

DIARY OF A  
WORLD PANDEMIC

Orange County, California  
March 2020

A Personal Account

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Day the Sky Fell. . .

For weeks the signs of impending doom had been dropping on a daily, sometimes even hourly, basis. But I didn't get it. Why would I? In my lifetime, nothing anywhere resembling a pandemic had occurred, at least not on my doorstep. What is a pandemic anyway? To me, this had formerly been a concept to be read about in a best-selling conspiracy thriller—science fiction. And yet, here it was—a global pandemic announced by the World Health Organization on March 10, 2020. The acronym for this heroic group, WHO, seemed to represent the questions forming in my mind.

It was just under two weeks before this astounding announcement, that we had received the first clue that all was not well within the safe cocoon of the United States of America—the NBA, discovering that a team member had tested positive for the Corona virus and having considered and rejected the idea of playing games to empty stadiums in order to protect both the players and their adoring public, announced that they were suspending the rest of the season—that's right, the whole NBA season would be cancelled! What followed was a mass cancellation of what much of the American public holds most dear: sporting events. . .and not only sporting events, but anything that required a large gathering of people. That's when I began to understand that COVID-19 really *had* arrived to dwell with us in the home of the brave. . .and to spread like wildfire through personal contact—one person to another.

And still, for me, it was business as usual. I had my hair cut, had lunch with friends, and went grocery shopping. . .where I was treated to yet another dose of reality—surreal yet actual. First I noticed a true traffic jam, uncharacteristic even within the small confines of the parking lot of my local market. What the heck was going on? Had I forgotten an unofficial holiday that would require last minute purchases? As I waited patiently for one car to vacate a space, another darted in from the opposite direction to nab it. Two attempts later I successfully secured a parking place. As I made my way towards the entrance, I became aware that carts were emerging piled high with. . . toilet paper? Maybe coincidental. But, no. . .once inside, I saw that lots of people were

piling up carts with paper goods, canned foods, dry pasta, virtually everything they could lay hands on . . .and many were dragging an additional cart behind them. I went about my business—looking for rubbing alcohol which was recommended as a wipe capable of killing any virus which might have somehow found its way onto household surfaces. What I found was an empty shelf where the alcohol, peroxide, witch hazel, etc. should have been. Okay, I said to myself, I'll do it another way—Lysol, Clorox. . .but no, again empty shelves labeled with the names of the goods I was seeking. Whoa. . .this may be more serious than I thought. I saw a lone bundle of twenty-seven rolls of toilet paper and swept it up and into my cart—I had no idea why I needed it, but maybe these people knew something I didn't know. I went about gathering the rest of the items on my shopping list. . .and a few others. I'm not really a hoarder by nature, but. . .what if?

News travels. The next Saturday, my city held its annual Patriot's Day Parade. We were excited to go watch because the year before it had been cancelled due to rain. It was there, at this small hometown parade, that for the first time I was to experience social distancing. When the friend I was attending the event with ran into to a crony whom I didn't know, I noticed her friend stepping *back from* rather than *into* the introduction, while saying, "They say we're not supposed to shake hands anymore." For me, a hugger by nature, this seemed a harbinger of things to come. The "what if," it seemed, was about to become a reality.

What if, indeed. It was only a few days after that when the Governor of California, my home state, laid down the law. There were to be no gatherings of more than one hundred people, bars and restaurants should consider closing, and folks over 65, as well as those with health issues should self-isolate. Self-isolate? The thought crossed my mind that this Is America—we can handle it. . .can't we?

The next day, as part of the President of the United States' update speech, the numbers for a safe social group shrunk from one hundred to ten.

In California, public schools began to close, and seven Bay Area counties were mandated to practice what was being called "Shelter in Place" for the next three weeks in an effort to curb the spread of the disease. Several million people were being asked to stay inside their homes except for essential activities—to isolate themselves, work remotely from home—to literally

change the way they had lived on the day before; to give up everything that was a part of a regular American daily routine.

The panic accelerated and spread. . .and, just like that, I caught it. Did I have enough food to sustain my husband and myself if we were asked to “shelter in place,” enough water, paper towels, canned goods, fresh food. . .toilet paper? I went back to the grocery store.

The final impetus for the altering of my reality regarding what was to be, came on Friday morning, March 13—that’s right, Friday, the thirteenth! That morning, when I glanced at my phone screen, as I do every morning just to make sure that all is well with the people I love, I saw an official message from my own small city; the declaration of a local emergency—the city hall and all city buildings would close; city classes were canceled for the next quarter; public schools would close until mid-April. Movie theaters, Restaurants, and bars began to close in cities all around us. Disneyland, the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, and South Coast Plaza—our massive shopping mall—all staples in the local Orange County area, announced that they would close for the next two weeks and then they would reevaluate the situation.

After being hit over the head only a few times, I finally got it—this is the new normal. Gary and I, both of whom are well over 65, will “shelter in place”—a synonym for self-isolation—meaning no socializing, no swimming in the local pool, no more mingling with other shoppers, or stopping to talk with neighbors to coo over their beloved dogs and grandchildren. No seeing family members face to face.

In the instant of that realization, my world, like that of countless others across the globe, became altered—engendering a less than sane focus upon hand-washing, sanitizing, suspicion for anyone sneezing or coughing, and obsessive news bulletin watching—all of which would soon be overshadowed by impending doom.

Strangely, this swirling of emotions and information that seemed to conflict wildly with my sense of normalcy brought to mind a folk tale wherein Chicken Little, an anxiety-ridden adolescent fowl, unwittingly throws the barnyard into chaos while running around like his head has been cut off, clucking loudly that “the sky is falling. . .” Of course, we all know that Chicken Little was sadly mistaken . . .in fact, it had been a falling acorn, dropped from the beak of a less than concerned bird, that had fallen onto his head. Be that as it may, he acted on what he *thought*

had happened, gathering friends and neighbors—denizens of the local barnyard, as followers to his faulty belief, and they, too, fell prey to the panic. . .only to be led to their own demise, as a sly fox lay in wait to take advantage of the situation. . .dinner! This cautionary tale was designed to teach us of the need to take care when faced with the unknown. . .don't believe everything you hear.

But, then again. . .what if?

Now faced with this looming unknown, questions arise. What do we do. . .who do we turn to, in order not to be led down that proverbial path to destruction? The events to come will be the teacher, perhaps revealing much more than we intuitively sense we want to know. Time will tell. . .

# **PART I**

## **STAYING IN**

### **The Concept of Isolation**

**A daily log. . .  
(selected entries)**

# WEEK 1

## DAY 1

SUNDAY, MARCH 15

Today is the first day of our self-motivated isolation from the rest of the world. . .a change in life style. At this very moment, it doesn't seem like such a drastic request. We have food (thankfully, yesterday we laid in eight cases of wine, so we're good there), shelter, and things to do—all here within the walls of this structure we call home. No problem. In a sense, it seems like kind of like a reprieve. No responsibility for getting up and getting out to run errands, exercise, or to be ever ready just in case somebody drops in. We are free. . .it can be pajama day every day. A new day. . .and, potentially, a new challenge.

As with any new challenge in my existence, there are stages. The first is euphoria. There is no telling how long each of the stages can go on, but for me, this one has lasted just a few hours—it took only until I had a moment to think—time to truly begin to understand the implications of isolation—for the feelings of loss, to set in. I am independent by nature, and value the autonomy to think and do for myself—I felt a large piece of my independence erode—for weeks, possibly even months, I wouldn't be able go out for virtually anything, would have to give up the power to choose how I would exercise, couldn't spontaneously meet friends for lunch. I felt a sudden and overwhelming sadness . . .as self-centered as this might sound, my sadness was not reserved for myself alone, but for people across our town, city, state, country, and indeed for people everywhere in the world. People who have lost what they hold dear. . .freedom to move around, revenue. . .loved ones.

It is the acknowledgment of the enormity of destruction that this tiny microscopic life form is capable of, that has caused a universal fear to sweep across whole nations and take hold

wherever it touches down. It is fear that has allowed our economy to slip suddenly into depression, businesses to collapse, daily life to be altered. It is fear of what we do not understand, and what we cannot control—fear that the landscape of our lives may be forever changed. The only contribution we can personally offer amidst this global uncertainty, is to stop the spread of the Coronavirus in its tracks via voluntary isolation—for me it seems the only responsible choice.

On this first day, even as I am clueless about what is to come, I know that I will soon feel the need to make things better—any way I can. Social distancing can be a major downer, and it seems that forced isolation and immobility makes for instantaneous longings: Suddenly I am missing friends whom I often don't see for several weeks at a time. In an effort to connect, I am telephoning, texting, and emailing in a way I have never felt the need to do before. It seems to me that if we can connect, however remotely, we will not feel so alone.



## DAY 3

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

Today is St. Patrick's Day. A few days ago, before the sky fell, I purchased several packages of corned beef with the plan of freezing two, and cooking one tonight—a very large dinner for two people who don't eat as much as they used to.

I think that maybe the fact that celebrations are often shared with others, makes it seem ludicrous to cook such a large amount of food for just the two of us. I seemed so focused upon this, that I made myself stop, take a breath, and reassess. If, in fact, we were not in isolation on this festive occasion, what would we likely be doing, I asked myself. The answer appeared to be . . . cooking a corned beef dinner for the two of us. So tonight it will be business as usual with just me and my guy. Dinner for two, upstairs in front of our fire, accompanied by. . . green beer!

