But right now, denial is dangerous for our community. We need to find ways to acknowledge our losses and grieve without putting our community at risk with unprotected social gatherings that will make us feel "normal" only until community members become gravely ill or die from Covid.

I really feel for the young people who are facing the shock and disappointment of high school and college experiences that are a pale imitation of what we have promised them. My life was upended when I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age 25, and I vividly recall the shock at having my expectations for my life shaken so dramatically and abruptly. I was newly engaged and in my first year of grad school. I had done everything "right" to have a happy life, and then this terrible disease dropped from the blue. My fiancé (now husband) and I cried and prayed a great deal.

Here is what saved me.

First, I allowed myself to grieve. The loss was real and pretending otherwise would not have been fair to myself.

Second, I reached outside myself for some perspective. For me, this meant reminding myself that my grandparents were war refugees. They had survived and built a new life. Compared with their suffering, even with this illness my life was manageable.

Third, I decided to focus on what I *could* do and *did* have rather than what I could not. I stopped comparing my life to my old expectations and focused on what was in front of me. I used to say that my dream was to become President of Harvard. Now I focused on each day: was I doing something that I found fulfilling and that I believed would make the world a better place? Did I build relationships with family and friends? It didn't matter how much I

was able to accomplish on a given day, so long as I spent some time on positive projects and relationships.

I hope we will all support our fellow Chatham community members to find safe ways to grieve what we have lost in this difficult year and to find some good in each day. This will unfortunately not be a good year for big parties (which I love, and I am sad with you). But can it be a good year for fortifying deep relationships with a few close friends? We can be creative about supporting the fulfilling things we can still do this year, for example, investing in fire pits and outdoor heat lamps for small outdoor gatherings into the fall and winter. This is also a good year to get a great winter coat, hat, and scarf and find some trails to hike with friends when the weather gets too chilly to sit outside. I hope that together we can seek the things we *can* do safely to build community and support each other through this strange and challenging time.

[Reprinted from https://www.larafreidenfelds.com/ September 23, 2020 post]

The author. Lara Freidenfelds, Ph.D., is a historian of health, reproduction, and parenting in America. She holds a doctorate in history of science and a bachelor's degree in social anthropology from Harvard University. Her second book, *The Myth of the Perfect Pregnancy: A History of Miscarriage in America*, was published by Oxford University Press in January of 2020. Her first book, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century America*, was awarded the Emily Toth Prize for Best Book in Women's Studies from the Popular Culture/American Culture Association. In addition to writing books, she blogs with the historian's perspective on childbearing, parenting, health, and disability as a regular contributor to the peer-reviewed blog Nursing Clio. Lara lives in Chatham, NJ and is a member of the Princeton Research Forum, a branch of the National Coalition of Independent Scholars.

THE WALKS -- by Arlene Gilbert

The Pandemic made me a pedestrian--a lone walker who sometimes talks to flowers. Deprived of the ability to drive to shops and theatres, and needing some exercise, I took to long walks every other day.

I've come to know the neighborhood streets. And I can identify which are the widest, well-kept plazas, and which are through paths to other main streets. The switch from "driver" to "pedestrian" is life-changing. You are suddenly part of an evolving, growing universe that begs you to pay attention.

Costa Verde Boulevard (CVB), where I live at the Vi, is home for many singles and young couples who live in the multi-story towers. From my home, north on CVB, it's about a quarter mile to La Jolla Village Drive, if you go straight. If you take "long-cuts," as I do, it's more than half a mile . On both sides of the street, owners of the high rises have planted flowering bushes and trees. There are also winding paths for residents, and walkers like me.

THE FLOWERS



← What I found most exciting was the progression of bloom. I felt almost possessive about the flowers in my path. Each week, there would be something new. The flower to the left is a budding magnolia, soon to open -- see below.*



← This blue flower has a glamorous name: Lily of the Nile. Native to South Africa, it thrives here, accommodating placement as a ground cover, reliably blooming perennially. Whether in bud, full bloom, or fading - it adds its blueness all along my walk.

The red star below is a Clivea, named for its designer. It is cheerful and abundant. I suspect we take this lovely lady for granted. But I try to remember to smile at her.



* Below is the full magnolia, in all its glory, highlighting one of the magnolia shade trees surrounding the entrance to the Vi. Sadly, however, the magnolia begins to wither as soon as it blooms; it has a short, sweet life.



Ten Things I've Learned During the Pandemic

by Arlene Gilbert

1) When you're wearing a hat and a mask, people don't know you haven't been to a hairdresser in months.

2) The New York Times crossword is easiest on Monday and hardest on Saturday. Same goes for the three in the Union-Tribune. (However... there are people who post all the answers on line....)

3) If your printer malfunctions when you're stuck indoors, it's not a good idea to turn it upside down. Next time, read the directions.

4) And related to number 3: glass cleaner is effective in removing printer ink from your hands.

5) Talking to inanimate objects is OK--just be selective. It's OK to talk to my stuffed frog, but not OK to talk to my refrigerator.

6) If your email stops working, it's not your fault. It could be the Russians. See the New York Times for May 28.

7) It's OK to experiment with food. Putting trail mix, nuts and chocolate into your morning cereal is perfectly acceptable.

8) Wasting time decorating your notebook filing system is satisfying. It also keeps your "to do now that I've got the time" list as long as ever.

9) In a pandemic, nobody knows you've stayed up all night reading. There's nowhere to go in the morning.

10) It's a good idea to make friends with people who know how to set up Zoom.

What? Me Cook?

by Arlene Gilbert

I hadn't cooked a meal since 2014, when I moved into the Vi at La Jolla Village. Of course, over the years, on some days and evenings, restaurant dining provided variety.

Then came the Pandemic, and day after day of Vi's cooking--which is actually quite good.

But I was getting bored. At one point my daughter, Nina, made a humanitarian trip with her splendid noodle pudding, pumpkin muffins, and chocolate chip biscotti.

Now the biscotti were gone and only two muffins remained. Things were getting desperate….but there were 4 over-ripe bananas in the refrigerator, and I'm here to share a wonderful recipe.

1) Mash those bananas.
2) Pour in just enough milk to aid in the mashing.
3) Add a large handful of cut up dried fruit and/or nuts (as you prefer).
4) Chop up four squares of a Trader Joe's Pound Plus chocolate bar and add to the mix.
5) Now spoon the mix into four or five 4-5 oz. freezer-safe dessert cups, and freeze….Makes a delicious substitute for ice cream, or lovely in itself.
6) Note: if frozen solid, like mine, just microwave for ten (10) seconds.

The author. Arlene Gilbert, a resident of San Diego, is a journalist with a strong interest in science. She is an active member of SDIS. Participating in SDIS is educational and stimulates creative thinking, along with participation with like-minded individuals.

These pieces were sent to SDIS in July and August 2020. © Arlene Gilbert

Report from a Musical Gig Worker: Choirs in the Time of COVID-19

Nina Gilbert

In February, I was music-directing two community theater productions (performing *Matilda* at Coronado Playhouse on weekends, and rehearsing *Big Fish* at Center Stage Productions in Escondido on Tuesdays and Thursdays); guest-conducting a community chorus on Mondays; playing accompaniments with a studio of flute students preparing for a recital; playing the piano on weekend afternoons for ballet students preparing for a visiting examiner; accompanying and coaching voice students at San Diego State (that is, helping them learn their music with appropriate phrasing and accurate diction in several languages, preparing for lessons, competitions, auditions, and recitals, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays); teaching piano and voice lessons; and music-directing at the Congregational Church of La Jolla (playing organ for Sunday worship, and directing choir rehearsals on Wednesdays or Thursdays as the choir graciously accommodated my weeknight schedule). I typed each commitment into two electronic calendars in my phone and set frequent alarms and reminders.

Matilda finished its run on February 23. Backstage between scenes we traded news and rumors about a mysterious disease beginning to spread.

The ballet students danced successfully for their visiting examiner on March 9. The examiner told us about other examiners whose trips to places like Singapore were being cancelled.

That week we heard announcements about groups of various sizes (250, eventually 50) being told not to gather. Thursday, March 12, we met *Big Fish* cast members at the door to our rehearsal studio and sent them home. Friday, March 13, everything else shut down or found a way to move online.

The examiner told us about other examiners whose trips to places like Singapore were being cancelled.

The following week, we learned the term "superspreader event" as applied to a choir rehearsal in Skagit County, Washington, where 53 of 61 participants developed COVID-19 and two of them died. Through spring and summer, we added layers of information about how the disease spreads—surfaces, droplets, aerosols—and tried to find safe ways for choirs to sing. We'd see a photo of singers carefully spaced six feet apart, possibly with Plexiglas shields, and think, They may be lucky so far—and they haven't read the latest epidemiological research about aerosols, ventilation, and even "toilet plume" (namely, even if your rehearsal space has MERV-13 filters and big open windows, the air and surfaces in the restroom can still be hazardous). Some people designed special "singers' masks" that made them look like giant ducks. Some researchers figured out that these masks didn't eliminate risk, though they certainly made people feel as if they were taking precautions.

People designed special "singers' masks" that made them look like giant ducks.

Some choirs are finding ways to meet outdoors—though my friends in Alaska acknowledge that this is not a long-term solution—as researchers offer data about

what direction people should face and how often the area needs to be vacated. Recently we have learned that louder singing and deeper breathing affect coronavirus transmission. And in September, the world again learned of a choir rehearsal, this time near Barcelona, where one singer infected 30 of 41 fellow members.

Artists are creative. How are choral organizations creatively meeting the challenge of coronavirus? The answer depends on the choir and its purpose.

Some community choirs are simply meeting socially via Zoom. That is, getting together for virtual coffee hours, without singing.

If you've tried to sing "Happy Birthday" (or anything else) together on a Zoom call, you know it doesn't work. It's not you, it's *latency*—the delay in transmitting sound makes it impossible to sing precisely together. If you have an exceptionally hi-tech situation, there is something called SoundJack that enables real-time collaboration in specialized contexts—for rehearsals, not audiences.

A colleague enjoyed guest-conducting choirs in Sweden, Canada, and New Zealand, all within one week.

If you've seen what looks like a choir singing together via Zoom, what you're seeing is a *virtual choir*. Each singer recorded himself or herself, carefully matching a guide track to stay in tune and in tempo, and a video engineer/ editor spent many, many hours compiling the result.

So how does a choir rehearse via Zoom?

Singers learn their notes independently. During rehearsal, everyone mutes except the director and perhaps a section leader. The director tells people what to sing. Everyone sings, self-evaluates, and lets the director know if they have questions. The director might listen to one singer. For online sectional rehearsals, I would invite participants to take turns "leading." That added variety, gave us a chance to repeat, and—my real reason—gave me a chance to listen to individuals without having them think they were being judged.

While this is generally a pretty hobbling way to run a musical ensemble, I have noticed a few advantages to online rehearsing. In one choir I visited, one singer was a Zumba teacher. She set up her camera in her studio and led an exhilarating physical warmup session at the beginning of the rehearsal. Choir members who have moved out of town can return virtually if the group meets online. And a colleague enjoyed guest-conducting choirs in Sweden, Canada, and New Zealand, all within one week.

Some choral organizations have enough technical expertise to rehearse in their cars. That is, everyone in the choir drives to a big parking lot, everyone gets a microphone, and an engineer among the choir members does something magical that enables everyone to hear each other through their car radios.

An engineer among the choir members does something magical that enables everyone to hear each other through their car radios.

Many of these choirs are church- or synagogue-connected. Some churches are livestreaming worship services either from their church building or from leaders' homes—clergy, musician, and possibly a vocal soloist. Some post services on YouTube, where people can watch them at any time, not just during an official livestream hour.

The church where I music-direct emails a worship-at-home packet ahead of

every Sunday during the pandemic: a PDF document with words and images, plus audio files with a sermon from the pastor, a song by a soloist (sometimes a hymn where we put music and lyrics in our PDF and encourage people to sing along), and my piano prelude and postlude.
Sometimes I pre-record an accompaniment for our soloist. If the song is more complicated, so is our process— she might send me a rough unaccompanied recording to listen to in my headset while recording a piano accompaniment precisely matched to her breaths and pauses, and then I send that back for her to record herself singing along.

What is my life like as a gigging musician in the time of COVID? I'm a pianist as well as conductor. I have recorded accompaniments for voice students' Zoom lessons and a cantor's chants for virtual Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. I send weekly uplifting emails to the church choir (we are not meeting, except for occasional church Zoom happy hours), with cheery photos of my culinary/homesteading adventures, including homegrown bean and vegetable sprouts and homemade spanakopita.

As a wonderful, nostalgic surprise, I have reconnected with students I taught as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya forty years ago. They're creating a virtual choir spanning three generations and four continents, and I'm recording some accompaniments and helping them find sheet music. Most charming was when they asked me to help re-find some Swahili lyrics that I had given them.

As of March 16, however, I no longer need my electronic calendars. The little boxes on my page-a-month paper calendar have more than enough room for any reminders I need.

The author. Nina Gilbert's background ranges from Kenya, where she translated Schubert's Mass in G into Swahili while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer, to Carnegie Hall (Associate Conductor, New York Choral Society), to Boston (Education Manager, Boston Lyric Opera). Her degrees are in music and conducting, from Princeton, Indiana, and Stanford. Nina has offered NPR commentaries on choral music, appeared on liberal and conservative talk radio as an expert on *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and lectured on the history and science of chocolate. She serves as music director for the Congregational Church of La Jolla, and freelances as a conductor, accompanist/coach and musical theater director. Nina is the daughter of SDIS member Arlene Gilbert.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September of 2020. © Nina Gilbert

COVID and our Morocco Trip

Faye Girsh

"Do you think we should chance it? I leave tomorrow so I guess we should make up our minds." It was March 9 and my daughter had called every night that week from Australia while we weighed the pros and cons of carrying out our plans to visit Morocco for 16 days. Ominous signs were coming from China. But a world virus seemed so unlikely that we decided on YES, we'll take a chance. I get to Marrakesh one day before Kamala does, and things might change. So— on March 10, I am off on my 7:45 AM from San Diego to Marrakesh via Newark and Geneva.



We had traveled together for the last five years — to the Camel Festival in Pushkar, India; to Papua New Guinea; a wonderful boat ride from Moscow to St Petersburg; last year to Ethiopia, and now to Morocco. I had booked a car and driver through a Moroccan tour agency with an agenda focused on Marrakesh and environs then a week in Fez — to return from Casablanca. Kamala's two sons are now in college, so she was ready to explore and I was happy for her company even though I was used to traveling alone. Only downside: she's a vegetarian. At my stops there were no indications of a forthcoming plague. No masks, no social distancing, busy airports, long lines, and crowded flights.



ADMAN, OUR GUIDE/DRIVER

Abdul, who met me at the modern airport, said nothing about problems and delivered me — though narrow streets with donkey carts and food stalls — to my Riad (small pension in an old house). I had a delicious dinner there, walked around enjoying the sights and sounds of the Medina and woke the next morning to the call to prayer from our local mosque.



The next day Abdul drove me back to the airport where we waited an hour for Kamala to arrive. It had been a year since I'd seen her so was scrutinizing every face out of the gate for her features. After our mother-child reunion when she did come through, she told me the airports were closing, flights were cancelled,



people were dying from this virus all over the world. I was incredulous and astonished when I realized she was suggesting that we would have to cut our trip short, find flights out, and maybe go back in a few days. NO WAY! Many years ago, I visited Morocco with Kamala's late father. My memories were of colors, exotic architecture, great food, lovely people, amazing things to buy. Though I had been to other parts of Morocco since then I had not visited Marrakesh and Fez for 30 years and was not about to turn around and leave!



Putting that question aside we had a delightful day exploring the shops, the markets, the mosques, and the people in the day, and winding up at the main square where we watched the African dancers and snake charmers. Streets and squares were packed with tourists.



The next day we drove to the Atlas Mountains where we watched the international trekkers outfit donkeys for climbing the mountains. We discovered the goats in trees that result in Argon oil and tasted the oil with almonds and honey.

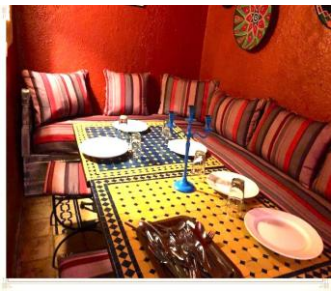
That night, back in Marrakesh, we enjoyed a spectacular show with Moroccan food, dancing and horseback displays. We were shocked to hear that this was the last night this legendary event would be open because of the virus. Even that night, sitting with a couple from Paris, we learned that half the reservations were not filled because people were leaving the city.



Undaunted, the next day Abdul drove us to the beautiful fishing village of Essaouira —full of tourists on the beach and boardwalk and in the narrow art-filled streets near our hotel.



I lunched on fresh-caught sardines in a charming outdoor cafe. But as we were enjoying the sun and the passing musicians the waiters were piling up the chairs anticipating closing the restaurant because of Covid. We dined in a delightful restaurant that night but it too was closing as we left.



By this time Kamala was beginning to convince me that there was a real possibility of closing the country — thus shortening our exploration of Fez — and maybe not getting a flight out. After a 4 hour wait on the phone, we were able to reach United, which changed my later reservation to one leaving in a few days through Toronto. No sooner than that was confirmed did we hear that Canada was closed. I had to find yet another flight. Kamala also had to wait on line to change her flight and was now going earlier through Dubai to Brisbane. A friend emailed me to check out a web site, Cranky Concierge, which will obtain hard to find tickets for a price. Yet more time on line was successful in reaching them and finding flights. I was crushed because there were so many more things I wanted to see, and we had 9 more paid days left. My flight insurance had already let me know that pandemics were not included in the policy.



We had one more day, so we wandered the now almost empty streets of the medina. Empty, that is, of tourists, but the Moroccans were still out buying bread and fresh fruit and veggies. All museums were closed and restaurants, which had been so bustling, were locked. It was fun to wander the empty streets.


High pressure carpet salesman

At one point we were followed by a friendly man on a bike, who seemed to be patiently leading us somewhere. The outcome was that Kamala was led to a carpet salesroom where she got the super-sales pitch, including mint tea — and bought a carpet.



We had a final dinner at our riad, where we were now the only guests. It was a delight to spend time with Mohammed who served us an interesting fruit and veggie tagine. He told us about his family and sang us a song in Arabic from his home town.



On March 17 Abdul drove us to the airport. He suggested we leave 4 hours before our flight to London because of the potential traffic. The airport was jammed with tourists leaving. It was a great breeding ground for the virus. We did indulge in a last lunch which happened to be Japanese, a cuisine we both enjoyed since we had lived in Kyoto for a year when Kamala was 13. Then we boarded our crowded flight to London. At that time mask-wearing was not even on the radar. We were blithely inhaling all viruses in the airports and on the planes.





At Heathrow we said our goodbyes. Kamala caught her flight to Dubai, and I had a lovely, clean rest at the airport hotel, albeit I had a hard time finding it, exhaustedly lugging my luggage (no wonder it's called "luggage"). The next day I flew to Los Angeles on an Air New Zealand flight. Fortunately, the plane was not crowded.

Knowing that the flight would arrive in L.A. around 10PM and the connecting flight to San Diego was hours later I had decided to come home by Uber, which I had done coming back from Uganda last year. I indulged again — for under $200. (BTW, my air fare for this and the last four trips was free because of accumulated frequent flyer miles on United.) We agreed that, though we had warning, we were glad we experienced the joys of this beautiful, exciting country and grateful we both stayed healthy.

The author. Faye Girsh is a retired clinical and forensic psychologist. For the past 33 years she has been involved in the right to die movement having served as President of the Hemlock Society USA and the World Federation of Right to Die Societies and founder of the Final Exit Network and the Hemlock Society of San Diego. The described trip was in March 2020. © Faye Girsh

MICROCOSM

by Robert Glick

This inhalation of mirrored atmosphere into a dark circulating pool of veins
Pulsed toward exotic shores inhabited by cannibals gnawing silently on impurities
Molded and expelled by self-membraned selves on the verge of asphyxiation
Cellular aspirations

Escaped in tiny ahhhs, amplified by a stethoscope eavesdropping on my neighborhood
Collective sighs of pain and pleasure, fear and satisfaction, intimate and covetous
Confessions of recycled souls, soiled and laundered over and over in an agitated attempt to
Consummate my replica

Copyright, Robert Glick, reprinted with author's permission from *Quantum Sense - How to Ally with Change, Growth, and Creativity,* 2019.

The author. Since graduating from Santa Clara University, Robert Glick has been fascinated by the human condition and forces that drive mindful change. His interest evolved into an exploration of the generative process of the universe, explained in his book: *Quantum Sense, How to Ally with Change, Growth, and Creativity*.

Robert began painting to discover ways in which language could coalesce with visual composition to achieve a higher form of expression. Much of Robert's work deals with the changing face of nature and the human condition. In 2007, Robert began mixing transformational elements such as fire, with more conventional mediums, such as oils, inks, and acrylics to create lasting impressions of transient nature. Given his reverence for all aspects of nature and his desire to celebrate life, in 2010 Robert began merging cremated ashes into memorial art to create posthumous monuments. He now divides his studio time between conventional and memorial commissions and championing ways to improve quality of life using the power of creativity. More information is at www.appreciationart.com and www.quantumsensation.com.