In some ways our life hasn't altered that much—of course I do realize that we are only on day 3. . . my perspective is bound to change. But as of this day, we are still getting up at the same time and engaging in our individual morning routines. Gary reads the newspaper, and I make the bed, before drinking my coffee while enjoying word games on my iPad. Then I read the paper, while he checks early morning sports wrap-up shows on television—oh yeah, that was last week . . . not so much now that *nothing* is happening in the world of sports. We get our exercise, take showers, and get dressed for the day. Then he works in the garden, eats lunch, or does household chores, watches a little television or reads. I do whatever cleaning is necessary and then read or write. At 5:00 o'clock, we meet by the fireplace for conversation and dinner which one or both of us cooks. Our late evening is also just as it has always been—we watch our individual shows or watch a movie or special program together.

Then why does this all *seem* so different? I think for me, when we no longer have the freedom to make choices, it seems that even if we don't often pick up the option to go out, we feel a sense of loss.

And then there is the lack of social connection. Tomorrow I will start a group email with several dear friends, to keep that connection going.

## DAY 4

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

Today, I started to worry about how we are going to get groceries. I know I don't actually want to mingle at a grocery store with people I don't know, who have had contact with other people I don't know, who have had contact with even more people I don't know. Of course it's not the "not knowing," that's most important, it's more who and what any of us has touched and who or what has touched us. This is all so new. . .and for many of us, what we're being encouraged to do goes against the grain of our social being. On the other hand, if we are going into isolation, it doesn't make sense to me to mingle in public places. That being said, what are the other choices?

A couple of years ago, Gary encouraged me to order my groceries online when he noticed a Pavilions truck delivering bags to a neighbor. At that time, it seemed to me that doing my own shopping was not something I was ready to give up—I like my independence. Well, guess what, I'm ready now!

I sat down with my computer to check out the Pavilions delivery website. I found the process was very user friendly. . .I picked out the items I wanted and they went into my virtual cart. Great! Next I filled out all the necessary information to receive my groceries. The last step before payment was to set up a delivery date. I clicked the "Today" box. Not surprisingly there were no slots available. No problem. I can wait a day or two. I checked the box for "Thursday," no slots. "Friday," no slots. . .in fact, there were literally no slots for as many days as the app allowed me to opt for—two weeks-worth. Okay, I checked that idea off my list, only feeling like I would have liked to know that there were no available delivery dates in the near future *before* I had ordered all those groceries!

Next I decided to try Amazon. I have never had a problem with deliveries from Amazon. And since they acquired Whole Foods, they had what they called Amazon Fresh—a service that I knew about but had never used. I logged in and started to put items into my cart, but this time I ordered only a few things, still feeling the burn from an hour spent on what had become a bogus effort. I got to the part about "Set Your Delivery Time" feeling smart and sassy, after all, I had

been recognized as a Prime member. Why didn't everyone just do it this way? A few seconds later. . .you guessed it, no available delivery slots! This is definitely going to be more complicated than I thought.

My next step was to assess what we actually have. Now was the time to ask the question of what we really need. It turns out that we have plenty of food, wine, cleaning supplies, and paper products. We will use only cloth napkins and dish towels to conserve on the consumption of paper towels. . .and the toilet paper. . .well that's another matter, but we're okay there as well.

The bright side is that while some folks are hoarding food and supplies, others are reaching out to offer to shop and deliver. Today two different people contacted us make such an offer. Thankfully, at this time we don't need to take them up on it, but how wonderful for folks to offer. It appears that hard times bring out the worst in some. . .and the best in others.

## DAY 6

FRIDAY, MARCH 20

Last night Governor Newsom put all of California—approximately 40 million people—on a “stay at home” order; self-isolation for all for at least two weeks. He predicted that if this order was not taken seriously, at least 56% of the people within our state would be stricken with Covid-19. Oh my gosh. . .that *event* which many of us (sort of) feared has actually occurred, and certainly not in the way we have been surreptitiously storing up water and canned food for, just in case—As a Californian, I had always envisioned that event to be a wild fire or an earthquake. This is an event unlike anything I could have imagined—an enemy which creeps towards us, undetected—the only sign of impending doom, of course, would be someone close to us coughing or sneezing—then, we are learning, we must panic immediately.

In the aftermath of this momentous announcement, I wonder how a mandatory “stay at home” order is different from a voluntary isolation. . .can we still go on our walk? The Governor did say folks could walk their dogs and/or take their children out. I wonder which category we fall into?

We decide to take our walk anyway, citing the health benefits, and the natural sleep aid. We decide we will wave at people we recognize (and those we don't) while crossing to the other side of the road to ensure distance. Within the first leg of our trek, I spy a person whom I don't actually know but do recognize from the pool where I swim. He's walking laboriously with two canes. I wonder what I could do if he fell; I have no phone with me to call 911, so do I risk my health by assisting him. I remember the story about the New Yorker who ended up infecting his whole family with COVID-19 after assisting a neighbor who was not feeling well by providing transportation to a doctor's appointment. I walk on, but not without mixed emotions.

Earlier in the week when my dear friend, Anne, was having difficulty finding an herbal supplement, I offered to use my Prime membership with Amazon to get it for her. When it came, I texted her that it had arrived and she could pick it up whenever it was convenient for her. . .we were bound to be here. . .no place to go. When she contacted me that she was ready to pick it up, we agreed that I would wash my hands carefully, before taking the merchandise and placing

it in our mailbox. Upon arrival at our clever pick up spot, she would switch out the merchandise for a check in a clean envelope. *This* with a person who has always been welcomed into our home at any time. I watched as she took the package from the mailbox and replaced it with the envelope. Then she drove away leaving me feeling a deficit. Ouch!

In order to assuage the darkness of the scene just played, I decided that I needed to be busy. I will make this a cooking and freezing day. . .a big batch of Chili and Confetti Rice to be divided into freezer containers for later us. Doing something productive towards a future date proved to be healing.

## WEEK 2

### DAY 8

SUNDAY, MARCH 22

For some reason, today was full of anxiety for me. I woke up feeling the need to talk to everyone in our family . . .to know that each and every one of them was doing okay. By the end of the day, I had found that our sons, Greg and Damon would both be working remotely for a time, as would our grandson, Gareth, who works in California State government—I worry about him a bit—a person who lives alone, now in isolation mode; it goes without saying that isolation is not truly isolation unless there is no one else there. Our daughter-in-law, Molly had spent the week before working hard to refinish the interior of a family condo with her brother and his wife. She has been orchestrating her parents stay-at-home care in Oceanside for the last several months, with Greg traveling between Oceanside and Rossmoor where they live. Not sure where they will be staying through the worst of this.

I feel especially worried about our granddaughter Hayley, who just recently began working a new job, and about Damon's significant other Jen, who is a flight attendant.

Hayley works as a vet tech and a farrier for UC Davis. I had heard that the University had shut down the animal hospital when the Governor's order came out. I was worrying about Hayley's income. Good news from her, the University takes care of its employees with emergency funds, so she's safely hunkered down at home with her personal menagerie. . .and she will receive compensation. . .for now. Jen, Damon's girl, is in a job that in the world of today, is dangerous. Trapped in the cylinder of an airplane with who knows what germs. While I know that the airlines have stepped up the cleaning procedures and put more stringent health

strategies in place, this is still a worry. I was actually relieved when she texted me to say her flight for the next day had been cancelled, presumably due to low ticket numbers. . .although, I know that too many cancellations could prove to be financially costly for her. We can't have it all. . .

There is an upside here that I discovered while talking face to face with Greg and Molly (a surprise faceTime call which caught me in my robe. . .at 11:00 a.m.!). We are so very lucky that if it had to happen, this pandemic came at a time when technology may be our saving grace. It does so much more than keep us connected to each other, which in and of itself, is huge. It also allows us to receive necessary goods—Amazon has become my best friend; I've since this began ordered vitamins and supplements that we were soon to run out of, dish washer detergent, reading glasses, implements to care for my own finger nails (yes, the person who has had her nails done since 1985, now has short, bald nails. . .not critical, but a loss just the same), a DVD player (which we very possibly don't know how to install), disposable gloves, and alcohol wipes (which never came. . .I still have high hopes). I wonder what we would have done without the internet during this time. On a more global level, technology has allowed business to proceed, if not as usual. . .at least in a way that may save some companies; it has allowed schools to continue to offer educational support for our young, and universities to create and disperse virtual classes; it has allowed us to order needed groceries, to be delivered (if anyone out there can get a delivery date, sign me up!) and/or picked up at the store site without the need for close contact with others. It is really quite remarkable how our collective obsession with technology has facilitated the ability for us to get through a crisis such as this. In education we used to ask if there was any reason why we needed to resort to the virtual world to meet a need, now we ask if we really need to meet *face to face*. . . or is there a way we can use that virtual world to meet the current need. This is yet another learning curve to be overcome.

Our world has indeed changed. . .it seems like overnight, but in reality we have been preparing since the first time we punched the keys of a personal computer, for me way back in the early 1990s, for others—the innovators—much longer. I will sleep easier tonight!

## DAY 9

### MONDAY, MARCH 23

Today my neighbor, Jolee, texted saying that she was venturing out to the grocery store and asking what she could get for me. At first, what has most often been my natural response to such requests came to mind. . . “Oh, no. I don’t want you to bother, but thanks so much.” But then after mentally shaking myself at the idea that we actually have no idea how long this will last, and letting good sense take over my need for independence, I answered, “Thanks so much. I’ll send a little list.”

A bit later, I got a text telling me that the groceries were on my front porch. Wow, that’s service. I emptied the bags, wiped each item off with a Clorox wipe, and put them away, before dropping the reusable bags, with cash that I had taken from our emergency stash (this money has seen no handling in months, so I’m pretty sure it’s clean!) stuffed into an envelope, before I washed my hands and dashed off a “thank you, so much” text. I am amazed at the kindness of people. . .yes, in everyday life, but especially in times of need.

Our friend Julie is a true go-getter. She’s not going to let a “stay at home” order stop her proactive work. Sometime mid-week of the week past, she had decided in the night that she didn’t like the way the city was handling the flow of traffic into Laguna. The previous weekend had seen scores of tourists making their way up and down our highway. . .even after the now famous “Stay at home” proclamation. Why were people from other communities still being allowed to crowd our trails, parks and beaches, spreading God knows what. She called the LBPD to ask some questions. . .they referred her to the LB City Council. Oh, No! . . .this was beginning to feel like the old run around! She wrote an email citing her concerns to council members. . .and, pretty much immediately, received an actual reply. Further, not too long after that, we all received a notice from the Mayor of Laguna Beach that all playgrounds, parks, trailheads, and beaches would be closed until further notice. That’s our Julie! (I’m sure she wasn’t alone in her act, but I like to think she caused it all to happen!)

Closures are now happening everywhere. Today we learned that after shutting down the Mammoth Mountain ski area to the public a few days ago, our beloved city of



Mammoth Lakes, long our family haven, would for the duration of this madness be closed to all tourists. Strong measures, but presumably, necessary. Such a sad day. . .

## DAY 14

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

When I started journaling daily, I was thinking that by now, this madness would have come to an end. But here we are, at the end of week two, being told that the next two weeks would be critical—more isolation! Disneyland has notified the press that they would be closed indefinitely, restaurants are open for take-out only, hotel parking lots are empty, playhouses, movie theaters and shops remain closed, even gas stations are suffering. . .nowhere for people to drive. Further our beach entries have temporary gating barring entry, our trails displaying the same. Only the grocery stores and online sales are flourishing.

And then there is the human aspect. We have quickly become a society almost unrecognizable. We wash our hands incessantly, won't even touch our own face, let alone another person's, and warned to keep our distance, appear closed even to breathing the same *air* with others (I sometimes find myself holding my breath when someone passes by too close on a sidewalk!). All this brings up a whole different area for concern: what this crisis will do to interpersonal relationships; in a society which in the past was peopled with those who have spontaneously hugged each other warmly upon meeting, we may become one that no longer touches. This, along all kinds of other unanswered questions about the future is still to be determined.

What will we be told after living indoors for the next two weeks?

Although Gary and I have so far been able to keep our spirits balanced, if not high, I can see the potential for one to slip into a depression when faced with such a scenario. So, today I will look for things to be thankful for.

Here is my list:

1. Gary, my ever-present partner in everything
2. Our family, friends and neighbors
3. Our health

4. Our home, which offers a safe and beautiful sanctuary of peace within which to shelter, and our remarkable village—the view of the sea is always there, different every day in color and/or texture, but still that large, sparkling body of water
5. Technology, which on a very personal note provides social connections, essential to keeping emotional balance (social connection, in my mind, is as close as we can get to personal well-being; I am so thankful for phone calls, texts [these daily chats with my besties have been essential to a smile-a-day—our dear Terri acting as the consummate cheerleader] and emails!)
6. Ample food and wine
7. Our daily routine—so much is getting done; an early spring cleaning!
8. Our daily walks, still available to us. . .although different now in that while some folks cross to the other side of the road when they see virtually anybody coming, nodding but often not speaking, others seem much friendlier.
9. Inane movies, Rom Coms are my go to—I want to watch virtually nothing that has an aspect of sadness; Jeopardy and cooking shows also work
10. The sun rising and setting each day without fail

When this all began, our son Greg said to us that in other generations, people had been asked to give up their sons and daughters (still teenagers in some cases) to the current war. . .we are merely being asked to stay inside our houses to combat this one. . .he is so right!

Although the pause button on our daily activity has been pushed, just like our TVs which spontaneously restart when left too long on pause, our lives too, will soon restart. We can do this!

## DAY 13

FRIDAY, MARCH 26

This morning, I woke up to find an earlier text saying that the USN hospital ship, Mercy, was passing just in front of Catalina on its way from San Diego to the Los Angeles harbor to provide extra hospital beds to assist overloaded hospitals in the area. . .the text was sent at 6:45 a.m. . . and, of course, like any sane person, I was snoozing. We had watched periodically the whole day before. . .really, it seemed that our entire focus for the day was fixated on seeing that beautiful white ship floating across the blue seas that fronted our living room windows. . .and, when it finally happened, I missed it! I find I'm missing lots of things now.

When we haven't had something for a while, even for just two weeks, it becomes that much more precious, and feelings of need for that thing are multiplied. . .even though in previous weeks the last batch of that same item lay rotting in the refrigerator long before we noticed it had gone bad.

These sorts of feelings started to form in my psyche a day or so ago, when I noticed that our stash of fresh produce had sadly diminished. Maybe I would need to sneak into the grocery store before dawn and grab what I could (if only!). Even while I thought this, I had feelings of impending guilt. A few days before, when we had taken note that some of our prescriptions were dangerously low, and noticing that the Pavilions organization was setting up free delivery of pharmacy items, Gary placed the call to our local Pavilions pharmacy. He was told that although they were not yet set up for deliveries, we could call our refill in, and when it was ready we could pay over the phone, drive up to the store and call in for a curbside pick-up. We thought this was grand! We assured the pharmacist that we would indeed take advantage of this service. Miracle of miracles, when that same pharmacist called us the next day, it was to tell us that not only were our prescriptions ready, but that we would be their first delivery—the guinea pig, so to speak, of a new service. Then she proceeded to say that our order should arrive the next evening. . .or maybe not; they were securing the services of a private delivery service, and she knew of at least one other Pavilions store that had set up a similar delivery for which the driver had never shown

. . .she *just* didn't know about how reliable it was going to be. While we may never actually see that special delivery, I certainly can't go into the grocery store due to a lack of fresh produce when I wouldn't even go into that same crowd to pick up necessary medication!

Wonder of wonders, this was the day that my dear neighbor again texted to say that she simply had to make a grocery run—she has two teenage boys and remembering my own food bill with our two boys, I know that food stuffs run out much faster in that household than in this. While feeling like a leech, I quickly texted my thanks along with a list: onions, celery, carrots, potatoes, bananas, bread, and eggs. . .and, oh yes, tomatoes! I can't even believe that I am asking this sweet girl yet again to do *my* grocery shopping. . .but there it is. I definitely owe her a really big present when this is all over—maybe a gift certificate for a night on the town. . .a nice restaurant. Well, I won't go there yet. . .sadly, we don't know which businesses we'll find within our village that will have the wherewithal to reopen when the green light to reemerge finally flashes. And *I* was worrying about tomatoes!

Postscript: Our prescription delivery showed up just when the pharmacist said it would . . .all sealed up in a package left on our front doorstep. . .Yippee!

## WEEK 3

### DAY 15

#### SUNDAY, MARCH 29

Upon hearing the California Governor's prediction today that in order to flatten the curve—stop this virus in its tracks, we could not emerge from our homes until, at the earliest, April 30, I found myself wondering if what we are currently experiencing in America really *is* the new normal. Newsom then went on to say that the alternative to staying in was the potential for this epidemic of Covid-19 to kill up to 200,000 Americans. Given those statistics, however speculative . . . the choice is. . .there is no choice.

But this information begs the question. . .is this a blip in our lives. . .or *is* it the new normal? The question is everywhere. . .along with this one: even if it is just a moment in time, will we ever again be able to go into an indoor gathering of a hundred people or more without wondering if we are carrying a germ, as yet undetected, that could creep out to put any one of the others in that room in jeopardy? And by the same token, are any one of them infected with something that could be harmful to us? Time will tell.

It all feels more like the new *abnormal* to me! As this thought hits me, I have a recollection of Igor in the film *Young Frankenstein*, who having been sent to a lab in order to harvest a brain for the great doctor's use in creating his creature, misreads the label of the only specimen left, AB Normal. Thinking this is a name, he triumphantly returns to present it to Dr. Frankenstein, clearly not understanding that this error has the potential to unleash a terrible predator. Further it becomes clear as the story unfolds, that the resulting monster is treated in such a way as to exacerbate the potential for destruction rather than to curb it.

This analogy brings to mind the fragile balance of treating this new predator with care. We truly understand it so little. If we choose to treat it in a cavalier manner, it will undoubtedly rise and strike anything in its path. Better to err on the side of safety. We'll stay in.

## DAY 16

MONDAY, MARCH 30

Last night was fitful. Learning that we would be in our home for at least another month, put me back into assessment mode. Do we have enough groceries to be in a “stay at home” mode for that another month. . .maybe even two? When this all started, I was thinking 2 weeks . . .we had plenty for that. But what about 4 or more additional weeks? I had heard that a friend had secured a “pick-up” time for an on-line order of groceries at a nearby Pavilions. It wasn’t until the next week, she’d said, but that would work. I once again began to look into ordering groceries on-line, but this time not for delivery which appeared to have no potential anytime soon. . .instead I was looking for a pick-up time, wherein one orders groceries on-line, arrives at the designated time, and the groceries are magically loaded into the back of the idling vehicle.

I went onto the website and clicked on the icon for “Schedule a pick-up time.” The choices for dates went through April 4. . .each slot was already filled. No problem, I thought—it’s Sunday, they’ll probably open up a new week tomorrow.

All night, I intermittently dreamed of the perils of trying to secure a pick-up date. When I woke up, before 7:00 am, I went immediately to my computer to check for times. There was just one additional day visible, April 5. I clicked on it. . .no available times. Who was snapping these time slots up. . .and how? Tonight I will stay up until midnight to see if I can sneak a time in for April 6.