Next page: HARMONY, a painting by Robert Glick

HARMONY

by Robert Glick



© Robert Glick

Dark Days

By Yvonne Groseil

I want to talk about the bad days last March and April. The dark, cold, empty days. The nights when the city was so quiet that I couldn't sleep. The way people passed each other quickly, furtively aware, not the usual New York automatic glance, registering awareness absentmindedly.

Streets were empty. *The New York Times* reported later that 40% of the population in my zip code left the city. There was so little traffic that the ambulances rarely had to use their sirens-- often just a warning beep at the intersection instead of the usual howling siren heard from blocks away. No one stopped to chat on the street and people walked alone. Only essential stores, food markets and drugstores, were open and whole blocks had dark storefronts.

March is always gray in New York, but this was the grayest March I have ever seen, and I have lived in Manhattan all my life.

It was a time of figuring out the new normal every day, creating new habits. We learned to look down at the floor in the grocery store to see where one was supposed to stand. We wrapped a scarf around the face before going out—masks were scarce at first, then expensive ($10 for 5 blue paper disposable masks/one package to a customer.)

Whole aisles in the supermarkets and chain stores were bare. The entire row of frozen food cabinets in the largest local supermarket was empty. We joked about the scarcity of toilet paper and bought what we could find at any price ($2/roll for single-ply, only one to a customer).

Television gave us new dreadful numbers every day, deaths always going up. The news showed us ambulances pulling up at hospitals that had no room for the patients.

My friends and I shared our deepest fears: for one, it was the image of herself dying on a ventilator with no one to hold her hand; for another, it was watching on TV the preparation of graves for mass burials on Hart Island off the Bronx. I still shudder at the memory of the black body bags being stacked in the refrigerated trucks because the morgues were full.

Day by day, we figured it out by ourselves and with each other. Standing 6 feet apart became a habit, even waiting for the light on the street corner. As masks became available, most people wore them. We all listened to Governor Cuomo's news briefings. As he learned more about the best practices, he advised us about them. He never hid the numbers or tried to downplay the seriousness of the situation, but he made us each feel empowered to protect ourselves and others by our actions: masks and social distancing were our tools. The Governor showed true leadership as he enforced a quarantine at the first known hot spot in Westchester County and brought together the governors of neighboring states to develop common policies throughout the commuting area.

It is a lot better now. New York City has had more than a month with less that 1% positivity. The days are warm and sunny, and the sidewalks are busy. People are eating in the streets, at attractive little pavilions created by restaurants, and soon indoor dining at 25% of capacity will resume. Schools are reopening. People are relaxing, walking around in small groups. Masks have become a mere fashion accessory for some: worn under the chin, hanging from one ear, around the wrist, or carried in purse or pocket only because stores require them. Construction projects have resumed. There is traffic in the streets again: cars, trucks, buses and now more bikes and scooters than ever before. The normal steady background hum of the city is returning.

Many of us are still wearing masks and social distancing. I hope we can maintain this progress and never return to the dark days.

The author. Yvonne Groseil holds a PhD degree from the New School for Social Research. A lifelong New Yorker, she attended Hunter College High School and Barnard College. She has worked in retailing, publishing, and non-profit legal and academic associations. Yvonne has been active in community organizing, especially for tenants' rights. A Master's Degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) led to teaching undergraduates and graduate students at Hunter College, CUNY, where she was an adjunct assistant professor and an active member of the union, the Professional Staff Congress. Hobbies include gardening, photography, reading, and talking back to political programs on TV, as well as participating in the National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS). Her current research is on US public responses to the covid pandemic, as well as continuing work on women's organizations and historic home preservation.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September of 2020. © Yvonne Groseil

Yard Birding During the Pandemic

By Nigella Hillgarth

During this pandemic I have spent time studying the birds in our yard. I decided to keep a photographic diary of the different species that use the garden. By doing so I got to know individuals really well and also recorded the natural rhythm of the bird community over the seasons. I found it enormously comforting to see nature flourishing in the midst of so much uncertainty and I wanted to share some of the birds with you.

When lockdown started in March, the yellow-rumped warblers were still here with our year-round residents, including the hummingbirds, the orange-crowned warblers, black phoebes and the song sparrows. I decided to put up more bird-feeders to entice species that don't normally come into the yard to move closer.



Black Phoebe



Mourning Dove

I would get occasional glimpses of lesser goldfinches, house finches and mourning doves, and so I put up a platform bird-feeder with mixed birdseed. I knew the house finches and doves would come flocking. They quickly found the feeder.

Male House Finch ➔



I could sit on the couch and study the different colors of the male house finches and even some of the females that are brightly colored.



Young male Lesser Goldfinch

I also wanted to encourage the subtly colored lesser goldfinches, but I waited before I bought Nyjer seed for them. That was because I committed the gardening crime of allowing the milk thistles to flourish and go to seed in order to attract the goldfinches. It was a joy to watch them as I sat on the couch a few feet away and I could study their delicate plumage, and the dexterous way in which they plucked seeds from the flower heads and devoured them ferociously.

Yard birding really helped to take my mind off the realization of the seriousness of COVID-19, and that, even though official lockdown might end, isolation may continue in many ways for a long time to come. Birds gave me great comfort and joy during this time - especially when spring migration began. It was such an affirmation to see birds coming through as migration got underway. One morning such delight as a warbling vireo decided to spend the morning in our yard!





Later the excitement of watching orange-crowned warblers darting in and out of the flowers looking for insects and following the insistent piercing cheap of their fledglings demanding to be fed.

Also, one morning hearing again the sharp tac-tac sound of the hooded orioles announcing their return and seeing the beautiful male with bright yellow and black plumage taking a quick drink at the hummingbird feeder by the front door. Later, as the summer progressed, watching the foolish antics of the oriole juveniles as they explored and played in the yard.



The garden is quiet now with just the resident birds left but Fall migration is underway and who knows what birds may visit! This week a migrating Townsend warbler took a bath a few feet from me and a Wilson's warbler flew by. Nature continues to bring me hope and nurture in this extraordinarily difficult time.



The author. Nigella Hillgarth is a biologist, environmental advocate and photographer concerned with the impacts of climate change on ocean and coastal ecosystems. Nigella is a founding member of Ocean Collectiv – solutions for a healthy ocean. She was the 2019 Climate Art Fellow at the Center for Climate Change Impact and Adaptation at Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Previously, as President & Chief Executive Officer of the New England Aquarium, she raised the profile of the Aquarium's global conservation and research work by founding the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life in June 2016, as well as developing a vision for the future of the Aquarium and surrounding Boston waterfront.

Earlier Nigella Hillgarth was Executive Director of the Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego where she produced the first major exhibit on climate change on the West Coast. Nigella was born in Ireland and received her Bachelor's degree in Zoology from Oxford University in the UK as well as her Ph.D in Evolutionary Biology. She has conducted research on behavioral ecology and evolution in birds in many parts of the world including the United States, Britain, India, Thailand, the Arctic and South America.

These photos were taken in the summer or early fall of 2020. © Nigella Hillgarth

[Linda Holt's Letter from the President of the Princeton Research Forum was originally published in the *PRF Newsletter*, Winter-Spring 2020: http://www.princetonresearchforum.org/newsletters.shtml]

Dear Colleagues,

Hello and greetings, during this period of Covid19 pandemic. I hope you are doing well, staying cheerful, and continuing to do good work. On a positive note, I don't think I've ever seen and heard so many operas in such a short time!

I'd like to share with you some informal findings, not about the science of viral contagion, but about the literary source of the word *pandemic* which has struck fear (and justly so) in so many hearts.

Etymologically, the word is not as sinister as the condition it recalls. *Pandemic* derives from the Greek, *pan* meaning all and *demos* referring to people. All the people. People everywhere. In sickness, in health, and somewhere in between.

While the word *pandemic* picked up disease-related connotations in the Middle Ages, home of some of the worst plagues in recorded history, the roots of the term could just as easily apply to other conditions and circumstances. What if we had a pandemic of peace? A pandemic of justice? Imagine, difficult though it may be, a pandemic of listening to each other with understanding.

The past few months have been unprecedented in the history of our country, perhaps in the world. We have become accustomed to seeing the daily statistics on TV, computer, and cellphone screens. It was a black day indeed last month when the number of Covid-19 related deaths in the United States surpassed 100,000, and then, in a matter of hours, climbed up another thousand and still rising.

If we never thought about *pan* and *demos* before, the period between mid-March 2020 and now has changed that forever. Each of us has a personal story to tell relating to the emergence and spread of a novel virus. It may be that some among us, or a relative, friend, or colleague, has contracted Covid-19. More commonly, we may be experiencing the isolation resulting from stay- at-home orders, essential though those orders may be. Some of us have seen dreams dashed, jobs lost, careers waylaid. My dream of singing in Beethoven's Ninth with a full symphony orchestra was dashed mere days after our last rehearsal in March. My hope was simply a personal wish, while others are finding they cannot pay the rent, have necessary surgery, or even take a much- needed book out of the library. Even wearing a mask or social distancing can be a challenge for people with certain medical or psychological conditions.

But what has sustained us during this difficult time has been the two roots of the word used to describe our shared affliction: pandemic. We are *all* in this together, as scholars, artists, and *people*. In times of isolation and uncertainty, we truly come to appreciate the

organizations we belong to. These may include religious institutions, social or service clubs, special interest groups, but for independent scholars, they most assuredly include organizations that support and encourage scholarship and intellectual exchange with peers and colleagues.

Many of us are learning to use Zoom and other meeting software to see our colleagues face-to- face and engage in lively conversation, while others are seizing the moment to indulge in that rarest of luxuries, Time: time to read, to take notes, to reflect on what we have read and our own original thoughts nurtured in the soil of quiet and meditation. Our Poetry Group is taking the path of individual reflection rather than a group activity this spring and summer, while the Science/Science History and Humanities Groups are continuing to meet in the online environment.

We recall, too, that independent scholars are not generally afraid of "isolation," which comes from the Latin word *insula* meaning *island*. In our research, creative work, and personal pursuits, we may well be transported in our imagination to islands such as Manhattan, Île de la Cité, or a sandy beach in the South Seas. Isolation is not always a bad idea.

In addition to PRF-related activities, many of us are taking classes online, some for the first time. As someone who has taught college courses online for 20 years, I can aver that students get out of it what they put into it, and that distance learning can be a life-changing experience. Online education is a great way to stay current in our fields and explore new horizons.

There is no substitute, of course, for good public and personal health, happy relationships, and fulfilling work (as remunerative as we need or desire). But the pandemic will pass, and, it is to be hoped, we will still be here. Thanks to PRF and other resources, we may emerge from our time on the "island" of isolation stronger, grateful, and ready to roar.

Best wishes to all,

Linda Holt, D.Litt.
President, Princeton Research Forum 5/29/2020

The author. As L.L. Holt, Linda Holt is the author of two novels (*Invictus* and *The Black Spaniard*) about young Beethoven published in advance of the composer's 250th anniversary in 2020. She is President of the Princeton Research Forum and writes about music for Concertonet.com, Bachtrack.com and other publications.

HELLO, VIRUS

by Gerry Horwitz

With apologies to Simon and Garfunkel, I feel as though the Corona Virus has put me on a "Bridge Over Troubled Waters".....more aptly, a bridge over waters *roiling* with not only the dangers of severe illness but the dangers as well of climate change, of economic insecurity, of racial unrest, of political polarization and of educational disruption.

Where am I? This bridge has no end in sight; its only direction is toward a new frontier of as- yet-unsolved problems, still unanswered questions, and unexpected consequences. Rather than, like brave pioneers of the past, *choosing* to depart from an unsatisfying present in search of more opportunity, I am—unwilling and unconsulted—losing control, on a voyage toward…….what?

Can I reframe the narrative? Can I help mend this ruptured culture? Will time itself, squeezed and stretched at once, regain a recognizable shape?

And yet, and yet, I resort to two ways of thinking that calm me. The first is an inherited sense of humor which enables me to see the ridiculous lurking behind many situations. Secondly I admit, and surrender to, a firm belief that Mother Nature cannot be conquered. She can be anticipated, and she can be dealt with, but she cannot be overcome; perhaps not a comforting notion but a realistic one, oddly soothing.

But I am afraid. I fear the virus and I fear the possible after effects if it catches me and I survive. In the meantime, I wonder about this bridge on which I seem to exist; will I reach its end?

Is there, in fact, an end??

I argue with myself.

The author. A resident of San Diego, California since 1951, Gerry Horwitz was educated at Stephens College, at San Diego State College (now SD State University), earning a BA in Journalism there and an MA in US History at UCSD. An active member of San Diego Independent Scholars since 1984, she has served that organization as both Program Chair and Newsletter Editor. She created and heads the Reading Experience study group and is active in both the Colloquy Cafe concept discussion group and the Film study group.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September 2020. © Gerry Horwitz.

Covid Hiking Break

by Kevin Knauss

His world revolves around organic chemistry and pharmaceuticals at MIT. My world focuses on California history when distilled spirits were considered medicinal. The one intersection between the generations is hiking. On this day, September 4, 2020, the hike was to the 8,587-foot location of the defunct fire spotting surveillance perch in the Sierra Buttes.

We had escaped Covid-19, but not the omnipresent smoke from millions of acres of California forests burning. The hike was so physically distanced – with the young man virtually racing down the hill – that this old man got lost.

My fear was no longer from the pall of smoke engulfing the mountains and valleys or catching Covid-19 and dying alone in a hospital bed; I was now gripped with the fear of spending the night alone in the wilderness. I wandered over various trails and roads blowing the rescue howler whistle with a certainty that no one would hear my futile attempt to summon assistance.

Where was the young man, whose diapers I changed when he was a baby, and why wasn't he looking for me? Never has such panic and a sense of my own mortality gripped my little brain. There was only a couple of ounces of water left in my bottle, no food, and only a light long sleeved shirt. I hopefully surmised that it was going to be a long night before rescue.



For months, I had been so vigilant at protecting myself from a virus I could not see, only to become lost in a terrain that I could see and touch. My savior was in the form of a little tag of PCT. I figured if I stayed on the Pacific Crest Trail I would eventually come to a road or camping spot. I followed the PCT for the next 90 minutes over a trail that did not look

familiar. I ventured down an old dirt road to see a gate I remembered we walked around six hours earlier.

As the parent of an adult, you must resist the urge to scold or argue with your child. It is a matter of respect, like you would display with any friend or stranger. This was the point, a moment in time he would not be aware of, where I, his father, swallowed my parental superiority and engaged him as an equal. He calmly sat in the car awaiting my return. "It did not occur to you that after 90 minutes your father might be in distress?" "No," he said, "You always hike slower than me."

I saw little use in trying to convey my fear and panic, if it was only for a brief period of time. Instead, I focused on my safe return and that my son was also safe. I knew that at the age of 23, he could not completely comprehend the wave of fear and uncertainty that can envelop an older person, whether the genesis of the foreboding is from Covid-19 or being lost in the forest. His perception of my anxiety over being lost was that it was irrational, illogical.

My son, fortunately, does not hold the same perception that the fear of catching Covid-19 is irrational, albeit that it is a little over hyped. He is appropriately respectful to wear a mask always indoors and keep a safe distance. I must assume, that when he is my age, and the body doesn't function like it did 40 years earlier, and you know your physical limits, that he will not find the fear of being lost in the woods is irrational, but a part of life.

The author. Kevin Knauss lives in Granite Bay, CA, and writes about local history of the area. He is a member of The Institute for Historical Study.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September of 2020. © Kevin Knauss.

Six Plaguing Pieces in the Shape of a Poem

by Kenneth Krauss

Villanelle

by Kenneth Krauss

There are tortures far worse than sheltering in place,
Than scouring your palms and fingers, or
Wearing a mask over half your face,

Like being sprayed with tear gas or mace
While cursing in the street what you abhor.
These are tortures worse than sheltering in place.

Protesting safely in the public space,
You'd think you were protected when you're
Wearing a mask over half your face.

Uniformed, faceless men—a nation's disgrace—
All dispatched to lesson the poor on more
Tortures far worse than sheltering in place.

Flee from the fumes, outrun their race!
What rites are these, you're right to deplore,
By every man who's masked to hide his face?

No dining, no shopping here or anyplace,
Stay safe at home? This life is a bore!
There are tortures far worse than sheltering in place
And wearing a mask over half your face.

Unheroic Couplets in Plague Time

by Kenneth Krauss

Saturday last I felt such a fool
Swimming alone (so I thought) in the pool
Beyond my condo's sliding door
Through which I've witnessed twelve or more
Unmasked bathers in the small hot tub,
Chattering close, a virtual club
Determined to make each other ill.

I'd stopped all exercise until
My doctor allowed that I might dare
To swim in the pool when no one was there,
So, every other day around nine,
I do my laps when the sun can shine
Through the morning haze, and the water warms
Though it's still chilled enough to ward off the swarms.
I do side and back stroke, because of my shoulder,
Across thirty times, and as I've grown older,
I tire rather quickly, then sit in the sun.

But Saturday last, long before I'd done
My third lap of side stroke, I noted a sound
Of a tiny brown creature, nearly drowned,
Struggling to float near the pool's far edge;
With a shriek I flung the mouse onto the ledge,
Where it shook its head and suddenly bolted—
No thanks for me, but I wasn't insulted
And turned around for lap number four
But was soon aware of a troubled roar
And saw some lady was waving her arm,
Who cried from her terrace, Was there any harm?

I laughed as I told her just how I'd thrown
The mouse to safety; in grim monotone
She stammered, *A mouse in the pool?*
And shrieked as I had, then laughed like a fool.

No coronet, no cape of ermine,
No title is bestowed on saviors of vermin
In a place where the pestilence hasn't yet passed
And your chat in the hot tub may be your last.

Sestina: Primo Lazaretto

by Kenneth Krauss

to my sister

Before I can recall, an epidemic
Revised my family through a quarantine.
My sister and I remained at home, systemic
Victims of how—we were told-- it had always been.
Signs on the doors announced a grim polemic:
"NO ENTRY! POLIO HOUSE!" Was this warrant seen?

We stayed inside, and we were only seen
By aunts, who, dodging the epidemic,
Waved through windows, thwarting the signs' polemic,
After Brother and Mother fled the quarantine
By ambulance, and Father, who, having been
Away at work, remained so—quite systemic.

A toddler and teen alone? What systemic
Response, if any, had ever been foreseen?
Left to our own devices, we had been
Abandoned seemingly by the epidemic,
Though Grandpa Max soon joined our quarantine
And launched at once an optimist's polemic:

"How lucky Mama," went his odd polemic,
"Died last year, missing this systemic
Imposition of this ill-planned quarantine
And Brother's illness; thank God she'd never seen
The result of this God-damn epidemic."
How lucky, said he, Grandma had surely been.

How unlucky, we thought, we three had surely been!
No argument, no reasons, no polemic
Could logically explain this epidemic
Nor help us comprehend why the systemic
Familiar unit nowhere could be seen,
Only its remnants under quarantine.

That was my very first quarantine.
And yet, no matter how hard those weeks had been,
They now seem pleasant compared with all I've seen
These past eight months. Allow me this polemic:
Grandpa, Sis, and I soon served our systemic
Seclusion determined by this epidemic,
And then we'd seen the end of quarantine;
The epidemic passed; but now I've been,
Sans polemic, in an exile quite systemic.

Notes by a Shut-In on the Final Night of the Publicans' Irrational Contention

by Kenneth Krauss

Humpty Trumpty sits on his wall.
Trumpty Dumpty must take a great fall.
All the king's asses and all the king's kin
Can never make Trumpty look better ag'in.

Melania, Ivanka, and Tiffany too,
Like Eric and Junior, but not Baron, who
Appears quite disturbed and remains out of sight,
Continue the myth that Daddy's all right

To keep his thumbs on the nuclear button
In spite of the fact that his head's full of mutton,
Despite the way that he demonizes
The victims of hate for their own demises.

Calling for justice makes one a vandal.
Suppressing such speech is no cause for scandal.
Bring up the subject of deadly virus,
And he'll swear that the world is still desirous

Of all we have: The most numerous cases
Among those, he believes, the expendable races,
And as if we lacked all sense of reality,
We're told to ignore the massive fatality.

Let Humpty Trumpty sit on his wall,
Believing his numbers never will fall.
All the King's asses and all the King's kin
Will never say Trumpty has been a has-been.

The Shriek of the Sheltering Shopper

by Kenneth Krauss

The Grocery Outlet's run out of caviar,
And anchovies too, salted in a jar,
And tins of Italian tuna in olive oil.
The dearth of fresh fish sets my blood a-boil!
The frozen shrimp's come back but all precooked,
And scallops? None to be had—and I have looked!
The cheese case lacked any prominent resident,
And the sell-by dates of those there made me hesitant.
The disappearance of artichokes on the condiment aisle,
Which had no Dijon mustard, erased my smile,
And the meat department caused my mouth to scowl:
No veal nor lamb, just burgers, packaged fowl.
There was chunk light in water, tilapia on ice,
Some Swiss and Monterey Jack at an excellent price,
Canned olives, jarred pickles—marinated pork,
Even stuffed grape leaves—Don't call me a dork
For my hunt for the luxe in this bargain-price store.
Why shouldn't we frugal folk go seek for more?
Chastise, if you must, my sad ingratitude
As you recall last April and coyly allude
To when all the toilet paper shelves were bare
And paper towels were absent everywhere:
"Isn't this better?" you ask with a smile pathetic,
Like I don't know we're in a great pandemic?
Well, I say "Duh! Who was it decreed
We go without in this our hour of need?
I need my caviar and albacore,
I need raw shrimp and scallops, need my brie,
My artichokes and veal. I guarantee
That not by bread alone can we now thrive;
Sans caviar and brie we just survive…"

Sonnet: On Endings and Beginnings

by Kenneth Krauss

> The weight of this sad time we must obey,
> Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
> The oldest hath borne most; we that are young
> Shall never see so much nor live so long.
> Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, V.3.

At the end will surely come a new beginning

To signal we have reached the end of the end,

Exposing at last the ghastly underpinning

That all will see and finally apprehend.

Nonetheless the truth's an ancient story:

The plague was sent against autocracy;

The Pharaoh, tyrant, fool in all his glory

Denied our peril with gross hypocrisy.

The sun will rise. The fog will fade away.

We'll mourn the dead and curse the long, dark night.

As the world returns, we'll often pause to say

That hence all wrongs will always be set right.

Yet how many decades of damage must there come

Before we wake again from growing numb?

The author. Kenneth Krauss was born in Newark, NJ and grew up in Maplewood. He graduated from the University of Sussex at Brighton and later received an advanced degree from Columbia University. Having taught drama and film in a college in Albany NY for three decades, he also wrote seven books on theatre and culture, ran a black-box playhouse, and composed foto-novellas, drama reviews, and various simulacra under the name of Baron Laszlo Szekrényi. He is relatively new to writing poems but has published seven books and is currently busy revising the manuscript of his study on Casanova's memoirs. He became a member of SDIS in 2018 and participates in the film and reading groups; he is also a member of La Maison Française in Balboa Park.

The poems were sent to SDIS in August - September 2020. © Kenneth Krauss 2020

Two Differing Stages of the Pandemic

by Inga Liden

May 2020: A Day at Home in the Time of Corona

I was inspired by a friend who asked me "How do you spend a day in this locked-down fearful time?" It is weird that all of us, our friends and family anywhere in the world are fighting the same deadly invisible fierce little virus.

I am terribly scared of getting the horrible illness which is described every day in the media as ferocious. Imagine, to be isolated in an intensive care unit with no one who is near-and-dear to me - and to think that I shall probably die soon - because I am almost 80.

That makes me very strict in my isolation. My household is just me. I am alone at home and I walk alone daily. I am far too worried to join a friend and try to keep six-foot distance which is the law in California. When I walk I wear my mask and garden gloves. It amuses me that I see new and different things when I walk alone in my own neighborhood where I have driven for years.

Now and then I meet a dog who has taken his master for a walk. Both of them look happy and when we meet, they walk into the street or I do it in order to keep the distance. Thank heavens there are hardly any cars around. We look at one another and say "thank you". Instantly these two words become important and meaningful - maybe we both live solo? Perhaps it is the only exchange face-to-face for the day?

Returned home to my locked-down spot I look around and enjoy my " things". Here I am surrounded by my favorite things - little piles of books to read, although I have not read as many as I assumed when my isolation started...and my different projects - to sort out closets and drawers. I create piles of "stuff" labeling them Save, Give Away, Trash.

Fortunately, I love to cook! And also, to shop for food. I do it once a week now and with a list in my hand. Gone are the days when I would dash out to pick up something spontaneously.

Reminding myself not to whine over that but say I'm lucky to be allowed to buy my own food - 'tis a privilege and a pleasure. Many grocery markets give away the bags for free since the recycled ones are forbidden. The virus is said to live on plastic or fabric for 72 hours.

In my own home I can play music when I want to and whatever category I desire! Oh my, how I appreciate those hours! When I cook, I often play opera and at HH (Happy Hour) swing jazz.

On my balcony I turn into a farmer. My herbs are especially satisfying because I enjoy eating what I have nurtured. My flowering potted plants show their gratitude by blooming in cascades after I have eliminated the invaders that EAT! their buds and leaves. The power of growing is visible in my little pots and also the power of life from a seed - makes me humble...

The new phenomenon is our Zoom room. Here I go to class, listen to lectures, learn about new things and have drinks with good friends. We exchange thoughts, titles of films and books, and we discover that we listen better in the Zoom room than in real rooms. That's something valuable. Maybe we appreciate the togetherness more now than ever before?

The old telephone has been through several new lives adding camera, alarm and music. Yet, best of all, it still offers us a choice of just audio - no visuals - reminding us that active listening IS an art.

Below the surface of a courageous attitude during the fearful Corona experience, I feel a gentle sensitivity from friends. I find more caring from near-and-dear ones, but not only from those people who are close to me, but also from worker bees in the grocery store, bank and post office. Let's carry this compassion with us as we enter our New Normal!

September 2020: Life in the Time of Corona

by Inga Liden

There is a haze in the air since many days. It is like June Gloom here in Southern California. The milky white air outside my window covers up a lot of my view and within a few hours my neighbors' houses and trees will come into focus again. It reminds me of how I feel about the Corona virus - it has put a haze over my daily life, but sadly it stays on as a veil in my head. It is a depression. I am not alone; several close friends express how they are struggling with pessimism that goes into depression.

I am angry, too. I hold back my grumpy comments about other people who ignore facial masks, and we all make satirical remarks about how the political Administration acts arrogantly about masks. I don't say what I want when I meet a non masked person in public, but I want to scream "shame on you!" You ignore that you very easily could give me the virus, because I am 75+ and very vulnerable and obviously you don't care if you would get it yourself. Maybe you are stupid, yes stupid, enough not to know how the Covid-19 is spread. It is airborne! How could you NOT know. Our media world pours out information around the clock. Many automated company phones have several minutes of information on how to protect yourself and your loved ones from the vicious virus. Do not defend yourself by saying you did not know you could carry the virus without getting sick yourself……do not fake the truth in order to avoid wearing a mask. SHAME ON YOU! I still want to scream it, but I don't. I am afraid that person has a political agenda behind her/his demonstration of no mask. How on earth could a deadly medical issue become political? All I know is it did. It is sad and it scares me that that many individuals belong to that political persuasion.

If I would catch the virus, test positive and have trouble breathing I have written a Statement, saying I do not want to be taken to the hospital. Keep that hospital bed for someone who is eager to try to win with the help of a ventilator. I do not want to try. I

want to stay at home and prepare to die with the protective help of Hospice. I do not want to survive the ventilator treatment.

This decision prompts me to prepare for my heirs and write little notes why I want each of them to see their name on different objects. I have not done that to the extent I think I should. I have experienced receiving things with a note with my name and it has filled my heart with joy and gratefulness. I do feel joyous to do that, but I also mourn the fact that I am facing my own death.

How did previous plagues affect people? The Black Death hit Europe with a peak time 1347 - 1351. I remember learning about it as a nine-year old and how scary it was. In Venice Italy one third of the population died. They began to isolate the sick and it resulted in a new building, their first hospital. The magnificent church Santa Maria della Salute was built in gratitude to God who ended the plague.

The Plague by Albert Camus published in 1947 was spell binding even as an allegory for fascism. I read it on a long train ride and never looked out the window. I still remember its powerful message fifty years later.

At the start of the lock down we were allowed to shop for food and pharma and to go for a walk. I love to cook, and I decided to try new foods, experiment and not worry about the risk since I am a single household. I wrote my list for the week. Some markets created certain hours for seniors. There could be a line outside with painted signs on the ground, "six feet apart", some seniors chatted with one another, others were checking their phones. At the entrance, a staff member handed you a sanitized cart and politely said "leave your recycled bags outside - you will get new bags for free". Customers and staff wore masks; some had homemade ones, others pulled up a turtleneck over mouth and nose and a few wore designer made masks - how chic!

We, also learned to thank staff for coming to work.

My food marketing became the high light of my week, a ritual filled with joy. All the rules made me feel pampered. After unpacking it all at home, I sanitized everything. The minute it seemed boring I talked to myself, tough talk, "do not complain - it is all about pushing death out of my life, Here and Now...

But my cooking is always to share the food and drink, and my balcony was too narrow to have guests - and to be outdoors was a must.

So, I got he idea to call on my closest friends with patios and gardens and ask if I could bring whatever they wanted and then we could eat outdoors together. They were all as strict as I and this was the beginning of a wonderful sequence of garden meals and maximum four people.

Our feelings when being face-to-face was nurturing and more than Zoom visuals. I think it became a time of gratefulness and our conversations got deeper than when it was "normal pre- Corona times". I wonder if we were all keeping fear of dying under control when sharing food and talks.

Many of us took the time of lock down to go through closets, garages, and bookshelves. Downsizing gives me a liberating feeling - some is given away, some sold at consignment shops and what I keep is dear to me - often associated with lovely memories. Perhaps

Consumerism was now seen as a 'bad sport' -- unless you really needed it. Maybe Bauhaus was right a long time ago, "Less Is More"!

One of my favorite books of all times is Love in the Time of Cholera by Gabriel Garcia Marquez published in 1985 in Spanish and translated into English in 1988. Someone wrote a few comments that I will paraphrase: The title means DEATH. The novel is about people who choose hope over despair, self knowledge over self dramatization in the belief that LOVE can transform age and time.

Now this has summarized why I love the novel and why I will keep on nurturing HOPE, even in the time of Corona.

The author, Inga Liden. My home has recently become San Marcos, CA, and is close to California State University San Marcos, where I have volunteered already as a mentor. I was born and educated in Europe. I received my M.A. from Stockholm and Uppsala Universities with majors in Anthropology and Aesthetics. If I had to do it again, I would choose these rather unusual disciplines for the joy they have added to my life. I did my internships at UNESCO, Paris, and the UN, in NY. My career was clear, UNESCO was for me! But instead, I fell in love with an American man, married and lived on the East Coast. I have worked in the Arts and Education, enjoying every day. Before retiring I added working with seniors as the director of sales and marketing in Senior Communities, learning from the residents about aging. Now almost 80, I am active in The Village Movement as co-chair in North County Village. After being introduced to San Diego Independent Scholars and creating a guest exchange between the two clubs, I immediately became an active member of SDIS! © Inga Liden

“Go bag” for COVID-19

by Vidur Mahadeva, MD

In my final year of medical school, I attended a lecture by an ER physician who proposed a mental exercise for all of the soon-to-be doctors in the room. He asked us to think about the medicines we would use to treat the largest variety of conditions we would likely encounter on a desert island, sort of a “Gilligan’s Island” scenario from a medical standpoint. While I began thinking of the best prescription drugs money could buy, our attending started the list of five with the humble Benadryl, a.k.a. diphenhydramine. This is a surprisingly versatile drug you can buy at a dollar store that amazingly can treat allergic reactions, insect bites, insomnia, nausea, dystonia, used as anesthesia, and therefore analgesia.

I have often thought since then what if we apply the same logic to different conditions and diagnoses? What would a “go bag” of medications look like for treating a heart attack? What would it look like for treating community acquired pneumonia? What would it look like if you were treating COVID-19?

Two decades later, by the spring of 2020, this was no longer a hypothetical question. Patients were presenting to our clinic or calling when they were told by their employers to go home because they had tested positive, to stay in quarantine and to seek medical attention should their symptoms worsen. In our patient community, this meant a large share of Spanish-speaking patients often working in food handling, food preparation, and the hotel and casino industry along with other service industries likely to be labeled as “essential.” Despite minimum wage pay and little or no insurance, these people were also risking their lives every day along with first responders, and the whole medical team.

The first few bags went out in a hurry, sometimes only with diagnostic equipment for taking temperature, blood pressure, oxygen saturation and otherwise check vital signs to monitor patients in their homes. The kits were either picked up by a COVID-negative non-symptomatic family member, delivered without contact, or left in a combination-locked dropbox for pick up outside our clinic.

In early August, we were contacted by a 40 year old Spanish-speaking woman, living with her adult brother and mother, all three testing positive for COVID-19, all with varying symptoms of fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, shortness of breath, productive cough, body aches, anxiety, fear, and insomnia from the psychosocial aspects of the disease. We decided to take on the case because we had successfully treated individual family members by setting them up with a similar ‘to go‘ kit mentioned above.

Along with prescription drugs including azithromycin (antibiotic), dexamethasone (steroid), albuterol metered dosed asthma inhalers, over-the-counter (OTC) diphenhydramine, acetaminophen, and guaifenesin (cough syrup), patients were given strict instructions to check in every eight hours with vital signs until they were "out of the woods.” The plan was to check on them two or three times per day via video conferencing or for them to contact us for a fever over 101°F, oxygen saturation less than 92%, along with high and low blood pressure and heart rate parameters.

Voltaire once said, “Medicine is the art of entertaining the patient, as the body heals itself.” Entertainment aside, simple medications given at the right time alleviated enough symptoms to build confidence that what we were doing was working. In this case the best medicine was the least medicine, along with the knowledge and security of knowing things were being monitored and worst-case scenarios anticipated with contingency plans in place if needed.

By the third day, it became clear that the younger patients were getting better with merely the use of the inexpensive OTC medications. Their symptoms were controlled, each day they felt stronger, and they gradually fell off our radar as we turned our attention to our original patient’s mother, a pleasant but clearly suffering woman in her mid-60s from the get-go at higher risk of complications.

From the video, we could see that she was breathing faster and from the oxygen saturations we realized that pulmonary symptoms were beginning. Coughing or breathing heavily into a microphone is probably underrated as a diagnostic tool. Clearly, it’s not a stethoscope, but it’s much better than nothing. Based on treatment guidelines of viral pneumonia, low doses of steroids from the bag were started and carefully monitored. The albuterol inhaler usually used for asthma came in handy. Oxygen saturations improved almost immediately. Later, when a productive cough began, the antibiotic was implemented some four days into the illness about the time one would expect an atypical bacterial co-infection. As the patient improved, monitoring was reduced from three times a day to two times a day then ultimately via text until the patient had completely stabilized from a respiratory standpoint.

In September 2020, for the first time in my medical career, I met patients in person, a full four weeks after I began treating them virtually. It was a good time to obtain all of the past medical history and fill in the blanks. While all the patients had some lingering symptoms to remind them of the assault they had suffered, the mother in her mid-60s clearly had signs of vasculitis and treatment was started with good results. Extensive laboratory tests and a physical exam confirmed she was no longer in danger of respiratory failure. However, like many Covid-19 patients, post-infectious symptoms would drag on for several weeks and would require monitoring and ongoing treatment.

While our original “go bag” was designed for one patient, it ended up treating three. The three simple diagnostic tools in the bag probably cost more to sterilize than to replace. They will serve again as telemedicine will undoubtedly be used again not only with this family but also likely with every family in the not-too-distant future.

For me this was an eye-opening experience that we would not have dared without the unique challenges posed by COVID-19. For just the price of a meal in a moderately priced restaurant, we delivered a transparent plastic TSA-compliant zip top bag filled with everything we needed to treat successfully during the acute period. Healthcare delivery clearly doesn’t have to be as industrialized and expensive as we have made it. COVID-19 opened the door to innovate just a crack and we seized the opportunity. Our team has been gratified by the results. Perhaps in the future further innovation can be driven by the rule changes that COVID-19 necessitated, or even better, because the innovations just make sense.

The author. Vidur Mahadeva, MD, is board-certified in internal medicine and trained in family medicine as well, with a practice serving the under-insured and uninsured in Reno, Nevada, since 2008. He is an Associate Professor of Internal Medicine at Touro University, Las Vegas.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September 2020. © Vidur Mahadeva

Ancient Wisdom Leads to Happiness in the Time of Covid-19

By Ashwini Mokashi

Of all people only those are at leisure who make time for philosophy, only those are really alive.

Seneca (c. 5 BC--AD 65)
On the Shortness of Life

The pandemic got me wondering: Could I put my scholarly studies of ancient philosophy to practical use helping myself and others get through this difficult time? I wanted to take Seneca's words seriously. These months of imposed stay-at-home leisure have given me a chance to reflect on life, to be creative and resourceful about ways we could change our lives.

Our forced reliance on the internet gave me ways to engage in conversations about ancient Stoic and Hindu precepts about wisdom, virtue, and happiness with individuals and audiences in places I had never imagined I could reach (see links below). In the American Philosophical Practitioners' Association, I found both a new set of congenial colleagues and a new career direction -- a philosophical counseling practice, certified by the APPA, aimed at serving people suffering during the Covid-19 crisis. Closer to home, my course, "Wisdom Leads to Happiness," allowed me to explore these issues with wise elders in the Princeton Senior Resource Center's Evergreen Forum.

The talk organized by Garje Marathi, a global non-profit in California that works to unify people from the Indian state of Maharashtra who have settled outside India, gave me a chance to connect with people who speak my mother-tongue and who, like me, have spent much of their lives outside the motherland.

The connection of Indian philosophy and the topic of Bhakti or devotion, an important theme in my work on the comparative studies in Stoicism and the Bhagavad-Gita, became a focal point in my talk with the students of the Hindu Life Program in Princeton. I wish I had met them all in person, but it was still nice to be in touch with the local Hindu community.

The virtuous life is the happy life, the ancient sages insisted. And virtue cannot be passive. So, I was spurred to take a more active part in fighting the pandemic. Volunteering with the Montgomery Emergency Medical Service to organize monthly blood drives, to help local hospitals replenish dwindling blood supplies has brought me new friends, a new sense of connection to everyone in my community – and, yes, greater happiness.

The author. Ashwini Mokashi, Ph.D. in Philosophy, is an Author, a certified Philosophical Counselor, former President of the 'Princeton Research Forum' and a Lecturer. Her book 'Sapiens and Sthitaprajna' was published in 2019. She has taught Philosophy at the SP Pune University in India and recently at the Evergreen Forum in Princeton. She spent a decade working in Fortune 500 companies in the corporate world in the USA. She was educated at the SP Pune University, King's College London and Rutgers University, NJ, USA. She is active at the local EMS and organizes blood-drives for her local community.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September of 2020. © Ashwini Mokashi

My life During the Covid-19 Pandemic

by Teresa Norris

The world started to grind to a sudden halt due to a deadly pandemic spreading like wildfire and killing people on my birthday this past March 13, 2020. I am not particularly superstitious, but there was a full moon, and it was a Friday. For months I had been planning a special gathering of far flung friends for a few days out at our rustic cabin in the middle of the Mojave Desert to celebrate my birthday. I had come down with a low-grade fever a few days prior to our departure day and was concerned about going into the wilderness feeling under the weather. All the folks that had been planning to gather seemed relieved I was canceling the gathering when I let them know I was not feeling well enough to go because we were all also concerned about this fast-spreading mysterious illness caused by a virus called SARS-Cov-2.

In February I had finally gotten in after waiting three months to see an orthopedic surgeon about an MRI of my left knee that showed osteoarthritis and bone on bone, that had been severely limiting my ability to go on long hikes. I'd been lame for a year wondering if the injury to my knee was a passing condition that would eventually heal, or permanent. During my visit with the orthopedist, I learned I was a candidate for knee replacement surgery. I told him I would have to think about it and get back to him.

Since we had to isolate at home and were not able to socialize or travel, I decided it was a good time to have the surgery and spend the isolation time rehabbing my new knee. So, I bravely put my name in a queue to get my knee replaced. At that point, everything had closed down including elective surgeries for a month or two while the medical folks and hospitals figured out how to deal with the people catching Covid-19 and treating them for the virus. It was mid-June when I got a call from the surgeon's office that I could have my knee replacement surgery on July 1st, so I agreed to that date. There was a lot of preparation involved to get ready for the surgery including seeing my general practitioner and a cardiologist to be sure I was in good enough shape to undergo the surgery and to get my first and only Covid-19 test I have had so far. The cardiologist required a stress test on a treadmill, and I was not sure my lame knee was up for it. But I managed to do it and the doctor gave me a letter of clearance.

I decided it was a good time to have surgery and spend the isolation time rehabbing a new knee.

I had total knee replacement surgery at Scripps Green Hospital in La Jolla on July 1st and spent one night in the hospital and managed to go home before noon about 24 hours after surgery. My doctor's name is Kace Ezzet. I had a very nice and capable physical therapist (Sharon Sample) come to my house the day

after I came home to check out how I was managing and to be sure I could get around with the two wheeled walker I borrowed. I was not able to get in and out of our three showers in the house for the first two weeks because I was unable to step over the sides of the bathtubs to get in and out of them. I made do with sponge baths. Sharon came for seven visits total, working with me on strengthening and mobility. She was a good role model because she had had total knee replacement surgery ten months prior!

I do my physical therapy at home utilizing our rowing machine, a stationary bike, and our swimming pool.