Yes, my dilemma seems comical, even to me! And, I *do* realize that many people in our country have much more serious problems than trying to secure groceries. Although Gary and I may not be eating the way we are used to in the weeks to come. . .we *will* be eating!

There are others across our nation who have through blurry circumstances, or a lack of information, or both, been forced to battle this foe in hand-to-hand combat. Highlighting this sentiment, was a story in our daily newspaper this morning about a choir practice which took place just outside Seattle, Washington, on March 7. The choir master, though concerned about safety, apparently felt fairly sure that gathering for their scheduled practice would not be



dangerous for the choir members. Yes, there had been word of an outbreak of Covid-19 in that larger city close by, but there were, as yet, no known cases right there in their small town. The practice took place, each person being handed hand-sanitizer as they entered while being warned against the handshakes and hugs that usually took place. The choir practice went on pretty much as usual, a two-and-a-half-hour session of joyful harmony. There were 61 people there. . .45 of them later came down with Covid-19.

I am pretty much convinced that if folks do not open their eyes to the dangers herein, we could be inside for a very long time—life may be irreparably altered.

## DAY 18

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

Isolation has the effect of creating within us the need to touch in with anyone in our past who has impacted our lives in a positive way. Gary is apparently no stranger to the feeling. Last night he decided that we should touch in with our friend, Jay. For twenty-five years we met with Jay and his wife Greta every Friday night for sushi at San Shi Go, a local restaurant. Our seniors by over ten years, they decided about two years ago to move to an assisted living complex. . .he into an apartment and she into memory care. Only a year later, Greta died leaving her partner of sixty some years alone. Although in the weeks following Greta's death, I know that Jay was missing her terribly, he still had other people in his immediate surroundings to act as a bit of distraction. . .his cronies there at the facility, visits from family and friends, and he was free to take advantage of the classes and lectures offered there. That was then. Now, however . . .with the coronavirus running rampant and the need for isolation, he can no longer have visitors, is unable to engage in the communal meals which before this time were the tradition there. . .in fact, he can have human contact of no kind (other than caregivers when necessary). It was just a simple call that we made. . .but, he was so happy to hear our voices. . .and talked our ears off for half an hour! During times such as these, it is more important than ever for each of us to remember to reach out to others, especially those who are truly isolated. It just feels good all around.

It goes without saying that social connection is important to us as humans (little did we know how important back in the olden days of two weeks ago!) and that communication comes in all forms in the technological world of 2020. We thought we were aware of those forms—at least those essential to *us*—I text and email and Gary can get more done over the phone than most people can on a computer and in less time, but just a few hours ago we were introduced to what seems a completely new form. . .well at least to us, neither of whom could be confused with one who is actually computer *literate*. . . Zoom conferencing!

Today is Greg's Birthday. He is our oldest son. . .and yes, I did do him the disservice of giving birth to him on April Fool's day. . .but, being the dear boy that he is, he doesn't seem to hold it against me. Yesterday, due to an idea offered by his wife, our sweet Molly, Greg set up the framework for a Zoom conference call to be held at noon and including all Smythe family members (we all brought our own lunches). What an absolute delight. We had one family member on her farm in Davis, one talking from his car traveling the I-5 from Sacramento, one in Seal Beach, two in Rossmoor, and the two of us in Laguna. We spent forty-five minutes chatting, and got to watch Greg blow out his candles while being serenaded by a cacophony of very bad voices singing Happy Birthday, before signing off. I feel like the whole family was just here for a visit. . . but there are no dirty dishes. We'll do a repeat performance next week for Gary's birthday!

## DAY 21

### SATURDAY, APRIL 4

Last night we tried a new concept gathering. . .and found it to be refreshing. We spaced ourselves more than 20 feet apart with each couple in their own driveway, two next-door to each other and one across the street. We chatted about how each of us was handling this new social landscape, sipped our wine, and greeted other neighbors out for an evening walk . . .all demonstrating an awareness of keeping a safe distance apart. Sometime during the hour, we received notification that Laguna, along with the rest of Orange County would be observing the guidelines issued by the California Department of Public Health that we should all wear face masks whenever we are conducting business outside our homes. Jolee, who, among other talents, is a great seamstress, said she was already working on a design. . .she would make masks for all of us. . . All in all, it was a fine happy hour. We decided that we would make it a new Friday night tradition—Cocktails in the Driveway (or driveways, in this case) was a definite hit!

The evening went downhill from there when while sitting in front of our fireplace, we felt an Earthquake. A thought bubble, born of the stress and anxiety building up in my body, immediately popped into my mind saying, “Maybe this truly is the end of the world!” The good news here. . .the earthquake was very minor. Then, a bit later, my friend, Anne, called to say that our dear Julie had had some kind of an episode earlier in the day—her husband Geoff had called their son, who is a cardiologist, and they were able to get her into the hospital where he worked.

This morning, she remains in the hospital undergoing a series of tests. She apparently doesn’t remember yesterday, but could answer all the relevant questions of the day. They have determined that whatever happened, it was not a stroke. . .but will probe further. Our thoughts, well wishes, and love are with our dear friends.

Okay, I admit it, today I had an anxiety attack. Our grandson drove down to his parent’s house for his Dad’s birthday, mid-week. Upon hearing this, Gary and I both began to feel the beginning rumblings of doubt. Why would he take the risk of an 8-hour drive? This morning, it hit me that he would have to drive back. . .another 8-hours, with stops at bathrooms along the

way. . .coming in contact with who knows what. The anxiety built until I knew that I would have to call them. . .to suggest that maybe he should just ride this out down here, in his parent's home. I caught them on a walk. . .and immediately fell apart. . .on speaker phone! By the time we had finished, they had assured me that they had been wearing masks, washing their hands obsessively and/or wearing gloves. Gareth said he could get home on one tank of gas, and would take his food with him. He would make no stops. Self-isolated in his car all the way to Sacramento, he would then resume the practice once he got home. I didn't ask about the bathroom. . .that's his business, as long as he doesn't get out of the car! Well, I pretty much ruined their walk, but I think I got my point across!

Good news. . .this afternoon we heard that Julie is home with restored sense of humor and hope. She apparently had gone into shock when she heard the news that a young man who had grown up with her boys, had died. So much sadness and worry all at once is apparently getting to all of us.

A snippet from today's newspaper I think is worth saving. . .when it all feels overwhelming, let's remind ourselves that this, however painful, scary, or out of control it feels in the moment, is temporary. One can only hope. . .

## WEEK 4

### DAY 22

#### SUNDAY, APRIL 5

We are marking the first day of our fourth week of isolation on this Sunday morning. It is a bright and beautiful morning which is just crying for one to venture out into the sunshine. After walking with Gary for 18 days in a row, my right knee gave out. Today I will test this semi-healed knee on a walk through our Village neighborhood. . .a trial effort to reveal whether I will truly have to give up my very much beloved daily walks for longer than just a few days.

We set off at 10:30 in the morning, hope abounding. . .and, before we have gone even a mile, my knee is seizing up, cramping in a way that makes my whole lower leg ache. We did an about face, very carefully on my part, and headed back from whence we came. All of 20 minutes after we had started, we arrived home just in time to receive a call from Gareth saying that he was on the road and already up to the top of the Grapevine. We were relieved to hear that he is on his way back to Sacramento, while still worrying about the five hours of driving still remaining toward his destination. Thankfully he kept us posted for the entire time he was driving, calling every few hours, and arriving home in record time. . .just over 5 hours. He said that there were no other cars on the highway. . .go figure—not to be judgmental, but I think of that as feedback!

This pandemic has made new people of all of us. Crazy people to be exact. It has accentuated our weak points, and flattened our strong ones. We worry over our family, all adults you understand, as if they were all still teenagers with only half of a working brain. If a friend doesn't immediately answer the phone when we call, we imagine her fallen and unable to reach the phone. . .panic has already set in during the seconds it takes before she finally picks up saying she was in the garden. Of course! It all sounds so normal. . .now that I know she is not, in fact, laying on the floor somewhere. We are obsessed with washing hands, wiping off door knobs, and

handles all over the house, wiping down our devices, tossing the newspaper into the trash barrel immediately after reading it and then washing our hands once more. When groceries come into the house—the Lysol comes out. While cooped up inside, there is probably more danger of poisoning ourselves via Lysol, rubbing Alcohol, Peroxide, and bleach, than from the coronavirus creeping in under the doorway! We have indeed become caricatures of ourselves. I guess I'll choose to see the humor in that picture, however scary.

## DAY 23

MONDAY, APRIL 6

Without a doubt, the last week was difficult. On Saturday, the same day I heard that my dear friend had been hospitalized, and that we had that minor earthquake, we learned that over 600 people had died in New York of complications from Covid-19, in a single 24-hour period. . . and that California was ramping up for the same if folks didn't start taking the "stay at home" order more seriously. We were being advised that because the state was expecting a peak in the spread of the disease over the next two weeks, we should consider with care whether the need was severe before making the decision to enter even the grocery store. While we are so sad for New Yorkers that they have been hit so hard. . .we also know that their experience is a lesson which, by the luck of the draw, they are teaching. . .and we are noting. We have learned the hard lesson of what can happen in a social climate such as this when we allow for business to proceed as usual. . .So, we will face the restrictions for the next month or until whenever it is that we are allowed out of solitary confinement.