It was also a good time to be laid up because my husband, Dick, who is a UCSD professor, was working from home. Since the pandemic shut everything down, I had him around to fetch and carry things for me, go grocery shopping, and even cook me meals! Joy!

Since July 1st to the present (September 21, 2020), I have been working on doing physical therapy for my knee to relearn how to walk on it and to regain strength and flexibility. After my home physical therapist stopped coming, I have been driving myself since the end of July twice a week to a physical therapy clinic called Proactive Sports Therapy on Carmel Mountain. They work on helping me straighten my knee as well as bend it as much as possible and they are monitoring my progress. In between clinic visits, I do my physical therapy at home utilizing our rowing machine, a stationary bike that I ordered at the end of July, and our swimming pool in our backyard.

I hope to get back out on the road to ride my spiffy electric assist bike

When I am not doing physical therapy I have discovered that I enjoy doing cross-word puzzles from the NY Times newspaper, I practice my ukulele at least once a week (our group leader sweetly sends us songs to work on), and I continue to enjoy reading books and having Zoom meetings with my book club, Zoom meetings with friends for wine tasting (through the Oceanids), travelogues from Chris Wills and his wife, Liz, and Zoom dinners with friends. I go grocery shopping periodically and have returned to being chief planner and cook for our meals.

I hope to get back out on the road to ride my spiffy electric assist (e- bike which I bought back in February) with Dick in the mornings through our hilly neighborhoods once our pool is too cold to swim in (maybe by early October). And, I have a banjo. I am hoping to get lessons via Zoom or Skype with a relative in Santa Cruz who not only plays and loves banjo but is also a very talented luthier. He makes fine instruments and also is an excellent banjo teacher! So, I have been filling my time constructively and look forward to when I can get out and see friends and family again and maybe take a trip or two to somewhere far away…

The author. Teresa Norris was born and grew up in the high altitudes of northern New Mexico, mostly in Los Alamos. She received a bachelor's degree at UC Santa Cruz with a double major in Biology and Environmental Studies with an emphasis on Natural History. She has spent her life raising two sons and sharing her passion for sharing nature with people of all ages through jobs both paid and volunteer including with the California State Parks, the National Park Service, the US Forest Service, the New England Aquarium, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, San Diego Parks and Recreation Department, San Diego Humane Society's Project Wildlife, San Diego Audubon, San Diego Natural History Museum, and the City of Poway's Blue Sky Ecological Reserve. When she was still in college, she led guided walks out to the Northern Elephant Seal colony at Año Nuevo State Reserve and then taught environmental education to 5th and 6th graders as a naturalist over four years at residential science camps in the coastal redwoods and the high Sierra. She and her husband, Dick Norris, were founding members of the Botanical Club of Cape Cod and Islands during their eleven years living in Falmouth on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. In retirement, she continues to share her passion with the outdoors by continuing to volunteer for The SD Natural History Museum, Project Wildlife and Blue Sky Ecological Reserve. Her connection to SDIS is through friendship with Dorothy Parker, who invited her to contribute to this COVID-19 writing project.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September 2020 © Teresa Norris

Three Poems

by Judith Offer

PANDEMIC

It seems we have arrived in some foreign country,
Where clocks mark time for places that do not open
And events that don't happen.
Not just the women but also the men show only their eyes,
And everyone looks away, and hurries by.
The streets are beautiful but empty.
They say the people are hiding out.
Or dying. But there are no funerals.

The emperor here speaks every day, day after day,
In a state-run press room; about machines which never arrive,
An economy which won't restart (but will next week),
And people he doesn't like and is going to fire.
Then he contradicts what he said yesterday,
Perhaps because no one else will,
And he feels dialogue is important.

They seem to speak English in this country,
But there is still a lot I don't understand.
If you try to ask anyone something, she backs away, startled.
There are long, silent queues to all the food shops.
It all has a Soviet quality.
I don't remember a plane ride; how did we get here?
Why did we decide to come? I want to go home.

YOU CAN BE WHATEVER YOU WANT IN THE U.S. OF A.

Or can't, like those White boys
From the worn out housing tracts
Hearing the smart kids answering questions
They don't understand, in high school classes;
Watching people with brown skins
Get accepted to Brown and Yale and Harvard,
While they start training in refrigerator repair;
Watching women who won't look at them
Drink beer with men with accents
In bars that used to be White.

"You can be anything you want in America"
Grinds their souls, their teeth,
Makes their fingers itch
As they buy semiautomatics
For the tasks ahead.

ALL GONE BATTY

The covid-19 Virus is thought to have
jumped species from bats in Wuhan, China.
-KALW News Report, SF

Across America, the worker bats hang through the days
Waiting in their family caves, praying for safety,
Everything upside down. Their sonic signals,
Pixels of light, Zoom magically
Across the dark Pandemic.

The Capital is a mass of empty offices,
Cavernous halls of echo-y marble walls, where
Footsteps of lonely guards come back at them
Like bat navigation radar,
Through the darkened government.

In the White House, the Master Bat, rabid--
Frothing, swearing, screeching--orders the Pandemic over,
The stock market up, and his golf courses open,
While he splatters guano tweets
Across his sewery Oval Office.

The author. Judith Offer has two daughters, six books of poetry and dozens of plays. (Eighteen of the latter, including six musicals, have been produced.) She has read her poetry at scores of poetry venues but is particularly delighted to have been included in the Library of Congress series and on "All Things Considered", on NPR. Her most recent book of poetry, called THE GRATING OF AMERICA, is poems about the dysfunction and destruction of the current US administration, as well as some of the successes of patriots in maintaining the democracy. It includes 22 poems and eight editorial cartoons by Washington Post cartoonist Nick Anderson. More information is available at www.JudithOffer.com.

These poems were sent to SDIS in September and October 2020. © Judith Offer.

Underwater Photography Meets Weak Generative Computer Art

by Nanette Oser Oselett

My passion is underwater photography while snorkeling in La Jolla Shores and Bonaire.

In March 2020, while working with my underwater photos, I created a whole new image. The Emergent Image was very different from the original photo.

I hope you enjoy the comparative photos on my website.

NanO-Creations.com.





The general process involves the use of computer apps: Apple Photo Edit, Affinity Liquify and Image Framer.

No additional code was written or used.

My computer was used only as a tool.

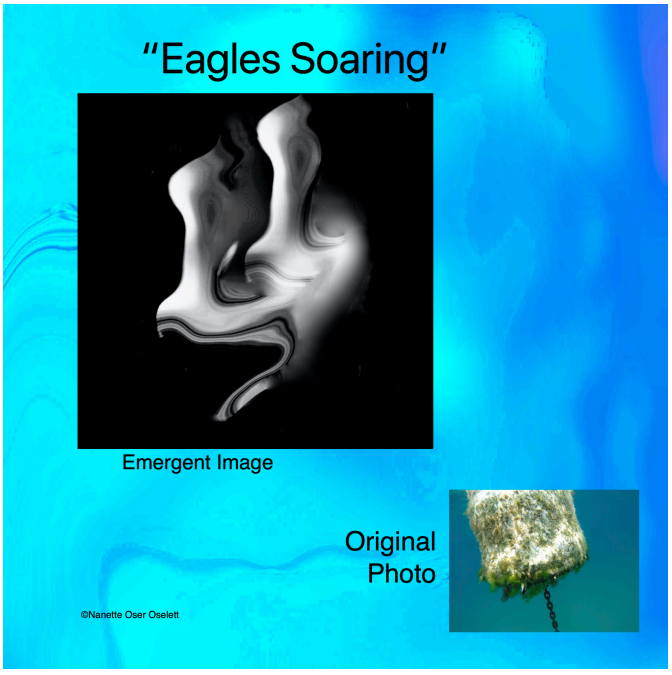
I striped away layers and played with the remaining light, colors and textures until an image appeared that pleased my eye.





Nanette Oser Oselett's education includes an AAS Degree in Industrial Chemistry, a BA in Theoretical Chemistry/ Education, and a M.Ed in Guidance/ Psychological Services/ Student Personnel Administration. She was a Chemical Technician for Union Carbide. Later she taught high school Chemistry in the US and Germany. Also, while in Europe, she was the Director of a military Transition Program for the USAF. She utilized her Masters Degree in several levels of education: high school Guidance Counselor, and Assistant Dean positions at community colleges, universities and at a law school. Her residence is in La Mesa, CA.

© Nanette O. Oselett



Covid-19 2020 Personal Chronicle

by Christopher Parker

Below is a recollection of my experience with the strange, unique, ever-changing year of 2020 in the United States of America. Currently living in the small city of Flower Mound Texas, I am a "work from home" support technician for a large Healthcare Company. The good news is that for the past eight years, I had already been working from home, as our branch office in Irving Texas had closed down. The remaining dozen employees based there were given the opportunity to work remotely as the company gave us computers, monitors, and a printer. We set up our office space, either in a spare bedroom, or in a home-based office. So, one of the side effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, of many people being forced to work from home to adhere to social distancing, had little effect on me. I had already worked out my routine of getting up in the morning, walking to work over my carpet, having lunch in my kitchen, returning to work and finishing up my day with remote meetings (using Webex) and conference calls.

I found some responses of people who recently began to work at home rather funny.

I actually found some of the responses from people who had to begin working from home very funny. Some people discussed if they should still get dressed up. Or wear their pajamas? And if they should still start work at the same time, and not be distracted by the TV, the UPS/Amazon delivery truck, and barking dogs in the background. Luckily, I had learned and applied all of those skills, being determined to be disciplined the very FIRST year that I worked from home. Many of my co-workers have had to make major adjustments, such as the fact that schools also closed and went to remote learning. Having to make all three of those adjustments at the same time (kids at home, spouse or other family working from home, and yourself working from home) was a challenge for many households in America. The good news is that the younger generation is very tech savvy. Adapting to online ZOOM calls, pulling down online documents, and posting their work back up on line was probably second nature for many of them.

I remember the day that this terrible disease began to cause such a disruption to us, because I was watching a Dallas Mavericks Basketball game on TV (March 11, 2020). The camera flashed over to the owner Mark Cuban who was looking at the news on his cell phone. He had an expression of shock and dismay! The Utah Jazz player Rudy Gobert had just tested positive with the Corona Virus (2019). The Utah Jazz games were going to be cancelled. Luckily, the Dallas Mavericks were able to finish up their game for the evening, but everyone was forecasting for the near future that probably many of the other NBA teams, and probably all of the other sports (MLB, NHL, Soccer), would follow suit. All of

those predictions came true and the sports world came to a halt. This disruption had more of an impact than WWI or WWII had on Sports teams, as each and every major sport now was basically going to shut down for an unforeseen amount of time.

One big impact on me, was the fact that my brother (who has Special Needs) was also affected in the fact that his Adult Daycare school was also going to shut down. This altered his daily routine. He could no longer take the bus into his school, he did not need to pack his lunch the night before anymore, and the social contact of being around his friends was taken away abruptly. He needed much help with the adjustment. I was able to use my personal home-based computer to gather his on-line projects, worksheets posted by his teachers, and online games/quizzes. I could then help him to complete his work and then re-post the assignments back up on-line.

Big adjustments involved helping my elderly mother and Special Needs brother with shopping and schoolwork.

The fact is that many low income and poorer neighborhoods were not equipped to do that. Many of the Dallas School district students live where their families either cannot reach adequate internet access, or cannot afford internet costs, modems, hot spots, or computer equipment. That caused a large issue for many of the school districts to try and overcome. Many schools had to spend $30 million or more to order, gather and distribute laptop tablets, and hotspots just to get students the ability to learn on-line. Then there was the major hurdle of having teachers switch their curriculum over to digital learning and helping the students adjust. It was a very large impact to the H.S. Seniors, as many of their graduation ceremonies were either Virtual, or in the case of some in North Texas area , driving into the NASCAR facility(Texas Motor Speedway), and seeing their car/family on the big screen as they picked up their diplomas.

The BIGGEST adjustment that I had to make was the trip to the grocery store. With an elderly mother and a high-risk brother, they needed help with weekly trips to the store. My very first trip, I used a mask and nylon gloves. I was extremely nervous about touching many of the products. Then bringing the groceries home, I unloaded them, threw the bags away, wiped down the products and then did a full hand-wash and finish up with hand sanitizer. Over the next few months, the risk seemed to be less and less, as the stores themselves put many new procedures in place. Everyone must wear a mask, having the aisles in a one-way direction, only entrance in one door, and exit out of a separate door, and employees also wearing masks and using hand sanitizer.

Another big impact, which started slowly but picked up steam, was online food ordering. Many years prior, a local grocery store Tom Thumb started an on-line ordering service. The users would pick the products and submit the order. The employees would pack up the products and you sould simply drive up to get your groceries placed in your trunk.

I think the concept was not well received as many people wanted to see/feel/touch their produce before purchasing. And there was some confusion about quantities, as ordering one Coke could be a single bottle, or a six-pack or a 12-pack. Now, after the Covid-19 pandemic began to affect people's nervousness, on-line grocery ordering has taken off in all of the major grocery stores in North Texas.

The independent taxi services (Uber and Lyft) have also adjusted by teaming up with local restaurants to be the delivery services for on-line food ordering services. Doordash and Uber Eats, as well as many others, now became the new job of many of the restaurant and bar workers who had been laid off. At one point, the governor of Texas had closed down the bars. Because slowly opening them up to 25% capacity caused a large spike in positive Covid-19 cases, he deemed it necessary to slow the spread by closing bars once again.

In the south, where there is still a large influence of the "Bible Belt" mentality of dry counties (no alcohol served), some of the cities and towns (including Flower Mound) only sell beer and wine in the grocery stores. With the on line ordering of food, and a temporary executive order by the Governor, the

Restaurants began offering alcohol with online food orders.

restaurant community began offering alcohol sales (beer, wine, or margarita mix) with the food order. It is possible that the Governor of Texas will relax that law and continue to allow alcohol sales with food, for the near future.

Some of the other very obvious side-effects are the light traffic patterns. Now with work-from-home families and with no commuting, the streets were nearly empty. The price of gas at one point had dropped from well over $3.00 per gallon, to as low as $1.89 per gallon. Many co-workers made the comments, that instead of having to fill up their tank weekly, or every 5 days, many people are going 2 weeks before having to fill up, and at almost half of the cost.

The on-line profiles of many people have picked up in activity. Friends and family that are long distances from each other, now have more communication on text groups, Facebook, Twitter, and other

At this time, everything seems to have political upheaval behind it.

groups. One of the funny companies that grew in popularity, TikTok/Douyin, is a Chinese video-sharing social networking service. The videos show people in silly situations. The issue, in this time and age, is everything seems to have a political upheaval behind it. President Donald Trump said that the Tik Tok application was a security leak that the Chinese were using to spy-on and steal intelligence from Americans. He lobbied to have the application banned and stopped.

The future is uncertain, and it seems that things change daily and weekly. The start of the new fall school session was scheduled, postponed, re-scheduled, then only ovirtual learning was offered, and then some schools offered a blended in-person and on-line option.

I have a feeling that people will not feel completely safe until effective treatment and a full vaccine will be available for ALL Americans. With the rapid advance in on-line ordering, the health industry has also seemed to step iton high-gear trying to get an effective vaccine available and passed through the FDA.

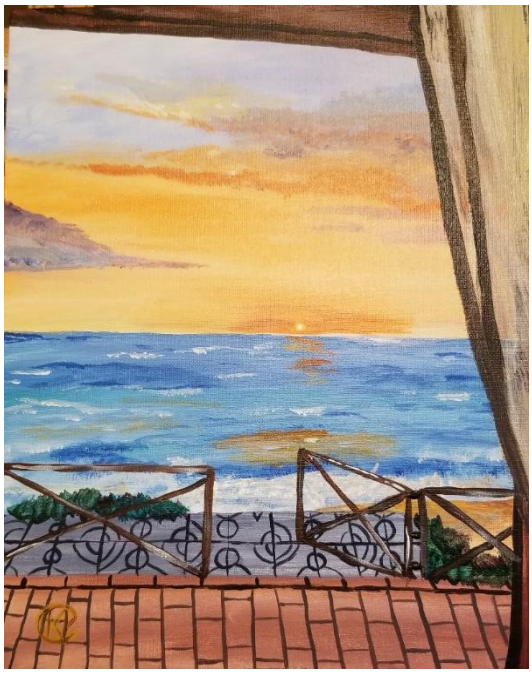
It used to seem strange to see the news clippings of people in China and Japan wearing medical masks in the airports. Many thought that it was unnecessary or seemed silly. Now, out and about in town, including any of the stores, it seems very strange to see someone WITHOUT a medical mask -- almost as if that person is defying the authorities and flirting with danger, opening the door to get the virus.

As we move forward, many of us just hope that nothing else arrives that is more strange than this pandemic, with its fall-out including restaurants closing, record unemployment in the service industry, sports world shutdown, daily school routines uprooted, long hours from our frontline healthcare workers and just general fear of this invisible disease.

We all hope that 2020 ends quickly, (Skip over Halloween, and any further life disrupting events) and get to a point where we can celebrate Christmas season with together with family. Then **FLIP THE CALENDAR over to 2021 ASAP.**

Finally, as people have more time, arts and crafts at home have become more popular.

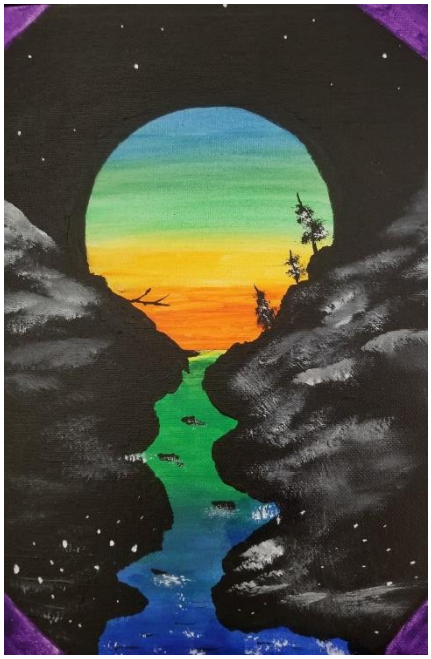
Below as some examples of time spent while being conscious of social distancing. With time on my hands, I completed these oil paintings for friends or neighbors.





Above, representation of a sunset from a postcard that a friend sent.

Left, from a photo of a sunrise out the back door of a friend living in Rhode Island.



And the above, is a star-light funky colored moonset painted on a carboard canvas.

It is my wish that people continue with good health, good fortune, and well-being.

The author. Christopher Kenneth Parker currently resides in Flower Mound, Texas, a small but growing residential town that can be considered a suburb of Denton, Texas. He has lived in Texas since 1992, after moving from Connecticut for two reasons: his company re-located there, and Texas does not enforce a State Income Tax. He is somewhat using his degree of Bachelor of Science in Business, as he currently works as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and PO for a large Workers Compensation Insurance Company.

This piece was sent to SDIS in August 2020. © Christopher K. Parker

When Seeking Social Distancing Almost Caused Tragedy

by David Parker

Dorothy and I have been hikers and campers since before we met as graduate students at U.C. Berkeley in 1970. We married in 1971. In the years that we have been with each other, we have taken several hundred camping and hiking trips together. When we met, we often shared wilderness back-pack trips lasting for at least a week or so, mainly in California, Wisconsin, and Colorado but also in Europe, India, and Nepal. Since 1996, when we bought a 22-foot converted Dodge Ram camper van, we have almost always hiked and then slept overnight in the van.

Recently we decided to take a 5- or 6-day trip into a remote area, Long Valley Campground near the Chimney Peak Wilderness in the southern Sierra Nevada Mountains. We had been to this site at least three times earlier and had enjoyed it much, but each previous time we had gone in either the spring or the fall. This time, we set out in late July, when it is hot in the day and cool at night.

I need to mention that I am now 88 years old and Dorothy is 81. We came to the wilderness partly because of Covid-19, craving to be in a different environment without the danger of encountering many other people.

Our chosen campground provided secure social isolation, we thought. Its widely-spaced campsites were ordinarily all empty because they could be reached only by driving 30 miles on twisty, one-lane dirt roads along steep slopes. There was no cell phone reception for miles, but we did not realize that.

Another attraction of Long Valley was a rugged canyon path leading for 2-3 miles to the South Fork of the Kern River, which has water year-round. On the evening of our arrival, I took a short hike down the trail and recognized it well, having been there most recently in 2016.

The next morning, I wanted to go further along the trail, possibly to the Kern River, but Dorothy wished to rest in the camp. I quickly set out alone at 9:30 AM. I did not progress as rapidly as I had on earlier visits, which had been in October and not in July heat. By 1:30 PM, I was very near the river, but decided that if it took me four hours to get that far, it made no sense to spend any more time before returning to the van because the sunset was at about 8:00 PM.

All went well initially, but when only about a mile or so was left, I think, the trail became indistinct, and I was having trouble finding it. I remember thinking that it was possible that I had taken a trail to the wrong canyon and noticed another trail to my left. I made the decision to try the other canyon. After following the canyon to my left for quite a distance, I realized that it was <u>not</u> the correct canyon, but decided to climb to the top of the right-hand side, to see what I might see from there.