Wouldn't you just know that tomorrow we are scheduled to pick up our first substantial load of groceries since this all started. . .and on the very week that we have been advised to stay away from grocery stores! The knowledge that the germ community is undoubtedly ramping up, almost killed my enthusiasm for fresh food. . .but not quite. I find that I am excited in a way I have never been over the mere purchase of groceries. . .or pretty much anything. . . well, maybe a new house or car. . .! Then, even that small bubble of euphoria popped, just like that, when the first thing this morning I heard from my friend, Terri that she and Don had received a delivery from Pavilions . . .yes, the same store that I am expecting to fill my order. . .and that their order had arrived with many omissions—items not available or that the store was simply out of. At this point in time, I am hopeful that they will have stocked the shelves just before our 9 a.m. pick-up . . . otherwise, we will just take what they have. . .not too much choice in this matter.

So then, why am I worrying about it? Can we really not live without another head of cabbage, artichokes, or apples? Do we really need the brownie mix that we've ordered? We have



bread, eggs, milk (I've been freezing the milk; it works well. About 5 days before we will need a new half-gallon, we put it in the refrigerator section where it defrosts without getting too warm. Talk about a learning curve!), butter, frozen veggies, and meats. We still have flour, sugar and some canned goods. What more could we need?

And then. . .the infamous words of the day crop up— “But, *what if*. . .?” What if we are stuck inside for more than a month; what if food sources dry up; what if. . .what if. . .what if? It is all such an unhealthy psychological environment. Paranoia personified!

Instead of obsessing about this, I decide to obsess over Gary's newfound interest in Kindle reading by repurposing my newest *old* Kindle (the last *real* book he tried to read caused him to sneeze. . .mold?). I tried this strategy earlier in our seclusion, but that Kindle (my first) was so old that it would only hold a charge for a day. . .consequently, whenever he felt like reading, the battery was low. I'm pretty sure that Gary isn't going to want to be plugged in while reading. . . the whole digital thing isn't going that well for him anyway. I spent an hour erasing all signs of books that were on my reading list (this was my second Kindle; I'm on my third!) and loading books for him from the cloud, even purchasing a few new titles from Amazon. As soon as it is powered up, I will present it to him as an early birthday present. I'm sure he'll be overjoyed!

DAY 24

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

It is Gary's birthday today! I am determined that we will make it a special day free of concern about the constraints of the times. I find myself thinking of other hard times. . .of people during WWII hidden in basements, required to be silent, lest the Gestapo lurking about discover their whereabouts and cart them off to concentration camps or just simply shoot them in the streets as examples to others. Of the Blitz over England when people survived (or did not) the daily bombing of London by the Luftwaffe for 57 days and nights. Of mere boys, sloughing through the jungles of Viet Nam, hiding in tunnels carved under villages and towns, and coming through a war, that was not of their choice, with severe emotional damage. Comparatively, this is a lark.

So, just before nine, off we went to our Pavilions grocery stores where according to our emailed confirmation, we should just pull into one of the two designated parking spots for pickups, dial the number posted there, and our groceries would magically appear. Once we located the designated area, there was even an empty space. We noticed the car next to us backing out . . . then it stopped and the masked man inside indicated that he wanted to talk. I was leery. . . he wasn't *all* that far away. . .but Gary accommodately rolled down *my* window. Oh, great! "Did you get an email?" the mysterious man asked. "We got a confirmation," I said. "No, I mean an email saying that your order was ready?" "No." He merely shook his head and backed away. Oh, no. Maybe this wasn't going to be as easy as it sounded. Our friend Maureen had told us a few nights before that she had just rolled up at her time, and about 20 minutes later, she was on her way home with groceries loaded. Nothing about a "we're ready" confirmation text or email. I called the number, and sure enough, the woman answering asked if we had received an email stating that our order was ready. We were told that they had 50 orders to fill that day, and that there was really no way to estimate the time any one of them would be ready. . . she was however able to confirm that we were on today's list. . .we'd be contacted sometime between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. We went home. . .to check our email every 15 minutes.

We were scheduled with our family for a Zoom birthday lunch at 11:45 to celebrate Gary, and we were hopeful that our email and the ensuing pick-up wouldn't conflict with that. Go figure. . .we'd had virtually nothing on our calendar for weeks and now we might have a conflict.

At 11:45, with only a *little* trepidation (and no email conflict), we logged on to find each family member with the background of a vacation destination spot behind them. Greg and Molly were in San Francisco sitting in front of the Golden Gate Bridge, Damon and Jen were in Hawaii with waves breaking behind them and palm trees swaying. . .and were dressed for it, Hayley was somewhere with the Northern Lights swirling around her head, and Gareth was sitting with a view of the golden Tower Bridge which spans the Sacramento River. Such a fun surprise—a spontaneous vacation! We had a lovely face to face visit with our loved ones. . .pets even getting into the action. Family has always been our top priority. . .now, more than ever.

It turns out that the timing for our pick-up was perfect. At about 12:30, we got a text saying our order was ready for pick-up, along with an emailed receipt. We jumped into our car, raced up to Newport Coast, and parked across from the designated parking spaces which were already full. We called the number to identify ourselves, popped the hatchback of our car, and a couple of minutes later I heard someone calling "Gary?". I stuck my head out and waved the hard working guys over, wondering how many times they had done this today. Within five minutes, we were on our way home. Upon arrival, Gary unloaded bags onto the garage floor where I, garbed in a hoodie, gloves, and masked face started the process of spraying each item with Lysol and drying it off before laying it on a clean towel to be carted into the house and put away by Gary. After only about a half hour playing with the germs, I striped, went into the house and immediately into the shower. Could be overkill. . .but maybe not.

Minutes later, we got a call from our neighbor, Rob. "Ask Gary to step out on your balcony," he said. Gary stepped out to see Rob, Jolee, True, and Preston (their teenage boys) standing across the street under an umbrella (warding off the effects of one of our infrequent rainy days), along with Brent and Una, standing under a similar umbrella on *their* deck next door. They began to sing, "Happy Birthday to you. . .". What a great surprise. A consciously socially-distant party! We love these guys!

Tonight we will eat roasted chicken and drink Austin Hope Reserve Cab by our fire. All in all, a perfect day for my boy!

DAY 26

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

How very strange it has been to watch the world around us—apparently the world around everyone, everywhere—slowly grind to a stop. . .businesses closed, parks, beaches and public spaces roped off, roads free of traffic—truly we are quite literally in the throes of a stage (we hope) of suspended animation. . .except of course where the grocery stores and hospitals are concerned—these places are thriving. . .thank goodness! I am continuously amazed at, and so thankful for, the workers, and first responders, who continue to venture out into a world of potential danger, and all in the service of the rest of humanity. . .especially knowing that *I* feel threatened at the idea of unpacking groceries that someone else *might* have touched or sneezed on!

Being who I am, I can't help but project to the society coming out of such an experience. How will our social landscape be changed. . .and will it be altered just for this moment in time, or will much of what we know to be socially acceptable suddenly be wiped out by the universal swipe of a giant eraser? What will it be like to go to that first gathering of people. . .will there be hugs, handshakes, or elbow bumps. . .or even just a simple greeting—no touching required? “So thankful to see you. . .”, “You look well. . .”, “What have you been up to since we met. . .?”. Be that as it may, I know that we'll be fine with or without. Hugs, handshakes, and blowing kisses are, after all, simply social behaviors. . .customs we learned in childhood, and that, consequently, we can unlearn. Gradually we'll engage in absorbing the kinds of social behaviors that *will* work now. If it becomes unhealthy to touch other humans in social settings, we, who *are* warm at heart, will simply learn different ways to express our caring for others. In fact, for some, hugging may have gotten a little out of control. When somebody hugs another upon first meeting, the “huggee” might even feel that his or her personal space has been violated. Because of the variability of customs within families of origin, Gary, for example, is much less likely to initiate a hug with a friend than I am. . .so, he'll probably be fine with the no hug thing. . .but, I could use a hug! I might have to work on an attitude adjustment. . .

And then the question of . . . is personal space overrated? I've found that too much personal space can result in strange behaviors even in a person who is ordinarily pretty industrious. Today, I found myself watching TV at nine o'clock in the morning. . . I'm thinking of it as productive behavior. . . I'm carving out space on our DVR by watching some of the multitude of shows that I've saved. . . in the interest of saving more shows. Currently, I am working my way through the 41 episodes of Jeopardy I've saved—I'm already down to 38! Alex Trebek never gets old. . . no pun intended!

One can only clean the same spaces over and over, before watching TV actually *does* seem productive.

## WEEK 5

### DAY 29

#### SUNDAY, APRIL 12

Today is Easter. . .Gary and I don't celebrate Easter as some others do. . .with the prelude of Lent and Good Friday, and the culmination of Easter services. For us Easter has always heralded the promise of Spring. We engaged in egg hunts with our children and grandchildren, Easter baskets, and chicks and bunnies. For many years we gathered as a family for a sumptuous dinner of ham and sweet potatoes. That was during the years when our grandchildren were still in the fold. Now they have gone off into their own homes far afield from ours.

I must admit I miss those days. . .the excitement spontaneously sparked by the wonder of first experiences. I loved seeing the joy on the faces of our young. . .both our boys, and their children, when a colored egg was discovered behind a leaf in our garden. Our grandson Gareth called today to say that his housemates (he lives in a compound, with a house in front, and an apartment over the garage in the back) had arranged a socially conscious egg hunt in the private court yard garden between their abodes. They all wore masks, and gloves, and stayed at least 6 feet apart. His enthusiasm for this celebration belied his years (he will be 26 in a few days) and gave credence to our human need for tradition. . .this need for ritual is apparently so great that we continually, when push comes to shove, design new ones.

Today we will begin our second month of self-isolation. It wasn't so long ago, that we paid good money to ensure a secluded environment such as we now have for free. A Smythe family tradition which has been ongoing for twenty-five years, is a gathering during the month of August—away from the world and all the stress that accompanies it. . .when everyone needs a break from the rigors of work and the daily social whirl. Our go-to has always been a cabin, two

as our family grew, high in the Sierra Mountains of Mammoth. There, we were away from newspapers, television, and . . . our phones didn't work very well.

Unlike our solitary confinement today, there we did have our beloved family around us, who, wherever they had chosen to be during the daytime (hikes, fishing, or what have you), gathered each evening to cook, eat, and play games together. So it wasn't really the experience of isolation that many of us are currently experiencing—we had each other. This may be the first year since our grandchildren were born that we will be unable to gather there.

Having been gifted with a governmental order to stay indoors, we must now use our own resources to find the balance that was formerly provided by feelings of family and social community. Although it would be ideal to find an internal balance without the aid of chemicals (maybe yoga, or meditation), I do find that a little evening wine, in front of the fireplace with my guy, helps!



## DAY 31

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

I decided this morning that I would do something I have never done before. . .bake bread! Last night, Gary found a recipe in one of our favorite cookbooks, Jacques Pepin's Heart and Soul in the Kitchen. It is a compilation of recipes that he cooked with friends and family members on the PBS show of the same name. The recipes are simple, when considering most French cooking, and hearty. We chose his recipe for Country Bread.

This recipe called for both white and wheat flour (which I just happened to have), yeast (which I had just received from an Amazon order), salt, and tepid water. That's it. And, further, it was mixed for only 30 seconds in a *food processor*. Could such a simple concoction and such an easy process really produce bread that was worth eating? I spent about 1 minute gathering the ingredients, 1 minute creating the mixture, 1 minute placing the mixture (which felt way too sticky to me) into a large bowl and covering it. . .and the next 20 minutes cleaning up. Where's the maid when you need one? After 3 hours, I punched down the sides to form a ball-like shape and placed it on a foil lined baking sheet to rise again (this time under a bowl) for another 2 hours. We then put it into a pre-heated oven (425 degrees) for 50 minutes.

After about 20 minutes, the house began to fill with the warm and rustic smell of baking bread. . .such a lovely surprise. How could I have known this would happen. . .I've truly never baked bread before. What a delight.

And I thought the *smell* was delightful. . .the taste. . .the texture. . .the butter oozing over the crusty edges surpassed even that! Simply scrumptious! We may never eat store bought bread again!

This was definitely my silver lining today!

But, Oh. . .I forgot, there was one other good thing. Today while Gary changed his shoes to go for a walk, he said nonchalantly, "When I get back, do you want to play Yahtzee?" What. . . was he actually inviting me to a game night? This boy, who'd rather eat slugs than play any game that I know of, wants to play Yahtzee? Oh joy. . .do I ever! Will wonders never cease!

## DAY 32

### WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

Today is tax day. . .well not so much. . .apparently that's been extended. There was virtually nothing in the morning newspaper about taxes. Instead, there was a compilation of what Governor Newsom sees as our future.

Several days ago, we heard that there would be a coalition of West Coast Governors—Washington, Oregon, and California—who would work together to make decisions which would best serve the people within each state, before directing their attention to the economy. This was in direct opposition of President Trump's decision to get the American economy up and running on May 1. . .a gutsy move on the part of these state leaders.

Today was the first time I had read anything resulting from that collaboration.

Governor Newsom laid out a preliminary plan. . .with no actual starting date. First, new cases of Covid-19 would need to be on the decline for at least two weeks. We haven't seen that yet on the West Coast. Next, hospitals would need to be equipped to handle any new cases that might crop up. Testing must be expanded, and outbreaks traced. And finally a plan must be in place for the reopening of schools and businesses.

Then and only then, according to Newsom will we be able to move into the *new normal* . . .a social landscape which would look very different from that which was our former norm.

Masks will undoubtedly be a must. . .and social distancing rules will stay in place. In compliance, schools may be serving fewer students at one time, by providing shifts and on-line classes which would be tailored to the individual. Classrooms would be set up for social distancing with desks spaced accordingly. . .as would restaurants, with fewer tables set up farther apart. And, at least for the summer. . .and maybe even until we have a vaccine, there will be no large group gatherings (100 or more people). That means ball games, concerts, movie theaters, Private Club gatherings, really anything that requires folks to gather in one place. While some others may be allowed to go back to work, and the closures of beaches and parks would be lifted,

it seems likely that old folks like us will be encouraged to stay indoors for a while longer. . .maybe for most of the summer.

These restrictions will mean different things for different people. It's all very blurred. Will we have our family gathering in Mammoth in August? We willingly postponed our European River Cruise which had been scheduled for June, but surely by mid-August, it will be okay to gather with our family. . .or maybe not.

So what is my silver lining for today? Possibilities. . .

## DAY 35

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

There was a protest march in Huntington Beach yesterday. People held signs alluding to the State's "Stay at home" order as an obstruction to individual Constitutional rights. . .more or less a "you can't make me do it" attitude. It was not a large gathering, but one of perhaps 100 people, consciously unmasked, and walking in close proximity. Other signs indicated that our hospitals are not overcrowded, that we do have enough tests and treatments in place to deal with this virus—the tone communicated an air of a population essentially being held without bail for a crime they didn't commit, by a power hungry government. How is it that no matter what is going on socially, politically, or within our own communities, we can count on someone or a group made of those disgruntled folks, to feel abused enough to form a protest.

I live in Laguna Beach, where various groups congregate on our open park area adjacent to Main Beach regularly, to protest this, that, or the other thing, I get that the right to gather and protest is a Constitutional right—it's not the right to gather that concerns me, it is the concept underlying the protest that is bothersome to me.

Do these people not get what has happened all over the world, especially in places where the government didn't step in to lay down measures which at least had the potential to flatten the curve? Italy, for example. Have they not been watching the scourge in New York City, in LA? Even with these measures in place, still 81 people in Los Angeles died yesterday of complications from Covid-19. That is a statistic I do not want to ignore. Knowing that I only have the right to follow my own conscience regarding what to do within any given situation, I still find myself wanting to say, "Go inside. . .if you don't care about being exposed to the virus yourself, the least you can do is work towards not exposing others, and thereby help to stop the spread!" It gives me pause to wonder where on Earth these people are getting their information. Or maybe that's the point. . .they're not.

Before this is over, there will undoubtedly be many more protests. . .they're cropping up all over from Newport Beach to the lawn outside the State Capital in Sacramento. What started

out as a fairly consolidated fear of the unknown has apparently now become a political position. Even in times when the social landscape is fairly even, I pretty much stay away from politics, but I find the divisiveness even more difficult to stomach in times such as these. First let's save the planet, then we can worry about who did what to whom.

## WEEK 6

### DAY 36

SUNDAY, APRIL 19

At no time in my life, when there has been extended stress or a critical time period, has there not been also an opportunity to learn something positive from whatever I was forced to endure, regardless of the negative content of the experience itself. For example, when my sister, Tina, died suddenly, I learned not to let go until tomorrow what can be taken care of today. . .I learned to listen to my internal warning systems. . .I learned to value every moment with the people I love. . .I learned to not go to bed angry over the inconsequential. The crisis of today is that we are in a period of suspended animation. . . everywhere. It is truly the uncertainty of the times that is so scary. . .and stress producing. There is no way to know when the need to stay indoors will end in California. . . especially for people in the elderly category. Although Gary and I are safely ensconced indoors, with limited access to the virus itself, we are locked alone with our own active imaginations envisioning what we will find when we are able to go out into the world and rejoin with society. Going out again brings its own level of anxiety. What will the emergence process entail, and how will it manifest itself? What will the lesson, or lessons, be from *this* experience?

The day after we began what we thought would be a two-to-three-week isolation, five dear friends began to text with me regularly—a group chat. Out texts were sometimes used to send funny quips found on the internet, sometimes for simple conversation—just touching in to share that all was well with each of us, some passed on news of the day, and some were focused upon inspiration towards a brighter future. One of the first internet finds that was passed around

was focused upon what might be learned from this experience. It found its focus in wondering if this pandemic was the Universe telling mankind to get its collective act together.

This particular thought stuck with me. What have I been doing to hurt Mother Earth? One thing that comes to mind is how wasteful we've been. . .with paper products, and with food. In the good old days—last month—we went through copious rolls of paper towels and toilet paper. Now we're more conscious of tearing off just what we need for the task at hand, and using cloth napkins and dish towels whenever possible. Formerly, when food was getting a bit past its prime, we would simply throw it away. Whole vegetable bins of food, loaves of bread, and forgotten left-overs went into the trash bin. Last week, when I noticed two bell peppers and an onion tending towards the wrong side of ripe, I chopped them up and froze them in single use packets. . .on Saturday, when I wanted to make spaghetti sauce, knowing that I couldn't simply run to the grocery store, I was so happy to have that green pepper still available! I'll use the red one when I make chili next week. On Sunday, when we found that our almost full loaf of bread was not so fresh, we made bread pudding. When *want* is absent, we tend to overlook the need to conserve.

In the past, time has also been squandered. . .well, I'm not sure that squandered is the right word, but formerly we would fill our hours so full with. . .well, just keeping busy, that we missed some of the beauty around us. A remarkable blue sky, studded with fluffy white clouds, a splendid sunset, a perfect rose as fragrant as it is beautiful, the spray wafting off the crest of the perfect wave, the fresh air blowing against our faces, the freedom to take a walk, were all passed over in favor of a frantic need for activity.