I was amazed and surprised! I could make out two structures that were near the start of the trail from our campsite, just - across the canyon in front of me. I had found the correct canyon! I was ecstatic! All I had to do was go down the steep (!) hill I stood at the top of and then climb up the same type of hill on the other side and I would be within a few hundred yards of our camper! This was at only 6:30 PM. It was still uncomfortably hot, and unfortunately, I carelessly veered too far downstream as I descended the hill, because I sought areas with pine trees, so I could get shade once in a while.

To make a long story short, I could not locate the trail that I had seen from across the way and was searching for it as night began to fall at 8:30. By 9:30 my teeth began chattering. I was in a situation I had never been in before. I had a light pack and had

carried four 20-ounce bottles of water, a sandwich, some beef jerky, and a few granola bars. Not much. I wore a light T shirt, shorts, hat, socks, and hiking boots. That's it!

For a long time, I kept checking my watch every five or ten minutes and wondered how I would make it through the night as it got colder. (We were at 5100 feet of elevation.) I was in a spot that had large stones with patches of sand between them and tried to lie down on the sand. My legs were tired and cramped terribly unless I held them just so. Eventually, at about 11:30, I decided to put put on my pack, to cover my back, and found a good patch of sand, where I lay down on my belly. The pack covered my back and made it warmer. The sand was quite good on my front side after it warmed up a bit from my body heat. I lay down and I couldn't believe it – I woke up at about 2:30 AM. I urinated and then woke up again at 5:30. Light! But of course, no heat. Whenever I was awake my teeth chattered constantly. Yet, I had slept for about five hours!

I got up at 5:30 because it was so good to see the light. I massaged my legs to get them to work and began to move some in the direction where I thought that I should go. By the time it was 6:30 AM, the sun finally rose over the hills and it warmed up. I had not much more food and little water. (Not good.)

I thought I had somehow walked upstream past our campsite and started going back downstream to try to locate a place I would recognize. Eventually, at about 9:30 AM or so, I heard someone calling my name. I whooped a call that Dorothy and I use when we are near, also calling her name, and after a while someone appeared through the underbrush not far from me. But not Dorothy! It was nice to meet Deputy Sheriff Brian Adams from the rescue team of Tulare County. I asked him if Dorothy was with him. No. She was at the van. He was across the stream in the correct canyon and showed me a good place to cross.

How did it happen he was there? Well, Dorothy will tell you about that herself.



David Parker's legs three days after hiking cross-country through wild terrain.

Dorothy's Story by Dorothy Parker

We were in Long Valley, a favorite destination of ours. It is a perfect place to enjoy nature, which remains balanced and beautiful no matter what is happening in the chaotic world of humans.

I was alone in the campground, as Dave was on the trail, but we were used to that. Dave is an experienced and careful hiker, who frequently takes off alone because I have arthritic knees and cannot go as far as he can.

When Dave had not returned by 4:30, however, I became concerned that he might be caught at dusk without his headlamp. As a precaution, I turned on the van's headlights as a beacon and started down the trail, carrying both of our headlamps, his jacket and extra water. At 5:30, I had to stop where the trail split into two because I was afraid that I might miss Dave if he came up one way and I went down the other. Also, the trail past that point was steep for my knees.

After waiting a bit, I returned to the van and then cycled that same route again, calling all of the time. On the second return to camp, it was so dark that I could hardly see the trail even with a headlamp. It was apparent that Dave would have to spend a chilly night in the wild, with only light clothing and little water.

I checked my cell phone. No reception.

I needed to go for help, but what if Dave returned while I was gone? All I could do was load a lounge chair with a flashlight, Dave's sleeping bag, his warm clothes, a gallon of water, and some food that would not attract animals.

By 11:30 PM I started driving in search of cell phone reception. Oddly, the need to focus on the difficult road was a help in keeping my mind off Dave's danger.

The trees on the uphill side of the road appeared in the headlights like grey-white ghosts with shifting shapes; I had to remember to aim toward them and not veer to the other side, which often was a steep precipice that I could not see.

Amid all of this, kangaroo rats hopped across the road and jackrabbits ran in front of the van's headlights. They were my friends during this dark night. I cherished their company and was careful not to hit them.

It was three hours and 35 miles later when I finally reached an operator, who contacted the Tulare County Sheriff's Department. "Return to the campground and a Deputy Sheriff will meet you there," I was told.

I reached the camp amid a beautiful sunrise, just before Deputy Bryan Adams appeared. He had gotten up soon after 3:00 AM, when I had finally reached 911, and had driven 2 hours over difficult roads. What dedication and selflessness!

Bryan said that he knew the hiking trail well and would start walking as soon as the light got better. I heard no more until about 10:00 AM when another official truck appeared. The driver said that they had found a man 1.5 miles down the trail and he was coming to help.

Whew! That was how I learned that Dave had been found and was alive.

When Dave arrived at noon, he was walking independently. He was scratched, dirty and bloody in places, but otherwise healthy. Soon thereafter a paramedic appeared to check Dave's physical condition. She washed his cuts, applied band-aids, and told him to take a bath.

This story is a Valentine to the dedication, efficiency, and coordination of the Tulare County Sheriff's Rescue Team. We have written a formal thank-you letter and will be forever grateful.

4ÈÅ ÁÕÔÈÏÒ: David E. Parker grew up in Springfield, Mass. He obtained an AB in Philosophy from Brown University, a MA in Psychology from Wesleyan University, and a PhD in Clinical Psychology from U.C. Berkeley. He now lives in La Jolla, CA. He has been fully retired since 1994. He is a member of SDIS.

Dave and Dorothy met at the International House of U.C. Berkeley in the last year of their PhD studies there. They worked in Wisconsin for 26 years before returning to California in 1997. Dorothy's biography accompanies the next section of this booklet.

This piece was written in August of 2020. © David Parker

Coronavirus-induced Computer Dependency Disorder

Manuscript for submission to the Journal of Ambiguous Psychiatry
Dorothy L. Parker

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, Computer Dependency Disorder has been considered to be largely limited to sufferers younger than 40 years of age. Here we describe a new manifestation that shows increasing prevalence with age.

This condition, which was first reported among elderly populations during 2020, shows a distinctive progression. It often presents initially as its opposite – **Computer Aversion Syndrome** – but then slowly progresses through **Computer Anxiety**, **Technological Euphoria**, **Computer Crash Phobia**, **Zoom Zombie** and finally **Computer Compulsion Complex**.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on the introspection of one 81-year-old woman who exhibited the extraordinary ability to manifest nearly 20 distinct pathologies within only seven months, reminding us that we all have undiscovered talents. The subject's cognitive abilities were failing, but she could still occasionally pass the "I am not a robot" test that her browser regularly demanded of her.

RESULTS

The subject's downward spiral, arising from the fear of a tiny crown-adorned virus, has manifested in the morbid conditions listed below.

Triage Terror: the knowledge that an elderly person is likely to be (and probably ethically should be) on the unfavorable side of the decision of who gets a ventilator in a swamped medical system.

Triage Terror alternated with
Ventilator Vascillation: indecision concerning the signing of a "Do Not Ventilate" form to help prevent oneself from becoming a ventilator vegetable.

The two pathologies above led to
Isolation Idealization: the belief that the crisis will evaporate if one stays at home all day and also gets along seamlessly with one's spouse while at home(excuse the contradiction).

To maintain Isolation Idealization, the subject turned to
Computer Compensation Complex: the hope that, if she and her friends all learned how to interact via the internet, then they would stay sane enough to maintain social isolation and not contribute to viral spread.

However, the effectiveness of Computer Compensation was counteracted by
App Apathy: boredom and downright dread about having to master the opaque eccentricities of pertinent applications, especially since their tech-support staffs were swamped and largely unavailable.

App Apathy was exacerbated by
Password Slip-up: indicated by a desk loaded with tiny slips of paper, each designating a vital password for which the use had been forgotten.

Another counterbalance to Computer Compensation was
Fulminating Frustation: complicated by **Computer Abuse Syndrome**, expressed as the desire to submerge a computer in the Pacific Ocean and smash a Cell Phone underfoot.

Also, the patient had some awareness of, and wished to avoid
Cellphone Cyborgism: the terminal condition in which a cell phone becomes an irreplaceable body part that never leaves one's presence, and for which separation feels like death itself,

As well as,
Computer Crash Lobotomy: the complete loss of higher mental functions when a computer refuses to do a requested task immediately

And
Coronavirus and Computer Virus Conflation: indicated by compulsive wiping of the computer with 60% alcohol and the purchasing of masks for the computer's mouse.

Nonetheless, the subject eventually progressed to
Internet Infatuation, accompanied by **Ephemeral Euphoria:** a temporary belief that competence in Zoom would solve not only the current crisis but also the whole problem of aging because social and physical isolation sometimes is a hallmark of old age.

However, this relatively positive pathology was rapidly followed by
Zoom Zonk: the feeling of being hit over the head by unending back-to-back Zoom meetings and webinars.

Indications of Zoom Zonk include
Virtual Voyeurism: the uncontrollable desire to turn off one's own computer camera while continuing to observe the behavior of others on the computer screen.

And
Background Bewilderment: a feeling that the exotic backgrounds on Zoom video images are soothingly constant and solid, whereas the human-like figures flickering in and out of those backgrounds resemble ghosts.

Zoom Zonk pathology is also accompanied by

Avatar Affinity: the conviction that one's avatar is much more lovable than one's video image, leading to hiding behind the avatar.

And

Lower extremity neglect: a condition affecting all but the head and shoulders and resembling the behavior of brain-damaged "Hemi-neglect" patients who deny the existence of the left or right sides of their bodies, refusing to wash, comb hair or even wear clothes on one side of the body.

Prognosis.

Bleak. At this time, the patient is in terminal stages of **Zoom Zombie** degeneration. We hope that she will not collapse from the related conditions of **Zoom Host Hysteria** and **Attention Attenuation.**

The author. Dorothy L. Parker's academic credentials for this psychiatric study are nil. She is a retired Professor of Bacteriology and Virology whose career emphasized organisms without brains. Her childhood interest in biology and genetics led to a BA in bacteriology from the University of South Dakota, one year of studying virology as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Tübingen, Germany, and a PhD in molecular biology from U. California Berkeley. After 26 years of doing research and teaching at a campus of the University of Wisconsin, she retired to San Diego, where she continued with microbiological research at Scripps Institution of Oceanography for several years. She is a member of SDIS.

This piece was written in August of 2020. © Dorothy Parker

Pandemics and the Longue Durée

Oliver B. Pollak

Contents

Introduction and Statistics – Natural and manmade population catastrophes
Egypt – God was directly involved?
Florence - 1340s – God's punishment for sins?
England 1665-1771 -- Enlightenment
1918 – Spanish Flu
Conclusion

COVID-19 compelled inquiry. Reading, research and writing can be therapeutic, escape by immersion. In 1894 Alexandre Yersin researching in Hong Kong linked plague, rats, and fleas -- *Yersinia pestis*. In 1943 the antibiotic Streptomycin was prescribed for plague. In 2015 geneticists identified *Yersinia pestis* DNA on the teeth of a twenty-year-old female skeleton in a 5,000-year-old Bronze Age tomb in Sweden.[1]

In the late 1950s I read Giovanni Boccaccio's 1353 Black Death novel *Decameron*. Ten years later I read Philip D. Curtin's *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census* (1969), an exploration of statistical variability of enslaved people brought to America, ranging from 3.5 to 25 million. Curtin assisted by computers concluded 9,566,000.[2] I edited "International Historical Statistics" for G.K. Hall in the early 1980s. Numerical revisions, as we will see, are a feature of pandemic history.

Reading list: William H. McNeill's *Plagues and Peoples* (1976), John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (2004), two of John Aberth's nine books, *The Black Death,* The Great Mortality of 1348-1350 (2005), *Plagues in World History* (2011), and *The Terror of History, on the Uncertainties of Life in Western Civilization* (2011) by Teofilo F. Ruiz.[3] There are several perceptive novels about the Black Death, 1665 Great Plague of London and the 1918 Influenza.

Plagues, epidemics, and pandemics challenged medical knowledge, record keeping, communications, transport, and food supply. The term Pandemic initially applied to the three *Yersinia pestis* plagues now also applies to the Swine Influenza, HIV and COVID-19.

It took 200,000 years for the world's population to reach a billion people in 1800, 100 years to reach 1.6 billion in 1900, and 120 years to attain 7.8 billion in 2020. Disease, famine, war, infant mortality, life expectancy, and nutrition restrained growth. Agricultural mechanization, irrigation, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, the green revolution and other innovations increased food security and encouraged population growth.

[1] Simon Rasmussen et. al., "Early Divergent Strains of *Yersinia pestis* in Eurasia 5,000 Years Ago," *Cell*, 163 (October 15, 2015).

[2] Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census* (Madison: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

[3] John Aberth's *The Black Death*, A New History of the Great Mortality 1347-1500 (Oxford, OUP, 2020) and *Doctoring the Black Death*, Europe's Late Medieval Medical Response to Epidemic Disease (Oxford, forthcoming 2021) were not available to me.

Natural and *Manmade* Population Catastrophes				
mortalities in excess of one million				
Event	**Location**	**Time**	**Mortality**	**World Population**
Covid-19	World	11/30/2020	1.47 million	7.8 billion
	USA	11/30/2020	273,000	
HIV	World	2005-2012	36 million	
	World	2000		6.1 billion
Flu	World	1968	1 million	
	World	1960		3 billion
Asian Flu		1956-1958	2 million	
	World	1950		2.6 billion
World War II		*1940-1945*	*70-85 mill*	
Holocaust		*1939-1945*	*6 million*	
	World	1940		2.3 billion
Spanish Flu		1918-1920	50-100 mill	
	World	1920		1.86 billion
World War I		*1914-1918*	*15-19 mill*	
	World	1900		1.6 billion
3rd Pandemic	Asia	1894-1930	12 million	
Flu		1889-1890	1 million	
3rd cholera		1852-1860	1 million	
	World	1800		1 billion
Great Plague	London	1665	100,000	
	World	1400		390 million
2nd Pandemic - Black Death	1/3 of Europe	1346-1353	75-200 million	
	World	1300		392-431 million
1st Pandemic	Constantinople	541-750	25-100 mill	
Antonine Plague		165	5 million	
	World	200 BCE		150 million

Exodus, Pharaoh, Pestilence – ca 1300 BCE

Four of the ten plagues in Exodus look like *Yersinia pestis*. Pestilence, boils, buboes, swelling of lymph nodes in the groin, first born – rapid mortality. God punished Pharaoh to aid his people the Hebrews. Who wrote Exodus? – Moses or 6th century BCE Babylonian exile writers. It has been suggested that Egypt "afforded unique facilities" for plague "since its agricultural interests foster rats and its semi-arid conditions favor fleas."[4]

[4] Charles A. Kofoid, review of A. W. Wakil, *The Third Pandemic of Plague in Egypt, Isis* (June 1935): 297.

First Pandemic – Plague of Justinian 541-750

From 541-42 CE, 25 to100 million died. Constantinople had 500,000 inhabitants, 40 per cent died. The pandemic killed between a third and half the population of Eurasia. There were recurrences to 750.

Emperor Justinian reigned in Constantinople from 527 to 565. His historian Procopius, wrote in *History of the Wars* about near annihilation, fever, mass hysteria, heroic physicians and care takers, compassion, dying for lack of care, speech impediment after-effects, breakdown of burials, detailing soldiers to distribute money, political factions, the healthy secluding themselves in their homes, "all trades were abandoned by artisans," and "starvation was running riot."[5] Accounts of contagion, transmission, treatment, mortality, and food supply would be voiced in later pandemics.

Numerical revisions. A 2019 study using multidisciplinary analysis downgrades the mortality to substantially less.[6]

Black Death, 1346-53 - Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* - The Great Mortality

Deaths during the Black Death were regionally between 30 and 60 per cent. Alfred W. Crosby observes "with the eruption of the Black Death in the mid-1300s, Europe's population crashed by one-third and continued to fall well into the next century, with city population probably shrinking faster than rural."[7]

In 1338 Florence had 110,000-120,000 inhabitants. In 1351 50,000 remained. From 1350 through the 1400s the Black Death revisited about every decade.

Boccaccio's *Decameron* depicts seven young women and three men fleeing the Black Death in Florence. They tell 100 saucy irreverent stories in ten days. The novel and the commentary, a product of crisis and imagination, were written during the plague.[8]

Boccaccio wrote of melancholy, contagion or divine will, unprecedented burial demands: "I say, then, that the years [of the era] of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came the death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous

[5] Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies, Sourcebook: Procopius: The Plague, 542," online.
[6] "The Justinianic Plague: An inconsequential pandemic?" first published December 2, 2019, Lee Mordechai, Merle Eisenberg, Timothy P. Newfield, Adam Izdebski, Janet E. Kay and Hendrik Poinar, and see also "Rejecting Catastrophe: The Case of the Justinianic Plague," by Lee Mordechai and Merle Eisenberg, *Past & Present*, July 2019, 3-50.
[7] Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality, Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1997), 50. See also Donald G. McNeil, Jr., *New York Times* science and health reporter, "To Take on the Coronavirus, Go Medieval on It," *NYT*, February 28, 2020.
[8] See Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, translated by Richard Aldington (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books,1949).

dealings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in the parts of the East…had now unhappily spread towards the West."

Sanitation:
"Orders had been given to cleanse the city of filth."
Carrying flowers or scented herbs to comfort the brain with such odours
Allay the smell of dead bodies
"They washed their hands" (face and mouth with vinegar in the hopes of preventing infection)
"An enormous number of ignorant men and women set up as doctors in addition to those that were trained." Quacks and flagellants

Social Distancing:
Cruel policy – avoid the sick; Shut themselves in houses
"One citizen avoided another, hardly any neighbor troubled about others, relatives never or hardly ever visited each other"
abandonment of sick spouses, parents and children, siblings
preservation - "Abandonment in which the sick were left by the cowardice of the healthy."
Flee, stay, shun, isolate, shelter in place, special clothing, quarantine

Civil Authority:
"In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared…"
"Every man was therefore able to do as he pleased."
"deriding authority because they knew the guardians of the law were sick or dead"
"The laws are now strict again"
looser morals in those women that survived
"The plight of the lower and most the middle classes was even more pitiful to behold."

The "other," and newcomers suffer the brunt of xenophobia. Medieval Jewish communities were the subject of scapegoating, being demonized, persecuted and murdered for causing the plague, poisoning wells, etc. Various sources state 60, 200 to 1000 communities were attacked.[9]

Numerical revisions. Black Death estimate in the 1950's for the Low Countries was "a complete fallacy." By ceasing "overprivileging of particular urban sources" "which obscured demographic decimation" the Low Countries experience was "perhaps no less severe than other parts of Western Europe."[10]

[9] Donald G. McNeil, Jr., "Finding a Scapegoat When Epidemics Strike," *NYT* September 1, 2009.
[10] Joris Roosen and Daniel R. Curtis, "The 'Light Touch' of the Black Death in the Southern Netherlands: an urban trick?," *Economic History Review* (2019).

Encyclopaedia Britannica (1768-1771) – The Enlightenment

The Black Death visited England in 1349 and at least seven more times until The Great Plague of London 1665. Perhaps 100,000 people died in 18 months. England was plague free after 1666.[11]

The three volume *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1768-1771) published about 100 years after the Great Plague of London, devoted 25% of its pages to anatomy, medicine, midwifery, and surgery. Perhaps *Encyclopaedia* editors read Procopius and Boccaccio. Familiar considerations include quarantining, social distancing, masking, fleeing until the disease is under control, and gratitude for health care.

Pestilence was described as "poisonous miasma, brought from eastern countries." It is "not a native of our country… the best preservative is to fly to a distant country…those princes best consult the welfare of their subjects, who in the time of the plague endeavor to prevent the spreading of the infection…when a family is afflicted, separate the well from the sick, and burn all their movables…Those who are obliged to be near the sick, must take care that the miasma do not approach their vital juices nor yet the saliva. To this purpose, frequent spitting, and washing the mouth with vinegar, or wine, or snuffing them up the nose, are useful…Plague sufferers should be fed special foods – "But above all, acids are highly praised; such as, juice of citrons, Seville oranges, lemons, vinegar, etc, which resists poison, putrefaction, and prevent the dissolution of the blood." This sound like Vitamin C scurvy treatment formulated in the 1750s.

Third Pandemic - Plague - 1855 active until 1960

Ten million deaths in India and two million in China. In 1894 bacteriologist Alexandre Yersin discovered *Yersinia pestis.*

1918 Spanish Flu

In 1920 the U.S. population was 106 million. Deaths from the 1918 influenza pandemic amounted to about 675,000 in America.

On September 30, 1919, Sam L. Rogers Director of the Census wrote to William C. Redfield the Secretary of Commerce informing him that from September 1 to December 31, 1918 that an estimated 445,000 Americans died from the influenza epidemic. The authors in 1920 were still collecting evidence. "The epidemic did not end until well into the year 1919, but it has not been found feasible to present at this time any data relating to that year."[12]

Numerical revisions. Global mortality has been updated at least three times: 1920s, 21.5 million; 1991, 24.7 to 39.3 million; and in Johnson and Mueller including "excess mortality"

[11] Andrew B. Appleby, "The Disappearance of Plague: A Continuing Puzzle," *The Economic History Review,* (May 1980).