All of my years as a school director, I warned my teachers against busy work. . . "Don't just keep them busy," I would say, "engage their minds with something real and valuable." And yet, even as a retiree, I had made myself so busy, that I often missed what was "real and valuable." When I'd heard others who had retired before me talk about how busy they were, I just didn't get how it could be possible to be so busy in retirement that I didn't know how I'd ever had time to work a 40+ hour work week. Now I know. . .busy work. This experience has given me pause . . .to just be. And surprisingly I think I like it. Savoring the moment is a lost art. Or is it? Perhaps it's just waiting to be rediscovered. . .

## DAY 37

MONDAY, APRIL 20

The newspaper has become my connector to what's happening out there in the world. . . and in my own community. It's pretty weird to have to rely on someone else's point of view in order to form my own opinion. Acknowledging that it's pretty much always been that way since the world has grown so large and overpopulation has set in, at least formerly, we could gather to discuss what we'd read with others in order to collect enough diverse viewpoints to form an educated guess of our own. Now I have few to talk to when something I've read doesn't make sense to me. With Gary it either makes sense or he doesn't read it. . .it's easy for him. . .he doesn't wonder. I wonder. . .

This morning the news was that Ventura County, which butts right up next to Los Angeles County's northern boundary, has reopened. While still implementing social distancing, and wearing masks, some non-essential businesses, beaches, and other public places will be semi-opened to start. People will be allowed to gather in small groups (no more than 5), ride in cars together, frequent the businesses that are opened and go to the beaches for exercise, although they've been warned not to gather in groups to socialize.

I know that city start-ups must begin somewhere. But should the first in the series be right next to the county with the highest number of cases of Covid-19 (and related deaths) on the west coast? That seems less than bright. How does Ventura County, which now will look quite attractive to those whose beaches remain closed, plan to stop folks from virus-infested LA county, who may be pre-symptomatic covid-19 carriers, from crossing over the county line, and mingling with others to perhaps restart the upsurge of the disease? Isn't this how it started?

It will be very interesting to see how this experiment. . .I can't see it as anything else. . . and a risky one at that, will work out. Will the number of cases surge upward, or stay flattened and eventually die out? I'll be watching. . . from a distance.

This morning, my friend Anne texted to say that she would drop off oranges and lemons from her backyard trees which had been harvested over the weekend—what a treat. . .fresh fruit. This brought up memories of my mother, relating stories of being starved for fresh fruit by the



Depression years of her childhood, which apparently resulted in her eating even the core of an apple or the peel of an orange rather than wasting it. Although, at the time, to the child who was me, her behavior just seemed weird. . .and a bit embarrassing, I now finally get how precious a commodity is something fresh.

When Anne dropped off the bag of oranges—to be left on our front porch, she said—I was sad that we were not able to invite her in. . .it seems uncivilized at the very least. One can only dream that someday soon, we will once again be open to inviting our friends into our homes without the fear of unwanted germs lingering on household surfaces long after they've left. I'm missing those precious times.

Terri may stop by for a curbside wave. . .when she texted the idea, I jumped up and started moving. Oh goody. . .something to get dressed for. . .if only, in my jeans and flannel shirt.

## DAY 39

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22

Yesterday, in preparation for our second annual grocery pick-up which was scheduled for today, I cleaned the entire kitchen. I first cleaned out the refrigerator. . . anything that had outlived its past due date or that had the potential to do so anytime soon, went into the trash (I guess I'm not cured of wastefulness, after all. . . well, at least as it applies to the possibility of food poisoning!). All the rest was reorganized to allow space for. . . even more groceries! Then I cleaned all surfaces: floors were mopped, counters scoured clean, stove top relieved of residual grease, backsplash wiped down. When all was shining, I turned to the pantry. Not much to throw away here. . . maybe just a little rearranging would do the trick. Voila! More space to fill. When all was shining and clean, I knew I was ready to bring in new groceries. The jury is still out on why I felt the need to clean up for what may be an unwelcome invasion of virus, creeping into our kitchen clinging to groceries that had been touched by hands unknown to us.

Referencing my one and only other experience with an appointed slot for grocery pick-up at a near-by Pavilions store, I figured that my 8:00 a.m. time would translate to my order actually being ready by 11:30 or so. After all, my last pick-up had been for 9:00 a.m., and my order had been ready at 12:30. So my imagined timeframe made sense, although I had noticed a remarkable difference in availability of appointment times. . . in fact, it appeared that every day was open!

Just to point out my lack of observation skills. . . I was *surprised* when I checked my phone upon arising, to find that my order was ready! It was 7:45!

We jumped into our clothes, put on hats and sunglasses, and flew from the house. When we arrived, all the parking spaces designated for stop and grab were empty. We called the number posted, and five minutes later, we were on our way home.

Once we got home, we donned masks and gloves and began the two-hour process of making the groceries fit to come into the house. This time anything that was not perishable, was

laid out on towels in the sun. . .we had heard that exposing the virus to solar rays would kill it in just a few minutes (who knew if this was a true fact, but we latched on to it!), so what could be easier. I *know*, going back to the olden days of last month would be ultimately easier. . .but in the range of things. . . After a half-hour, we flipped all of the items over to allow the sunshine to kill stuff on the other side. . .and waited. While all this waiting was going on, we were not idle. Instead, we were busy wiping off all perishables with a Lysol soaked paper towel, before drying them carefully and putting them away. All fruits and veggies were washed thoroughly and put into individual plastic bags (hopefully, lack of air would kill anything still lurking there!), and put away in a fruit bowl or into the refrigerated vegetable bin. Then it was time to bring in the pantry goods to be stashed away. We finished at 11:00. Exhausted, we flaked out for the rest of the day.

Although, I'd really rather do my own shopping, I do appreciate how helpful these grocery store people have been. That being said, however appreciative of their heroic efforts to help, the fact is that you never know *what* you're going to end up with. . .some of the substitutions are quite interesting, if not welcome! Surprise!

## DAY 42

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

The re-emergent process has begun. Today, Anne told me that the golf courses would be reopening. The associated restaurants, pro-shops and such would not be opened, and there would be a whole set of new guidelines for social distancing and health concerns put in place. She was up for the experience. Although, I am not a golfer, I do lunch. . .formerly, a couple of times a month I met the golf girls to have a post-game lunch at the adjoining Ranch Restaurant. That will have to wait.

I must admit that at this point, I still have pretty major trepidations regarding going out and/or gathering in groups. As opportunities arise for both, each of us will be making decisions about what feels comfortable for ourselves. Right now, my take on it is that things will need to be, or at least to feel, more stable than they do for me right now. Although I know that in not jumping at any chance to see friends, I'll feel that I am missing something, I think I'll have to pass on it for now. I do hope that my friends understand.

This, I know, is just the first in what will become a series of decisions about to go or not to go. I think about what will be three family birthdays (the third falling next Saturday with Gareth's 26<sup>th</sup>) that the Smythe family has had to gather for via Zoom during this time of isolation . . .no hugs, no face to face, no hanging out together. When looking at the sacrifices that all of us have had to make during the last six weeks, the sense in going out for literally anything becomes clearly not an option, at least until we get official clearance. I will wait it out.

Having made this decision, what comes up for me still is. . .will others understand? While I have no difficulty in making such decisions even in the face of controversy, I truly do not want my dear friends to view it as about whether I want to be with them. Gary would say that I am making things up. . .he doesn't worry about these types of things. He feels that if people really care for and respect you, they will also respect your decisions even if they differ from theirs. I worry that people, being human, will take exception. . .thinking it more of a statement about my *wanting* to be there or not. . .and their importance in my life.

This is yet again, an opportunity to grow beyond what I think I know about what is real. .and to do what I need to do for myself, and for Gary. This is only the first in a series of social dilemmas. Six weeks ago we had to learn about how to stay at home. Now, we will need to learn how to go back into society. I know that this new curve is just in its early stages. .and that it will offer any number of situations that will give cause for discomfort—they will come up again and again as we begin to emerge from what has seemed a fairly secure place, to go back into what doesn't yet seem safe. As always, I will forge ahead and hope for the best.

## WEEK 7

### DAY 43

SUNDAY, APRIL 26

After six weeks of sheltering at home, it appears that folks are beginning to feel a bit looser about complete isolation. . .and the *stay at home* order. We are none of us, akin to being totally alone, or to being in the company of the same people 24/7. . . Cabin fever? Whatever the reason, at this point, we seem to need some distraction. . .and, so we begin to fudge a bit. Even us. . .

Case in point. . .today a very strange thing happened. We went out! For two weeks we had been wishing we had tomato plants to nurture. . .so, this morning, thinking that if we waited too long they'd all be in other peoples' gardens, we donned masks and gloves and went to the Dana Point Nursery. It felt strange, after a six-week hiatus, to go out into the world. We had literally been nowhere during that time, unless one considers the Pavilions parking lot to pick up groceries an outing, or a trip to the gas station. . .no, not to gas up the car, which doesn't go out much these days, but to get fuel for the lawn mower, which gets out quite a bit now that spring has sprung.

So, you might imagine that it was with trepidation that we drove into the tiny parking lot of this sweet little plant shop. We noted that one car was leaving and there was an empty parking spot. Once in the nursery, I adjusted Gary's mask, which I noticed he had pulled across his mouth and nose, but not under his chin, which actually secures it (the learning curve is just setting in for this phase), and we moved into the unknown jungle of possible Covid-19 contact.