[12] *Special Tables of Mortality from Influenza and Pneumonia in Indiana, Kansas, and Philadelphia, PA.* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 7.

suggest 50 million with the caveat "that even this vast figure may be substantially lower than the real toll, perhaps as much as 100 percent understated." There were probably three waves. The 445,000 four-month American death toll noted above were part of the second wave that "scorched its way around the globe."[13]

Conclusion

By the end of November 2020, the Covid-19 had claimed about 273,000 American lives. Historians writing the Covid-19 history will contend with masses of information, uncertainty, upending and reconfiguration. Discord between leaders, confusion, and anti-social behavior existed in earlier pandemics. Science, healthcare, living conditions, nutrition, education, communication, and lower pathogen lethality mitigated COVID mortality. The reactions of stubborn individualism, human nature, mask phobia, dislike of government regulation and a sense of privileged immunity echoed earlier pandemics.

Zooming, education, print culture
Unemployment, poverty, income inequality, eviction and homelessness,
Economic retraction, decline of traditional retail, recovery
Work at home office or office building
Racial, immigrant, generation, and class divide
Health care preparedness and vaccine
Limits to empathy, compassion, and expectations?
How can the richest country in the world be so stricken?
Continuing threats: exploiting natural resources, pollution, and global warming.
We await the new normal.

The author. Oliver B. Pollak was born to refugees from Germany and Austria in England in 1943. The family emigrated to America in 1952. During the mid 1960s he served in the U.S. Navy. He earned his BA at California State University, Los Angeles, a PhD in History at UCLA and a law degree from Creighton University. He taught at the University of Zimbabwe in the early 1970s and at the University of Nebraska at Omaha from 1974 to 2012 and practiced law. He is the author of twelve books, several hundred scholarly and popular articles and is a correspondent for the online San Diego Jewish World. He cofounded the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society and is a member of the Institute for Historical Study. His interests include print culture, legal history, food history, biography, higher education, American Jewish History, Myanmar, and Zimbabwe. Oliver and Karen retired to Richmond in 2016. © Oliver B. Pollak

[13] Niall P. A. S. Johnson and Juergen Mueller, "Updating the Accounts:" Global Mortality of the 1918-1920 'Spanish' Influenza Pandemic," The Johns Hopkins University Press, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (Spring 2002): 105, 107.

Lockdown Thoughts

by Beatrice K. Rose MD, MPH

When the lockdown was announced and all events cancelled, my first thought was about the empty space that was created for future afternoons. The emptiness seemed vast because there was nothing there.

I began thinking about that nothingness. What was there instead? Was the nothing there in my mind or really in that space. Something was there and I thought most of it came from my mind: plans, thoughts abut projects, thoughts to think about, thoughts about what other people communicated or said.

What about all the things that happened in that space before the lockdown—the many people who did or brought things to me, where are they now, where did they go? I treasure them now because they are no longer in that space and the only imprint they have left is in my mind. But they had a value that I had not recognized or acknowledged. The space became a tangible thing, an area to be explored, to be understood, an area wanting to be and waiting to be filled. Then time began to take its toll as more spaces proliferated under the lockdown and my mind needed to address all of them.

The author. Beatrice Kartus Rose was born in 1915 in New York and celebrated her 105th birthday in California during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 1943, after working in the federal Treasury, Lend-lease, and Agriculture Departments, she entered George Washington Medical School, graduating in 1946. Later, as a professor at the Department of Public Health and Preventative Medicine at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU), and in addition to usual duties, she created the first Infectious Disease Manual at OHSU, supervised medical students as Health Counselors in Portland Section 8 housing, participated in setting of CPR standards by the American Heart Association, introduced CPR into the OHSU curriculum, certified medical students in CPR, helped set standards for EMTs, and assisted in training programs that prepared ambulance attendants to become EMTs. She was President of the Oregon Heart Association, a member of the Oregon State Board of Health and Doctor-Citizen of the Year 1972, in an award from Oregon Medical Association, making her the first woman to be honored by that association.

In 1994 Dr. Rose relocated to La Jolla, CA, where she still resides. A pillar of SDIS, Bea created its Millenial Project and has held several Board positions. She founded the SDIS Neuroscience Group, which she led for a quarter century. In 2020 she is an active participant in many Zoom meetings of SDIS.

Dr. Rose served on the Board and the Scholarship Application Review Committee of the Doris A. Howell Foundation. She also was as a mentor for the UC San Diego International Center for ten years. For her residence community, she wrote a Fire Manual and revised the Disaster Plan. She also created and presented with Vi residents a six-week program of book reviews highlighting the scientific legacy that won WWII.

This essay was sent to SDIS in July 2020. © Beatrice Rose.

Plagues in Ancient Greece and Rome

Michael Sage

The dangers that COVID-19 pose both to us and to our world are nothing new. If anything, the menace of infectious diseases was far more threatening to the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Plague appears at the very beginning of Western literature. The Iliad, the great poem ascribed to Homer describing the war between the Greeks and the Trojans, opens with a plague. The priest of Apollo, Chryses, approaches Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek army besieging Troy, to beg Agamemnon to release his daughter Chryseis. He brings a ransom accompanied by the symbols of the god. Despite his plea, Agamemnon spurns him. He does it in a brutal way, makes it clear he will not give the girl up, and threatens the priest if he ever finds him again near the Greek ships. The priest prays to Apollo, asking to send a disaster upon the Greeks for what has happened. The archer god, enraged by the way his priest has been treated, obliges his priest. His arrows of death strike down animals and then men in the Greek camp. For nine days men died in droves.

Finally, Agamemnon gives way and the priest's daughter Chryseis is returned to her father, but not before a quarrel breaks out between Agamemnon and the greatest fighter in the Greek camp, Achilles. It is the quarrel that forms the real subject matter of the poem.

The story that opens the poem brings together a number of elements that marked the ancient experience of infectious diseases. It illustrates the role of Apollo as the bringer of plague and death. Like ice cream, the god came in many flavors. The god that Chryses prayed to was Apollo Smintheus who as the "mouse-god" was associated with plagues. Both he and his sister Artemis, the Roman Diana, were associated with sudden death, he in men and she in women, especially during childbirth. It points to what seems to have been a common ancient explanation for epidemics, that they were the work of a divine force and punishment for some human transgression. Both the Greeks and Romans had deities connected with epidemics and other forms of illness. Apollo in his various forms not only sends plagues but can end them. The prime healing god in Greece and Rome was Apollo's son Asclepius. His reputation as a healing god was so great that in 293 BC, because of a plague, the Romans brought the god to the city and built a temple for him. The plague then stopped. Other deities were also associated with illness and epidemics. The Romans had a specific temple dedicated to the goddess Fever. The sources are full of these deities. It seems likely that most people viewed plagues and epidemics as caused by a divine power of some sort and so thought they could be treated by appeasing those powers wit prayers, rituals, and sacrifices.

The plague in Homer also illustrates another aspect of infectious illness in antiquity as well as in the modern world. That is the relationship between crowding and the intensity of infectious diseases. Crowding in camps, as well as their lack of sanitation, created a perfect environment for the transmission of infectious diseases. All pre-modern armies lost far more men to disease than

to enemy action. This was particularly true when, as at Troy, they were conducting a siege and so stationary for a long period. Lack of sanitary facilities and close quarters contributed to the rapid spread of disease.

Besieging armies were cities in miniature, and it was in cities that epidemics and plagues struck the hardest. They were incubators of disease and suffered from endemic infectious disease which often remained dormant for part of the year and then broke out, often at the same time, every year.

For instance in Rome, the most populous city in the Roman Empire, with close to one million inhabitants, appalling poverty, crowding and unsanitary conditions, malaria, typhus and tuberculosis became a permanent part of the population, breaking out mostly during the summer and early fall. Cities were also commercial and trading centers where ships often landed their cargoes and epidemics. Descriptions of epidemics and plagues in antiquity often mention their having come by ships from overseas. This was also true of the arrival of the Black Death in Europe in 1347.

The first detailed account of a plague occurs in the history of the great war between the two most powerful Greek states, Athens and Sparta that lasted from 431-404 BC. The plague broke out in the second year of the war, 430. Thucydides, who had had the plague and recovered, writes that it was thought to have come from Egypt and first broke out in Piraeus, the port of Athens. It quickly spread to the main part of the city. Curiously, Thucydides mentions that the year had been particularly free of disease before the onset of the epidemic. The plague lasted two full years and then reoccurred shortly after.

The writer describes the symptoms and the course of the disease. He notes that Athens was then under siege by the Spartans and that people from the countryside had fled within the city walls, which made overcrowding and the spread of the disease even worse. He mentions that the number of deaths was overwhelming with bodies lying in the streets.

Together with the staggering number of the dead, he paints a picture of the breakdown of social norms. Men saw the good and the bad dying arbitrarily and so felt free to do what they wanted. As Thucydides writes: “As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether one worshipped them or not, when one saw the good and the bad dying indiscriminately.” Given the usual view ascribing plagues to the will of the gods, this was a striking effect of the disease. There is no consensus about what the disease was. But it was probably a disease that died out long ago with no modern descendants.

Thucydides mentions both the attempt by doctors to treat the disease and their succumbing to it. He does not describe the treatments used. Ancient medical writings hardly deal with epidemics beyond describing them. It was not until the late nineteenth century that the theory that many diseases were caused by microscopic organisms gained ground and finally triumphed. In essence, ancient medical science had no answer to the spread of infectious diseases beyond avoiding contact and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

A number of plagues are mentioned in Roman sources. A particularly destructive one broke out in the Roman Empire in the 160s AD lasting into the 180s, which may have killed a quarter of the Empire's inhabitants. The general view is that it was smallpox. We next hear of a further serious plague in the 250s.

The most devasting epidemic of all broke out in the mid-sixth century in the eastern half of the Empire; it was probably bubonic plague. Perhaps more than one-third of the Empire's population died. It had serious political and economic repercussions. It severely weakened the Empire at a time when threats to it had multiplied. It was the last serious plague of European antiquity. As Covid has made clear, the possibility of catastrophe that epidemics and plague threaten will always be with us.

The author. Michael Sage, PhD, is a professor emeritus for the University of Cincinnati, where he taught in the Classics Department for thirty-five years and also served as head of the Classics Department. He moved to San Diego in 2010 and taught at UCSD as a visiting professor. He has published a number of books on religious, intellectual, and military history in Greek and Roman civilization. His latest book is a study of the Emperor Septimius Severus, who reigned at the end of the second century AD, at a critical time in the Roman Empire's existence. In addition, he has published a number of articles and encyclopedia entries on classical subjects. Since joining the San Diego Independent Scholars, he has given several talks on various topics.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September 2020. © Michael Sage.

Collage of Cellphone Photographs



Photographers, left to right starting at the top: Nigella Hillgarth, Martha Dennis, Janet Goff, Ursula Moede, Thespine Kavoulakis, Liz Bonkowsky, Kim Signoret-Paar, Barbara Bank, Nancy Groves. The collage was created by Kim Signoret-Paar. All are in the Oceanids Cellphone Photography Group. See next page.

Cellphone Photography as Solace in a Pandemic

Kim Signoret-Paar

We all have our cellphones, and a bonus is the camera that comes with it. A group of us have been meeting monthly since December 2018 to figure out how to improve our use of that camera. We skipped a beat of two months as the pandemic changed everything that we had scheduled into our lives. Then we began meeting on Zoom, focusing on photos that could be taken in the vicinity of our homes.

We initially photographed sights along the streets near us. We then went on to photograph wildlife and plants outside and contents inside our homes. We moved on to studies of a topic each month from a website and book entitled "Seeing Fresh" http://seeingfresh.com/: color, texture, simplicity, light and space. The collage of our work is from the topic of Color. We have just finished Texture and are moving on to Simplicity.

We share our images, tips, apps, and camaraderie at our meetings. I think that we find that photographing our surroundings has enriched our lives during lockdown – making us appreciate what is still available to us and, in fact, right before our noses.

Kim Signoret-Paar uses her camera to create images that tell stories from fleeting moments or from structures around us. She won her first competition with a BW photo of a boy in a tree when she was thirteen. With a degree in journalism from the University of Iowa, she went west in 1980. Her career in California and Mexico focused on public relations, publishing, and fundraising. In 2009, Kim returned to creating art with her camera and, in the summer of 2014, she won Best of Show at the International Exhibition of Photography at the San Diego County Fair. Her website is: www.signoretpaar.com

In addition to competing and showing her photography in various venues, Kim teaches iPhoneography at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Retirement Center and OASIS San Diego. She coordinates the Oceanids Cellphone Photography Group.

Other participating photographers are listed on the preceding page.

This piece was sent to SDIS in September 2020. © Kim Signoret-Paar

A TRAVEL LEADER'S VIEW OF COVID-19

Jill Swaim

I have had "the best job in the world" for the last 16 years and it all came to a crashing end (most likely) in March. I have been a Group Leader for the adult education/travel not-for-profit company, Road Scholar. I would spend about 12 weeks of the year traveling with these groups in Southern California, meeting wonderful people, staying at great places, and seeing many beautiful and educational sights. I learned so much and figured that I would be doing this until I couldn't anymore, (perhaps when I turn 80 some years from now.)

I also was an Ambassador for them, having given 300 plus presentations across California and in a few other states over the last eight years. Although, this was a volunteer position, I received vouchers to go on Road Scholar trips, so my travel was almost all paid for because I was the volunteer that gave more presentations than any other person in the country. I also had three Road Scholar programs that I planned to attend in 2020: in May, (France), June, (New York "Five Boroughs in Five Days) and August, (Vegetarian Cuisine and Buddhism at a Buddhist Retreat in Soquel). These have all been cancelled.

Travel has been my primary hobby over all of my adult life. I have been to all continents except Antarctica, and to almost 100 countries, plus every US state. I also had planned to spend a week in Palm Springs in May, and a week in Vancouver, BC in August. These, of course, have been canceled as well.

There is no telling if Road Scholar will survive the pandemic.

There is no telling if Road Scholar will survive the pandemic. They are trying hard. They have let many long-time employees go and stopped publication of their catalogs and are now all online. Their hope is to ride this out and come back to where they were before 2020 some day.

My husband, who was in Cambodia at the time, was unable to return home because of COVID-19.

Meanwhile, I am alone at home since my husband was in Cambodia when this happened and was unable to return in June, as the airlines stopped flying from there except to China, so he has been happily stranded there. There is little or no Covid there, and he lives a free life, in a nice apartment going to music events, pool tournaments and walking the city daily. He does not want to return here until a vaccine is developed, Covid is gone, or there is no quarantine for those returning to the US. There are many expatriates in cities all over the world, who are living better lives than we do in the US at this time. Cambodia is locked in, and all are accounted for, so the virus did not spread. They do have mosquito borne diseases like dengue fever however and rampant poverty because the clothing factories have been shut down, and poverty has reared its ugly head.

I have respected the local, county, state, and scientists' pleas to isolate, and I have mostly done so. I have gone once to a pharmacy, once inside a bank, and walked through a restaurant several times to pick up food. I have my groceries delivered, take walks in the neighborhood almost daily, swim in our condo association's pool almost daily, do "Jazzercise On Demand" online and Chair

Yoga on You Tube. I call friends and family daily, see one son and those grandchildren once a week from a distance and speak to the other son and those grandchildren once in a while. It is a lonely time, but I try and keep busy, and stay positive. I listen to many lectures online, do jigsaw puzzles, and have a few streaming episodes of shows that I like on tv to watch at night, besides baseball, which has been a great diversion for me.

My great grandmother died in the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, leaving four children still at home, with my grandmother, age 15 in charge of the 3 younger than her. She married quickly and had a hard life living with her mother in law, who used her like a housekeeper. No one in my family who is still around ever asked their mothers or grandmothers about what life was like during that time. How did my great grandmother, Rose, contract the disease? Why did no one else in the family get it? Etc. That is why I think that this record that SDIS is compiling will be of interest to many in the future. I know that I am lucky to live in the beautiful city of Carlsbad, have a pool to swim in, comfortable surroundings, money to have my groceries delivered as necessary, and a car if I need to go anywhere that is too far to walk.

My great grandmother died in the Spanish Flu pandemic.

One new interest of mine, is Improv. I am taking lessons once a week on Zoom, and it is the highlight of my week. I have hopes to teach it both virtually and in person at our local Senior Center when it reopens sometime in the future. I wear a mask when leaving the house, wash my hands often, and stay 6 feet from others.

My life has changed over the last six months, and it has been life-changing for me. Yet I am adaptive, look on it as a learning experience, and hope to survive without contracting Covid.

The author. Jill Swaim graduated from the San Diego State University, taught elementary and middle school for 39 years in San Diego and Ventura Counties, and loved being a Group Leader for Road Scholar for 16 years. She has traveled to six continents and over 50 countries. She is member of SDIS.

This essay was sent to SDIS in September 2020. © Jill Swaim

Nine Months of 2020

By Tiffany Vakilian

2020 started with rain nonstop
The two-year-old driveway bottomed out
Arguing with the previous contractor
feels like complaining

Pregnancy reigned from my bed
I avoided all things red
Makena shots til little man's birth
feels like complaining

Coronavirus came via China
Wanting to share, the world stood in a line-up
Too many people to count started dying yet it
feels like complaining

For safety, we couldn't go anywhere
Masks and job loss EVERY where
LA almost had clean air, still it
feels like complaining

Knees on Black necks and bullets flew
Protests and politics, who's lying to you
Say their names, why don't you do because it
feels like complaining

Fires started in California
Southern hurricanes eating the ground up
Did you almost miss the earthquake, because that
feels like complaining

Oh yeah, it's an election year
Here comes mud and bipartisan fear
Voting might not even matter, dear and it
feels like complaining

Don't get me started on social media
Look up "brainwashed" in the encyclopedia
Gross darkness is what people are posting, which
feels like complaining

Kobe, and Boseman, and Ginsberg
the year ain't even over
Hold death with ice in cold water, or it
feels like complaining

What book of Revelation are we in
What year of the tribulation?
Wonder if missing the second coming
feels like complaining

With a Masters in Transformative Language Arts, Tiffany Vakilan is not only a voracious reader and exceptional performer but a professional writer and editor. Tiffany is currently President of the San Diego Book Awards Association, as well as a member of ASCAP, The National Forensics League, and the Kingdom Writers Association. She's the quintessential Renaissance Gal. This poem was sent to SDIS in September 2020. © Tiffany Vakilian

Monarch Butterflies as a Therapy for Covid-19

Christopher Wills (the photographer)
and Liz Fong Wills (the Monarch whisperer)

After my wife Liz and I managed to get out of Raja Ampat, Indonesia, at the end of March (we were two of the last people to transit through the Singapore Airport), we found ourselves back in San Diego. It seemed that one moment we were swimming with whale sharks and watching birds of paradise mating, and the next we were stuck in quarantine at home. It was disorienting!

Casting about for something to do, we observed that the milkweed plants Liz had added to our back garden were full of Monarch butterfly caterpillars, and adult Monarchs were flying everywhere. Over the next several weeks I used a variety of closeup equipment to make a movie of all the life stages of this remarkable insect.

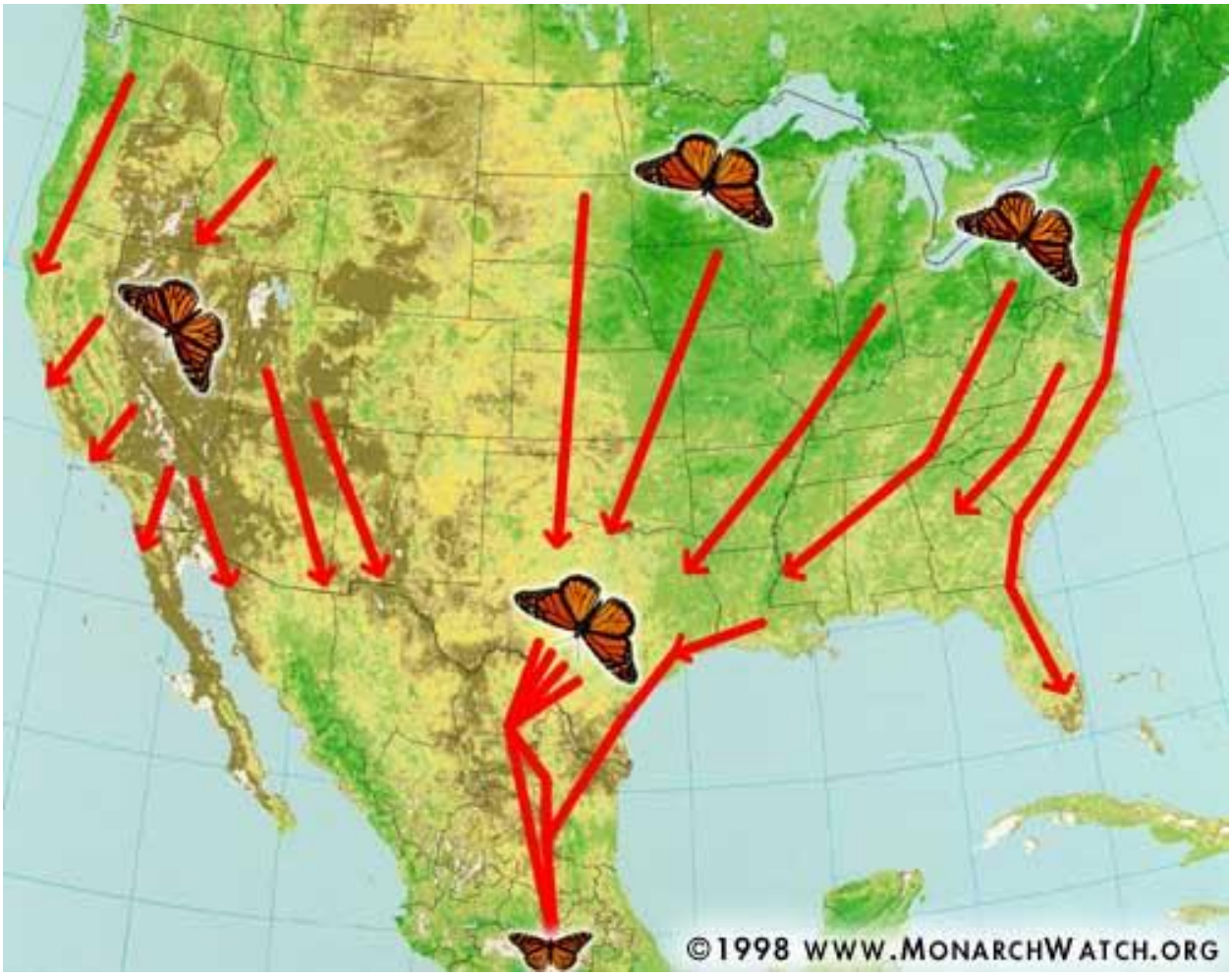
At one point we were tracking sixteen caterpillars. The most challenging bits to photograph were an egg hatching and the swift transition from larva to pupa since you never know when these things will happen. Sometimes we would watch all day, only for the awaited transition to happen during the night!

The Monarch, as you know, can fly long distances — as shown on the map on the next page. Now, on the West Coast, some populations have taken up year-round residence.

These beautiful butterflies can make birds sick because as larvae they fed on milkweed sap, which is full of cardiac glycosides. To help these threatened insects, you can plant milkweed plants!

Here is the YouTube link to the movie on the Monarch butterfly life cycle: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfYrDqF_4rM .

On the next page is a map showing the fall migrations — they reverse in the spring. Remarkably, it takes more than one generation for the Eastern Monarchs to complete their spring and fall migrations!



Liz and Chris Wills are members of Oceanids and the Friends of the UCSD International Center. We were born in Stockton, Calif. and London, England respectively, and we met at Berkeley's International House in the early 1960s during the Free Speech Movement. We came to UCSD in 1972. Liz was trained as a school psychologist, and Chris is now an emeritus professor of evolutionary biology in UCSD's Division of Biological Sciences. He has worked in human evolution and molecular evolution.

Chris has written a number of books about evolution, including "The Darwinian Tourist" (Oxford, 2010). We have traveled widely, in part because of Chris' current research on the evolution and ecology of rainforests around the world, and in part just for the fun of it. Chris has photographed wildlife in a wide range of terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Together we have presented many illustrated talks about our adventures to help raise money for the Friends of the International Center Scholarship Program. If we hadn't been stuck at home because of Covid, we would have missed the many details of the Monarch butterfly life cycle!

This piece was sent to SDIS in August 2020. © Christopher and Liz Wills

Appendix

PLAGUE JOURNAL 2020

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RETURN TO THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN 85
HERE COMES MORE 86
LOOK AT ME 87
A COMMUNITY OF WIDOWS 88
ON MY OWN 89
SOME PROSPECTS 90
LOOSENING RESTRICTIONS 91
SIGNAL 92
GRASS 93
HARD TO REACH 94
GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF 95
PROTESTS 96
GOLDEN ZIPPERS 97
CORASUE COUGHING 98
CAN WE SURVIVE WITHOUT THE INTERNET? 99
THE PERFECT POSITION 100
WORKING 101
LIMP CARROTS 102
EATING ANGUISH 103
BIRDS, SQUIRRELS, AND DOG WALKERS 104
MY RIGHT LEG 105
SNOW IN JUNE 106
GOSLINGS 107
EXERCISES 108
MOWING AND SHAVING 109
DOORWAYS 110
IT MAY WELL BE 111
STONES 112

RETURN TO THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN
I am dying and the world is dying.
I wanted Leslie Friedman for the part
but she wasn't available. So Corasue and I
have created a virtual cave of phagocytic shadows.
You reach a point where life just goes on
while you can't. Yet the corner must be
turned, going upstairs or downstairs
or staying on the same level.
Memorial Day was pivotal,
dance of the dead on the beaches,
a mask-less masquerade ball.
Today indoors it is so hot
I can note the viral index
wearing only my underpants. Walker
aside, I may still be able to get up though
by pushing down on the computer table,
but leave that till later. Corasue
hasn't made her appearance,
and I am beginning to think
this could be going somewhere,
if only outdoors to feed the starlings.
Looking up, I see a jet trail,
which means that someone must be above it all
without feeling the burning inside,
or is that a cinder at the end of it
or perhaps the NIPSCO burn-off?
Today may be the day
when I won't be able to bend over far enough
to put my socks on,
so maybe I'll clang around in here
barefoot among the stalagmites
when I present myself to the waking day
feeling every bit of detritus
leftover from last night's unconscious ramblings
where if I can't walk by myself
I can still fly up walls and over rooftops
and make swordplay my diversion of choice.
But then there is the RLS
that interferes with the PLS
to keep me from sleeping all day.
If Haggard and Halloo were still around
I could send this in
and maybe get online or at least
give whoever is published today a shot
of my critical adrenalin,
but there isn't even a weekly Front Porch
for me to treat others
to my nonsense and empathy.
So this is it,
and I'm the only one left.

HERE COMES MORE
Clank goes the sky
and it pours
more vertical advance for plants
and horizontal decline among people.
My wife has just mowed our lawn
of pandemic grass
and already it has grown
as great in percentage as Terre Haute.
I with my imbalancing disease
have given up turning corners,
and she, alas, may be
as overcome by this exercise in reduction
as Jewel's unmasked market in profusion.
The tide is not turning,
we believe, but changing color
like the liberated sunbathers
jumpstarting their tan.
Let the sporadic robins
enjoy their upstart worms
while I further my sleep
to twelve hours of waking life
until this is all over
and I arise to a brave new world
without friends but unaffected species.
Clouds may keep blooming white
on a blue horizon then turn grey
for another onslaught of luxuriance,
just as my insistence to pee
subsides to keep my genius going
past the brink of my unconscious.
That is, until my restless legs fall off their joints
like Wagner's barbecued ribs
to lie helplessly on the bed
or at chair-side. I may be doomed
in my increasing sedentary way
to create as profound a malignancy
as anything in nature,
seeing as we are all part of it
without knowing how to deal with it
but in dreams, which even though
they be nightmares deliver us to the relief
of everyday phenomena,
re-encouraged to stand up
to tasks of the moment
however inglorious and shortsighted,
thanking our spouses
for taking them over
and praising their outcome.

LOOK AT ME
I'm as deranged
as a Picasso and dismantled
as a drunkard,
not knowing my right foot
from my left as they
prevaricate the living room.
Yet I am used to this
worsening condition as a chick
gradually making its way back
to its shell. Whereas once
I went up and down stairs
two steps at a time with a bound,
all I can do now is keep hold of the railing,
while a decade ago I could scale
Trail 9 and back in five hours,
maneuvering my way along Trail 7
with my walker takes two,
and having bicycled for miles in my youth,
I can't even mount one without
tipping over. Yet I can negotiate our shelter
from chair to sofa arm to wall to bathroom doorknob
without my walker, keeping it only as
a brace between the recliner and the DVD player,
and can still put on my underpants
and tie my shoes, although retrieving
anything dropped on the floor
remains a trying undertaking.
I can still cook—some tried and true meals—
and take out and return
the garbage receptacles, rake leaves into piles
but not tarp them, a heavy snow may be
too much to shovel, and, as you know,
my wife has taken over mowing the lawn.
While the PLS isn't supposed to kill me,
it may render me home-bound by Christmas,
so that the increasing difficulty
of my getting in and out of the car
may exclude that day's visit to relatives,
if not my helping Corasue trim the tree,
although I may have to submit
to directing her from my armchair.
But then my being virtually quarantined
keeps me from following her
into the supermarket where, masked or not,
I would be exposed to the virus.
Yet what would happen to me,
if she were to succumb, and all the things she does
to keep our household together
fell on my depreciating shoulders?

A COMMUNITY OF WIDOWS
I actually have two walkers:
the one I keep upstairs in the video room
and one in the car
for negotiating curbs to sidewalks
on our infrequent carry-outs
and parking lots to trails
on minimal joint excursions
into natural areas.
Both are gifts—from a lady up the road
and another in Miller—previously
owned and operated by their late husbands.
Why should we buy one
when these were no longer needed?
The husband of the lady next door died,
as did a lady's on a nearby street,
and one further off.
The husbands of two friends in Chicago
and one commuting between there
and Bethesda are dead.
I know them all collectively
as "my wife's friends." We get along alright.
They came to the house occasionally—
before the stay-home advisory—
and now Corasue calls and emails them
periodically to check up on how they are doing
and takes walks with three.
They don't visit anymore, which,
for my incapacities, I, and they, I presume,
are just as glad. I, for being the odd man "in",
so to speak, feel uncomfortable with them,
and I think Corasue gets overdosed
with their sympathy in advance. But then
I don't have any friends except my wife,
one in California, and an erstwhile buddy in Brazil,
the latter who may have succumbed by now to the pandemic.
At the Front Porch I was friendly
with many people, but not friends.
In most cases the relationships prevailed
only that Thursday evening. Mostly musicians,
they were my often quizzical audience
and I always their enthusiastic advocate. Again,
I felt odd being among them
and not understood or appreciated
except when our talk turned to them,
which I always by compensation facilitated. Still,
despite our transience, most of them
loved me, as I did them. Yet,
not as innately gregarious as my wife,
I doubt I'll ever see them again.

ON MY OWN
I can still drive by myself, when needed.
Today I took the car in for an oil change,
early, which my wife doesn't like, but I prefer,
because I don't like waiting around
in a lobby full of customers and TV talk.
She doesn't either, yet not enough
to get up before six to get over there
before seven, the opening time. I intend
to be first in line and the first one out.
Not one to wheel myself under the vehicle,
empty the dirty oil, get up and put in a new can,
and then test the level—which now I couldn't
begin to do and have never wanted to, although
I've stood and watched the procedure countless times—
I pay the semi-annual $27.20. Still, the procedure—
drainage, dipstick, and all—appeals to me as much
as a doctor's visit. At least with the oil change,
you figure there's an improvement; with the doctor
things only get worse. Some new test, prescription,
or proscription is required, and add to those
my worsening condition, which can only be monitored.
So this morning just after dawn, happy
to put on my mask and get some fresh air,
I ventured out on my own into the pandemic universe,
whose death count in our country had just topped
100,000. No masks but mine anywhere. None
on the passersby, none at the shop. There was a sign
on the door saying no one was allowed in the lobby
and that oil change customers either had to
wait in their cars or elsewhere. Being elevated
in my car while the workers operated on it
would make me feel worse than at the doctor's.
At least watching in the garage, I could see
what they were doing under there and follow
their departures and returns. What if they did
something abnormal, such as forgetting
to put back the oil cap or leaving a wrench
behind in the works, or went off
and just left me up there with no ignition key
to open the windows and call for help?
Without a mask, where else would I have waited:
a contaminated McDonald's, the killer street?
And in the garage, where I habitually
stationed myself, were my counterparts keeping
any more social distance than customers
in the lobby? No, they were at close range.
"Out of curiosity," I coughed involuntarily,
"why are you guys not wearing masks?"
"The boss said we didn't have to," they chorused.
"And he wouldn't ask it of customers."

SOME PROSPECTS
Just taking a false step at home
or on a curb or patch of grass,
I could trip and hit my head or hip
and it would be all over. The head
could total me; the hip portend
arduous rehabilitation, which,
if plausible, wouldn't be possible,
given my progressive deterioration.
My world could change drastically
in an instant, like the world at large.
One moment we were caught up
in our customary lives; the next,
hearing about keeping social distance,
preferably staying home, closing
our businesses, not going out to eat
or to any gathering. In a second,
if I were still conscious, I could see
myself dying or at least having
everything I was trying to hold on to
taken away, which I did when
the COVID-19 alarm went off. And
with the latter, it was everything
we took for granted: the food, drinks,
movies, TV shows, concerts, sports,
holidays, get-togethers, sales, services,
the personal things we need or want
along with all whom we care about—
gradually, suddenly, going, gone,
leaving those left with only a space
to hole up in and hoard, or a car
and with a little gasoline to try
to get somewhere else and running
into others on the way. If it were
just me tripping and falling and not
going into a coma, it would be a bed,
hopefully at home, my wife Corasue
to take care of me, and my imagination.
There, waking or sleeping, I could find
consolation and terror, hope and despair,
regret, acclamation, decline, bolstering;
if not a solution or resolution, then
personal honor for giving it a try. If both
were to happen, it would probably go
the same way; much as it is now, focusing
on intermediate drop-offs and edges,
media predictions and my own projections.
In some ways, I may be getting better.

LOOSENING RESTRICTIONS
Nowadays,
after an oil change,
given a partly sunny day,
we may put other prospects aside
and drive off together
under creampuff clouds
towards Shipshewana
to stock up on meat, cheese, and eggs,
and on the way
stop at Middlebury
for carryout sandwiches,
pie slices, coffee and soda
consumed at an outdoor picnic table
instead of indoors,
winding through rolling
Amish countryside along
clip-clopping carriages,
enjoying the sights
of grazing cattle, free-range chickens,
and roadside market signs,
then, stomachs and cooler full,
marvel again all the way back,
except for my disgruntled
wonder where my cap could be
I had on my head that morning,
not spying it looking around the car,
giving up, looking again,
provoking driver Corasue's
interest, my telling her
and asking her if she's seen it,
her replying no,
she can't even recall
my wearing it, my wondering
if I could have left it
on the picnic table or
hanging on a restroom door,
doubting either but also myself,
shrugging at last thinking
it will turn up or my having
plenty more at home; only,
as we pull into the garage
and I prepare to get out,
finding it squeezed
between the gear box and seat;
my thinking life can still be good.

SIGNAL

Hatchet faced, red crested,
black and white streaked,
beady eyed, large, clinging
to the dead oak limb, pecking.
"Quiet. Don't move." It flew
into a cluster of branches.
Seen in woods far afield, now
it had chosen here to probe,
leave in an eclipse of leaves;
the first in our back yard,
maybe the last, I mused:
a pileated woodpecker,
a red, white, and black arrow
I could feel in my lungs
burning, heaving, leaving
in its moment, once rare,
now legion, its singular
devastation of all I knew
and treasured, fear's first
show beyond foreboding,
dread hit home dead center.
I had to get out of there—
a perfect noon of patio chairs,
Sun Chips, and ginger ale
abandoned to sheltered shade—
but stayed with an ephemeral
host of latent dream images
seizing my consciousness
numbing my buttocks. She,
my wife, had withdrawn
to dress for a get-together
on a friend's lakeside deck
to which I too was invited,
but I was Theseus in Hell
unable to get up. So as it was,
I took the chair with me
and sat down to chat about
masks and beach revetment,
when all I wanted to do
was sit back home upstairs
and put that signal thrust
on our patio into words,
which I knew from the start
would be forthcoming.

GRASS
growing through the pavement,
streets, sidewalks, and driveways,
floors, cupboards, cabinets, ceilings,
porches, patios,
garages, sheds,
beyond the lawns,
under the swings and jungle gyms,
amidst the overturned bicycles,
swimming pools, reservoirs,
highways, ramps,
parking lots, and office suites,
factories, stores, parlors, taverns, malls,
barns, silos, stables, pens, corrals,
tractors and abandoned cars,
overriding the fields, pastur es,
museums, churches, stadiums, theme parks,
choking alleys, sewers, cisterns,
along fences, walls, barricades,
up signposts, utility poles, chimneys,
down tracks, channels, runways,
into the garbage dumps and onto the landfills
soon sprinkled with wildflowers.

HARD TO REACH
Socks lying on the floor,
dropped underpants, trousers,
scraps of paper, crumbs
I find hard to reach,
an agony between them and me
of my bending over
and extending a hand—if
only two fingers—to nab them
and bring them to the level of
my feet, waist, wastebasket.
It's a strain getting down there
and as though they're resisting me
they seem to be further away
than I see, so that my thrust
has to stretch a back-straining inch
more before it can grasp.
And there's the chair shoulder,
the wall, the corner, the floor lamp
I have to connect with
before reaching the table
on my precarious way about the house,
always a stretch. And then
the raised carpet edge backing off
from the linoleum I calculate
will take three steps when it takes
four or more. All at a petty remove
that may trigger a tip or a fall.
The towel on the rack, the toothbrush
and floss dispenser on the sink,
the toilet paper drooping low. Each
day by day reach becomes more of a contest.
Yet I convince myself I can make it—
the whole nine yards—
before losing my balance
in making up the distance.
I grow used to it.
Outdoors is another thing:
the curbs, sidewalk levels, doorways
require unique often extreme negotiations.
Inside someone else's house
is customarily a labyrinth
of not quite attainable
footings and grips
where my tentativeness
shows off my handicap. Yet,
oddly enough, as I discern through
these exercises, I reinforce my sense of self
in its discrete relation with the world.

GETTING AHEAD OF MYSELF

On my birthday, the day of my annual dune hike,
after a five year lapse since the mailbox incident,
I set out on my walker over the boardwalk and up
Trail 7, actually leaving Corasue behind at first to
negotiate its giving way on her own. I was inspired
by the idea that with six legs under me instead of
just two, I could make it up around and then back
to the parking lot. No mean feet, but 40 plus years
of experience on Trail 9 told me I could overcome
at least these two medium-difficulty miles despite
my disability. So I kept going. The walker's prongs
dug in; I wobbled less than anticipated. The next
traverse of a steeper incline that followed put me
on top of the naked ridge overlooking the treetops
of succession I had undertaken before, up the back
of Mt. Tom, its tallest, steepest precursor. There I
waited for Corasue. "Are you sure you want to go
any further?" she panted. "No problem," I replied
regarding the decline of the winding trail ahead.
She insisted on being in the lead then. Pronging on,
I could see her glancing apprehensively back.
At an abrupt decline near the end she waiting up
for me offered her hand, which I cavalierly waived
to angle the walker tentatively down. I made it.
Bolstered by this success and my wife's acclaim, I
thought my handicapped progress on an upswing,
so much so that the next day I was prancing along
the asphalt of our neighborhood the mile up to
its lake overlook at over a mile an hour when
a squad car slowed down. "Nice day for a hike,"
the smiling officer said through the open window
in those pre-mask days. "Couldn't be better," I said
keeping my merry pace. Back home I was spent,
wondering if he were the same one on patrol who
had driven me home five years ago when on my
half-mile trek to the mailbox in the other direction
my feet ran unanticipated ahead of me to the point
the only way I could stop them was to wind myself
around a stop sign, where the officer picked me up.
It was then that I decided to see a neurologist. Not
thinking more about it that day after my birthday,
the next day, still on my high, I went after the mail
on my walker only to find it getting ahead of me
and my having to dig in its forelegs to slow down.
After that my legs began wincing whenever I moved,
and I got over the idea I was on my way to recovery.

PROTESTS, RIOTS, LOOTINGS
set off by an act of violence
waxing pandemic, radiating
throughout the world,
organizing anger erupting in chaos
switching into personal gain
at the community's expense,
tired of being cooped up,
wearing masks, maintaining distance,
wanting it all for ourselves,
a group thing with one overweening tight mind
inadvertently bringing the invisible germs,
their heat, heaviness, convulsions
back on itself, making reason
intolerable, patience a lost cause,
the right thing hidden by the turn in the tunnel
showing us, despite our mutations,
we are still animals
in the aggressive opportunist sense
controlled by instinct for self-preservation gone awry
against the principles of humanity
beginning with fear then launched by indignation
beyond control into destruction of livelihood
overcoming any moment of reflection
by continuous self-indulgence
whereof I speak inconsiderately
of my problems matching our world's
in all their invasive particulars
overwhelming us by interconnectedness,
breaking into our own shops,
filling our streets, and pressing down
on our necks till we can no longer breathe,
much less speak of all the terror
inherent in us for all we in our intelligence can't
quite imagine tossing the tree leaves,
scattering the clouds,
latching to our tongues and nostrils
communicated by our stiff spastic imbalance
to anyone within range,
we ultimately for all our singular enterprising dreams
of creating a universe
answerable to our needs
coming home to us
in the most incoherent, incalculable, insurmountable ways
only a few can predict,
not listened to until we are destroyed.