The good news was that we were the only customers there at that time, and except for the employees who were all masked (except of course for the young man who was helping *us!*), we were alone with all of those beautiful plants. Temptation took over. We bought enough

plants to fill the entire back of our SUV, discarded our gloves *before* getting into the car ourselves (as any sane person would, I had brought a brown paper bag for disposal purposes), and took our treasure trove home to plant.

It is amazing what a day of planting does for the soul. Although sore from bending, I felt centered and safe in a world of imbalance and insecurity. For many years, Gary has professed to use gardening as an alternative to therapy. I now get what he meant.

By the time the afternoon rolled around, we were tired but excited to engage in yet again, another Smythe family April birthday party—via Zoom, of course. Twenty-six years ago today, our darling Gareth was born. It was a beautiful day, so this time most of us called in from whatever outdoor space was nearby. Molly, Greg, and Gareth, who was in southern California for business at the San Diego Naval Base and was able to stop at his folk’s home for a short visit on his way back to Sacramento, were on their outdoor covered patio, Damon and Jen, in their beautiful backyard, Hayley, under a tree in the pasture, and Gary and I, on our patio. We’d had a lively conversation, and showered Gareth with birthday greetings, when, one hour into the party, my iPad screen froze. I couldn’t seem to reconnect, so I sent a text message apologizing for our hasty retreat, and wishing them well, before reminding them that our next birthday meeting would be for May 17, Jen’s Birthday. My sweet Greg, ever ready with a quip, immediately wrote back, “Thanks, Mom. Hope you can stay for that one!” Cute! Sometimes I wonder why we ever encouraged speech in our children! You’ve got to love them!

## DAY 47

THURSDAY, APRIL 30

Wonder of wonders, yesterday we heard that the Laguna Beach City Council had decided that they would reopen the city beaches on Monday, May 4. We read that the beaches would be opened for only the hours between 6:00 and 10:00 a.m., and only for the purpose of exercise; there was to be no loitering or hanging out in groups. Although typically, Gary and I don't walk on the beach much, the mere idea that it was now available seemed enticing. . .so much so, that we found ourselves asking, "Why *don't* we walk on the beach anymore?"

Then I began to think. . .always a deficit for me. How was the city planning to monitor these openings and closings? Once on the beach, why wouldn't avid beach-lovers just stay? Surfers don't ordinarily wear watches while sitting far out on the water to await the perfect wave. How could they possibly know what time it was? Would the police stand on the beach at 10:42 a.m., anticipating the opportunity to snap these surfers in cuffs as they hit the beach, still dripping from the last wave? And, how would social distancing be ensured? I had heard that some of our street beaches would be designated as entry and some as exit. . .Anita Street would be for going down to the beach, while Oak Street would be for leaving, for example. That could be helpful, but still. . .it seemed an enforcement headache of major proportions. As I said before . . .Gary doesn't wonder about these things. Oh, he *did* when he was being paid to wonder. . .he checked out every possibility. But now he merely shrugs and says. . . "It's not my job. . .why worry?" Okay, I'll admit it, he's got a point. . .but I'm damned if I'm going to tell *him*!

As it turns out, I needn't have worried (I can just hear Gary saying, "Oh, *really?*"). This morning Governor Newsom, overrode our city's decision saying that due to excessive numbers on Newport Beaches over the weekend before, not only would city beaches remain closed in Orange County, but that the county beaches would also be closed now. This was a huge blow for our local surfers who had been parking on residential streets to use the county beaches, where only parking lots had been formerly closed . . .now the county *beaches* would also be closed.



Although, I didn't feel anything which could be called a sense of defeat at this decision, when I ran into a neighbor, she expressed disdain over the Gubernatorial edict, saying that her daughter, a budding surfer, had been excited with the prospect of getting back into the water, a mainstay of her prior daily routine, and was thrown into a mini-depression at the loss of opportunity. This mom also expressed that she had more concern for the mental health of the children as a *result* of this pandemic than she did about the virus *itself*. Interesting. . .

This definitely gave me pause to wonder. How will the children, especially those still in the period of formation, under six-year olds, who are being taught to stay away from other children, not to touch even their own grandmothers, let alone persons who are unknown to them, to wash their hands constantly, not to touch their mouths, etc., be effected in their overall development. . .but especially in their social/emotional development? Those of us in the field of education had long been worried about the effects of technology on the social development of the young. . .now it may be the saving grace. . .the way to touch others, without actually touching!

## DAY 48

### FRIDAY, MAY 1

Today is May Day. . .traditionally a day for festivals signifying the start of better times—Spring! What will it signify for us? The news of the day is grim. This afternoon, a Harvard professor of Epidemiology, along with the PhD author of a major joint report on related subject matter, shared their forecast of what was to come.

Two years is the prediction of the time it will take for a pandemic such as this to be quelled. According to them, even if the US is able to keep the virus at bay for a time, it will continue to feed in other areas which don't have the means or impetus to keep it controlled, and then it will come back to rest here once again as travel bans are lifted and infected people have contact with the inhabitants of other nations. . .and so on. . .and so on. These two apparently learned men said further, that this virus could only effectively die out when 70% of the world population has developed antibodies to fight it. That's a big number, considering that we are currently at under 2%!

Is this hype. . .theoretical scare tactics, a mere slant of the numbers, or is it the truth? We know that hype has certainly been prevalent before. . .when folks rely on the common need and interest in finding answers, to make a name for themselves, or for whatever reason. Times such as these appear to bring out the predators. If it's hype or anything of a shady nature. . .then, all I can say is. . .shame on them! But if it's truth, it stands to reason that we will need to rethink how we will live in the future.

I can see modifying what we are doing now for the near future. . . I'm envisioning some folks continuing to work remotely, while others return to a workplace that is more sparsely furnished allowing for distance, and perhaps even working in shifts to accommodate fewer numbers. . .thus, allowing the economy to begin a semi-start-up mode. . .schools reopening (albeit, within a different configuration). . .maybe even major league sports re-activating. . .if playing to an empty arena. . .teams relying on well-placed cameras, instead crowds of people. Let's face it, this year even the football draft was done virtually! As things die down a bit, I will put on my mask and gloves and actually go into the grocery store to do my own shopping. . .this

with the hope that others will also be using masks and gloves. . .and staying in their own space. . .and away from mine! *Two years!*

In such a society, will masks actually become a *fashion statement* or a *requirement*? No shirt, no mask, no service! All this time we've been joking about this, but now this is a reality. Remember when we could identify the nationality of others simply because they were wearing masks. . .it turns out they were the smart ones! Now, will there be bias in America against people who *don't* wear masks. . .or against those who *do*? With this in mind, I found myself ordering four more masks from the Gap!

What about gathering in groups? The membership letter from our social club came today, requesting dues. Of course, we will support this group by sending in our money. . .but will we feel comfortable joining in to a group of at least 100 people? Will we go to even one event with all of this hanging over us?

And what about my beloved Rummy Tiles game nights—shared food, common tables, four pairs of hands reaching into a common grab bag, again and again to retrieve tiles. Within this particular social climate. . .it doesn't seem likely. Perhaps we can think of another system for retrieving tiles. . .who knows how *need* will result in which modification.

Tonight I feel myself in need of an attitude adjustment (once again!). Other cultures have lived through worse. . .and emerged within a society which looked and felt different. . .but they survived and adapted. . .and went on with their lives. Let's not mourn for that which is no more, but invent ways to make the future better!

## DAY 49

### SATURDAY, MAY 2

We woke to a beautiful, sunny morning today. The dawning of a new day. . .a day for doing something positive. I decided to spend some time with my plants. Gary has always loved his garden. . .he spends hours a day snipping, replanting, mowing, watering and trimming. As a result, the garden is beautifully draped with flowering vines, potted plants, and hanging baskets, all overflowing with colorful blooms. Even during the winter, this garden seems to be blooming somewhere. He has always professed that gardening for him provides purpose and balance.

As a part of my retirement transition--moving from the purposeful activity of structured work to days full of possibility but less structure—Gary suggested that I take responsibility for the small area where I had a floundering herb garden growing. . .nothing very significant, just pots lined up against a wall. I was a bit reluctant. . .he was such a master with plants, and experience had shown me that my thumb was not particularly green! But, what else did I have to do. . .so, I too, entered into the magical world of gardening.

At that time, we had recently been to northern Italy where we saw all kinds of innovative ways to nurture a garden, where there was none. . .and not much potential for one. Wall gardens, potted plants marking each step of a 500-year-old stone staircase, window boxes. . .it was quite remarkable. Because my space was small, with no visible dirt, I decided on a pot garden. We found an old, 3-tiered, circular, wrought iron stand that would hold 12 plants, and I started with just herbs. Over the years I've added an avocado tree that was grown from a seed (a science experiment with prospective teachers), which is now 12 feet tall, a 5-level shelf—which provides a more sheltered space that became the herb garden, as many flowering plants as the area and exposure would allow, and. . .a nursery for coaxing the life back into floundering plants which no longer met Gary's criteria for his part of the garden. During this time of isolation when we have not been as free to run out to Roger's Gardens or to the Dana Point Nursery to purchase new plants, as we had been in former years, those plants nurtured back to life in my nursery have filled in the blanks in Gary's garden. . . rather beautifully, I might add.

So this morning, as I wandered into my lovely little space, sprinkling the trough of basil, the recovering geraniums, the 3-tiers of flowers, my herbs and tree with water, I found myself talking. . .to *whom*, you might ask. . .there was no one nearby. . .in fact the prospect of conversation with literally anyone has been pretty much non-existent! So, yes, I was talking to my plants—the avocado tree which sometimes reaches its leaves down to tug on my hair, responds very well to a few kind words. I don't know. . .does this make me crazy. . .or just lonely?