GOLDEN ZIPPERS
I dreamt it was Christmas Eve,
but it was hot outside,
in the 90s,
leaves drooping from the trees,
a torrid midsummer night's eve.
On the television
a choir of children
in green robes
stood on a tower
of inclining ramps
in the shape of a Christmas tree
singing
"All I want is golden zippers,
golden zippers for my teeth"
to the tune of
Harry Belafonte's Scarlet Ribbons
("scarlet ribbons for my hair")
and miraculously
from their opened mouths
all their teeth glittered gold.
I was inspired
to go out on that sultry snowless night
to the two spruces
in our front yard
that towered either side of our driveway.
As I neared them
on that magic eve
I began to see they too
glittered gold
though they were scraggly
and in many places
bare of needles,
having grown more so for years.
Drawing closer,
I examined the bare golden boughs.
Their twigs
were pieced together
by tiny luminous
spruce bud worms—
the parasites an arborist had shown us
that would eventually
zip together
to take over the trees entire
and leave them needle-less skeletons.
I stood there
sweating with exultation
at the marvel
of that summer winter's night,
afraid to wake up.

CORASUE COUGHING
Corasue's been coughing
sporadically for some days now,
a dry, rasping cough
relatively short-lived. I've asked her
if she's all right, and she says
she thinks it's just an allergy,
the kind she gets every year
about this time, in late spring
when the leaves have budded, catkins fallen,
and the various seasonal plants are blooming.
She takes half an allergy tablet to keep
the symptoms at bay
and her drowsiness in check.
Not prone to such allergies,
I cough sympathetically, I believe, with her,
although my nose runs a little
and my eyes water. The air
seems hazy as it always does
in early June. I imagine that's due to the pollen
blown about that one can't perceive
in particular but only en masse.
She goes on to say her throat
is a little sore, and I confess mine
feels a bit grainy. But I take echinacea
to boost my immune system, although
the bottle says it's out of date.
She continues weeding, carrying brush out front,
and has taken over mowing the grass.
She comes in coughing, sneezing, tearing,
saying not to worry, she's got it under control.
She's the one who goes grocery shopping
and comes home complaining
more than half the shoppers aren't wearing masks.
She takes periodic hikes outdoors
with friends in the flourishing, fragrant air,
mask-less, sharing binoculars to identify birds,
and comes home more tired than usual.
Age she attributes that to.
She wakes me up at night coughing, sneezing,
grabbing a Kleenex from the headboard,
waking up in the morning weary.
I suggest a video chat with our GP. Maybe.
My throat is getting worse.
I'm feeling a bit feverish, as does she.
We decide to leave off kissing.

CAN WE SURVIVE WITHOUT THE INTERNET?
Can we start the day
without waking up the computer
to find out the weather, news,
late night emails? Can we go through the day
without emailing and responding
to others, shopping online, catching up
on a favorite funny site, looking up
medical advice, hunting down a word,
playing a game, checking a website?
The Internet is the greatest invention
since the computer. What if it goes too,
along with the rest of our lives' resources
whose restrictions temporarily loosening
could be undermined again
by a new wave of loss? Then we would know
the world as we know it has disappeared.
Meaning the workaday populace
behind the technology is gone.
For me it would be like there not being any more
trains going by our house day and night:
nothing to transport, produce or produce it with.
If the screen went blank on Kohl's or Walmart,
we would find no Kohl's or Walmart. We would find
no customer ratings of products, because
there would be no customers,
there would be no products,
there would be no places to sell them. Say
we phoned a friend to find out what was going on.
There would be no working device to put us through.
There might be no friend. The greatest invention
a century ago would be gone too, along with
all the media after and before. Would there be
gas or electricity to light our stoves, heat our homes,
run our devices? No. We would have to
open up stocked cans of soup, light fires
with matches to warm them up, grow things,
dig wells for water. Our nearest information
might be a neighbor down the street, if not next door,
not our monitors or cell phones. And without
goods and connections, living friends,
yet with still breathing CEOs managing to stay above it all,
would we even want to survive? The Internet
gave us access to everything we wanted to live and die for.
Gone, what would be left
but inklings of how to get by and fading memories?

THE PERFECT POSITION
Yesterday afternoon
I lay down on the futon
on my right side
my head on the bolster pillow
facing the patio,
my left hand
tucked under the pillow,
my right inserted
between it and my head
clutching a handkerchief
with my baby finger sticking out
just shy of my nose,
and realized after a moment or two
I was in the perfect position.
Neither my left leg
nor my right
was kicking,
my right hip
hadn't begun to ache,
I lay perfectly still
without feeling the need
to shift my position.
Outdoors green leaves swished,
a redwing, a blue jay, a goldfinch
darted to and fro,
a hummer kept visiting its feeder.
Indoors the cockatiels
were quietly settled in their cage.
Corasue was upstairs on the phone,
so the one down here wouldn't ring.
I could have drifted off to sleep,
but didn't; instead,
eyes open,
I watched the birds and leaves
and thought I could die like this
and be perfectly happy.
But then I thought,
why die? Why not go on
living like this
as though this was what life were all about.
I could see myself
staying here forever,
not moving, not thinking,
just holding on to that one thought.
Eventually though I had to pee.

WORKING
My wife is a worker.
Even though we're retired,
she's always working at something:
weeding, mowing the lawn,
planting, watering, rubbing on After Bite;
dusting, vacuuming, doing the laundry,
cooking, cleaning up,
paying bills, keeping our accounts;
keeping up with girlfriends,
going on hikes with them;
reading assiduously, looking up information,
playing mind-challenging computer games.
Everything she does—
even watching movies with me at home,
which she analyzes, predicts the outcomes,
and identifies the actors—falls under the category of work.
Yesterday I caught her
dabbing the rim of the basement doorway
with a brown felt tip pen.
What was she doing that for?
Although the colors didn't match,
she was trying to cover up the telltale scratch marks
of the previous owners' dogs,
mars to the woodwork I'd never noticed before
or, for that matter, known they'd had dogs.
She's very acute, very wary, very obligated to put a hand to
anything she perceives needs doing.
And she can never get ahead of that game:
there's always something more to do.
She's always been this way, I believe,
but now I'm wondering if it's become an obsession;
specifically as a defense against our looming destruction:
my progressive deterioration, the increasing pandemic.
She works at looking into any matter of things
that could alleviate my condition: wheelchair, medicament, massage;
when I see it inevitably worsening,
which nothing can help, and my just getting used to it.
She works at thwarting the virus on all fronts:
staying at home as much as possible,
keeping socially distant when we can't,
purchasing the most germ-resistant masks and hand sanitizers;
when I see humanity evolutionarily doomed
by our own desires and shortsightedness,
which will be interesting for us precautionary few to observe.
But then I'm picking most of this up from her,
who in her not so quiet desperation
complains about all human inadequacies,
our overpopulation, and innate blindness,
and views herself, left on her own much of her life,
as the sole one to compensate for them.

LIMP CARROTS
The stew calls for
stew meat of course,
potatoes, carrots, celery,
beef broth, and pepper,
salt to taste. She has
everything on hand, but,
handling the carrots, finds
they are limp. Well,
they'll be cooked anyway,
so what's the difference? No,
they'll be mushy then and not fresh.
She's been to the grocery store
just this morning, so now
she has to go back to mingle with
the crowd of afternoon customers,
most without masks. The meal is important.
There a maskless CIT child
sneezes on his father's cart of food
directly in front of her in the checkout lane.
The checker, though gloved,
bags the food, rings it up, and then rings up and bags the carrots.
She, the carrot buyer, gives the checker exact change,
takes the bag, gets out of line,
and rubs her hands with sanitizer.
At home she washes the carrots,
cuts them, and adds them to the stew.
Two hours later she sits with her husband
over delicious bowls of stew,
mentioning the sneezing incident in passing,
but not the penny dropped by a mother
to pay for her daughter's mechanical pony ride
she, the carrot buyer, retrieved for her ungloved off the floor.

EATING ANGUISH
Your throat constricts,
grows tight, so tight
you can't swallow, yet
you don't choke, there's
more coming you can't
block, cough up, seepage
though trickling through
mixing with acid reflux,
both ends at an impasse,
ingestion the equal of
revulsion, the way out
unknown, the dilemma
however, inescapable,
yet you keep eating,
gorge yourself on it, if
only it would go down,
but indigestible, it stays
at the standoff, building,
becoming your being's
core you can't surmount,
bypass, dissolve, expel,
that keeps backing up,
still there is something
about your agony with it
that's sustaining, nothing
so great you have had
to deal with you are now
dealing with, as it comes,
you go, make your move
against the world teeter-
ing at your consumption's
effort, no holding back
or it would devour you,
realizing at last perhaps
you are the consumer
of choice, you are the one
affected who is giving way
to let it all come in, and if
it can't, that must be your
overpowering it, refusing
with your deepest guts
to partake of such a meal
although you are willing
to indulge whatever it
may bring to the table.

BIRDS, SQUIRRELS, AND DOG WALKERS
After dinner, Corasue and I
often sit in the living room
gazing through the windows
at the front yard, the trees, and the street.
There an upright robin usually stands
for a moment, hops a few steps, then stands again,
a squirrel squiggles along a branch, leaps
to another, then may descend head-first to browse,
someone walks by with a dog running ahead
on a leash who then may stop, sniff, lift a leg or squat.
There may be other birds besides the robin,
another squirrel, and many dog walkers
some of whom we know by name
and nearly all by sight. They don't see us.
The unlit living room is dark to them
as the sun completes its dazzling,
while we sit and talk, make note of them perhaps.
They are our evening show, which we
occasionally delight in from our theater cave.
They stand and start and stand again,
cross over and come down, parade, return,
and in their business, whatever that may be,
seem as content to overlook us as we to sit
and watch them. Who are we after all
but those as nondescript as they
repeating themselves no further than the dusk
we hide behind carrying on
whatever conversation there between us may transpire?
We on each side of the glass
are as separate as they, of different species entirely,
not to mention the occasional bug
bounced off the window
as though trying to get in,
and the tiny flying silver things appearing this increasing hour.
And why do we two in particular
return in separate armchairs opposite each other then
to look at them as much as one another?
To share some time together
elusive as the day
yet as predictable,
holding on to what is left to us
as it grows dark outside,
to contemplate observing
these others fade and our reflections overcome them,
and then get up, go on to something else.

MY RIGHT LEG

My wife and I sleep in the same queen-size bed.
I like to start off the night lying on my back,
because it settles me down and feels most comfortable—
but only for a couple minutes, then my RLS kicks in,
right or left, which I can't defeat just lying there.
So I switch to my right side, away from my wife,
as hers is the left side of the bed. There on the right,
I can cross my left leg over my right or squeeze it
under my right—depending on which leg is acting up—
which helps to suppress it. Then the culprit
usually settles down so I can get some sleep. However,
for whatever reason, my right leg tends to slip from
either below or above my left leg to protrude outside the bed.
Either way, I'm aware of it, because of its exposure
and gravity. Even now, a sheet our only bedcover, I am
aware of my leg's contact with the air, and that annoys me.
Its weight is also disconcerting. So I have to pull it back in
and shift my body to the left, which may disturb my wife.
After a while, though, it slips out again. My only remedy
is to switch to sleeping on my left, which again
may disturb her. Why does this happen? In bed alone,
it happens repeatedly, giving me the thought the bed,
without her compensation, slopes to the right, inducing
the leg to gravitate that direction. But why then,
if her presence makes it level or even sloping slightly
to the left, does the leg jut forth? All I can tell you is
that in keeping with my RLS it's a trick leg and my being
on the right side triggers its ejection—so much so it's
carried me with it onto the floor, making my wife scream
and me, with luck, on the verge of sleep, reel with dizziness
and befuddlement, if not injury as yet. I'm thinking now
it may be the death of me. Though the distance be only a
few feet—to the floor—I could get caught up
in a semi-conscious freefall to the abyss. The world
has already signaled my collapse, and others', my doom
is imminent, and another such drop-off could make it, if
head-down, complete. Vertical, on my feet, I consciously
do all I can to stay upright, maintain my balance, not trip—
lest the reverse prove fatal. In that twilight interim
supine in bed, defenses down, when I am about to drift off,
my impromptu leg may gain the advantage and pull me over.
Or worse, for all my tossing and turning and wrenching
our covers this way and that, my wife may on her end
may be compelled or compulsed to kick me out of bed.

SNOW IN JUNE
Outside it is snowing:
bits of fluffy white down
drifting past the green
full-fledged leaves
onto the verdant lawn;
not much, a flake
here and there, though
sometimes a flurry
driven horizontally,
not visible upon
making contact
with the ground,
yet when aloft, enough
to catch the eye
in a trompe l'oeil.
No, it is not snow
but blossoming cottonwood,
the common tall dark tree's
tiny sporadic efflorescence
in its dispersion
taking on an air of faery.
Going out, you can delight
in its sight and touch
and realize it clings
to the grass, as well as
your clothes and hair.
Its trees may be
nowhere in view
yet this, their seed,
is omnipresent
if scattered, borne
on a breeze and born
of nothing at all,
it seems, its own
individual phenomenon,
were it invisible
would not be known
except for other sensations:
a tingle, thrill, perhaps
a sting at its locale
in time or place,
and if not upon,
inside, without a trace
of how it got there,
floating so freely, widely.

GOSLINGS
Long necks down the road
at the intersection
of pond and shoulder:
brontosauruses
seen at a great remove
or the hydra within
walking distance,
flexing their adolescence,
how much they have grown
already since two weeks ago,
almost to their parents' size,
yet gangly and jaundiced,
a far cry
from the yellow
cotton balls
just up on legs,
darlings under supervision
all in a line
walking or afloat,
after a day
less lemony, more sallow,
but still scampering off at the approach
of someone big on foot or in a car
while a grownup spreads its wings and honks;
soon they will be on their way
to making it, taking care
of themselves, straying, paddling, flying
away from the family
they will desert to reconfigure into a flock,
migrate, re-gather, pair off to hatch their own chicks.
Yet let us catch them here
still growing out of their clothes,
unsure whether to eat or be fed,
wondering what wings are for,
observe them as we were,
coax and corral them,
give them advice and criticism,
guess ourselves when to stand off and let them go,
for us to begin again.
What would we do different?
Would we raise them beside a road?
Would we look for a home with better pickins?
After this brood, will we have any choices?
Will they in their uncanny way
within their own perimeter
of surliness and doubt
make it possible or impossible
for any of us to survive?

EXERCISES
Corasue and I do them together
before breakfast,
in the living room
standing facing one another first
doing arm stretches
out to the side
and over our heads.
Then she gets down on the floor,
I poise on the edge of an armchair,
and we flex our legs and torsos
in prescribed ways each of us is wont.
Eventually I get down on the floor
and do some sets, get back up
on the edge of the armchair
and do a more strenuous version
of what I did before, and then get back down
to strain myself yet more.
When I'm done, she gets up and comes over
to stretch my legs five times apiece
as far up as they'll go; something
I can't do on my own but she can on hers.
Our reward is breakfast.
Though some days we get up
at different times and do our exercises alone,
or say we have, and then let the other
go ahead or not. If I had my way
in this wicked world,
I would never exercise,
because I don't think or feel
they do me any good. Those I learned
were under the guidance of a physical therapist
who agreed with me our routines
weren't helping my condition.
Unlike Corasue's, mine continues to worsen,
and not just because of age. While
she feels better after our exercises,
I feel the same. Oh, maybe wearier
and glad they're over, but not
any stronger or more flexible. I don't let on.
She tells me how important they are
to both of us. I agree, enough to join her
when we both show up on time, to keep the peace
between us, but it could be they're hastening my decline.
Each day I get out of bed a little stiffer, out of joint, in pain,
but I'm not one to complain. I mean so what?
Their advantages outweigh their disadvantages,
so as long as I can get from the chair to the floor
and back again to chair and floor, I'll do them
whenever we're together, as long as we're together.

MOWING AND SHAVING

My wife did let me know
it would be easier on her
if I could mow our lawn's
east side, so obligingly I
took out the mower and
paraded back and forth as
far as the shoulder then
around the spruce tree to
my driveway invasion and
around and around in ever
tightening circles. Simple?
It's not. I angle and turn,
pull back, push ahead, bow
under the spruce boughs
at first and then negotiate
the remaining circuit's
unevenness, tipsy at best.
I never have found it less
than challenging and now
just shy of upsetting. Done,
I wheeled the apparatus
back in the garage doubting
I should bring it out again.
Shaving is like mowing only
on smaller terrain but with
ridges, dips, and, on my face,
crannies almost impossible
to get at sans subterranean
seepage. True, balance isn't
as important, but my hands
can lose their touch, having
to go over and over an area,
and, unlike mowing, there
shouldn't be anything left
of the turf. Also, lawns don't
need lathering beforehand.
It takes a while for me to
recover from either. Now
that I've proved I can mow,
I'll probably do it more, as
my wife's unwillingness to
kiss me after a couple days
unshaven makes me return
to the bathroom mirror.
The basic problem of both
lawns and beards is that
they too recover in as many
weeks as days, and make
as pandemic a revival.

DOORWAYS
I can't go through them
without a twinge of foreboding.
They press in on me from both sides
telling me I won't be able to make it.
In a doorway's interim
I have the feeling
where I have been and where I am going
don't match. There might as well be
a wall. Even though I can see
daylight here and there, the air there
will be different. I won't know how to breathe.
I'll choke. Mucus will rise up and take over.
While I know, once I go through,
things will clarify
and I will be different from whom I was
in a way that could make sense to the others,
the part that is still me
holds back. No, don't go there,
it says. There you will die
of a disease they will give you
you can't be cured of.
It will possess you like something
from another part of the world
against which you have no defenses
and make you feel wretched.
At this point,
I'd rather die of any disease I know
rather than go meet this one,
I'd rather jump off a cliff,
dive into a sea. It is a wall
that is not a wall but a portal
to unimaginable annihilation.
Imagine you are I
at the threshold of this doorway
I am describing to you.
Do you have the will to turn back?
Do you believe in your sense
that where you are headed is wrong,
that you are not like the others
and are not wrong?
On the other hand,
couldn't you be saved
by realizing your foreboding is just a twinge
we may all feel?

IT MAY WELL BE
Someday I won't be able
to push myself up from my computer table
and will have to call for help,
in which case I won't be able
to make it by myself downstairs,
even with the railing,
so I'll have to stay down there,
probably in a wheelchair,
and wheel myself up to the kitchen table for meals
then into the living room
perhaps for a transfer to my easy chair
and eventually the hide-a-bed sofa for sleeping.
Even with a ramp from the porch
to the walkway, getting me from the wheelchair
into the car wouldn't be easy,
not to mention getting me out into
whatever conveyance the car could hold.
But then there would be nowhere to go:
no stores, no malls, no restaurants, no friends.
We'd be wearing all our old clothes,
eating out of cans, and talking to ourselves.
So, dismissing the bygone Internet and phones,
conversation would remain pretty much as it is now.
If there still were electricity, we could watch old movies,
but we're already getting tired of the ones we have.
It would be hard to get me
down the two steps to the den
and out to the patio, so maybe
I could look out at the world
through the living room windows.
No dog walkers, lone hikers, or kids on bicycles,
but plenty of squirrels, birds, and trees.
I could watch the latter form buds and leaves
and the leaves turn color and fall off.
I could watch the grass grow and turn brown,
the rain rain, the snow fall and melt,
and the spring's cottonwood fluff mush in the gutters.
Of course there are always books to read
with pictures to look at, although all that
would seem relegated to the past.
Corasue, when she has time off from cleaning, laundering,
keeping the cave in order, and looking after me—
if not outdoors weeding, mowing, raking, and shoveling, and feeding the birds—
might keep on drawing and making collages. I might write,
but again, those pursuits may only pertain to the life we knew.

STONES
Spread out on the living room table
between the two armchairs
are a number of stones,
beige to dark grey, oval to round,
all of them almost perfectly so, which,
over the many years we've lived here,
Corasue has picked up from the beach.
Recently she set them on the table
to get a good look at them,
see which she should save,
which she wouldn't, though
it would be hard to take any back,
since the beach scarcely exists anymore.
These however she treasures,
rearranges by color, shape, and size,
her eyes aglow, thinking
how they have traveled through the years—
thousands—under ice, water, and sand
broken down, honed, rounded,
finally selected, collected, displayed.
To me none of them seems
remarkable enough to bend down for,
carry home in my pocket,
but then I don't have her perspective
for appreciating their individuality,
showing them off together,
seeing how they compare.
Evenings we sit across from each other,
looking out the windows
at the hoppers, climbers, passers-by,
and then back at the stones
distinct and distinctive,
two decades worth of amassing
from a great lake onto our little table.
Once she goes upstairs, I stay behind,
transferred to my easy chair
for a more direct look out the windows.
From there the setting sun
shockingly rims the floor lamp
behind the one armchair
and scatters its light on the wind-rustled leaves outside.
I see the shadows of the leaves dancing on the living room wall,
fascinated as a child, look briefly back out the windows, look back at the wall.
It is blank.