

DIARY OF A  
WORLD PANDEMIC  
Parts II & III

Orange County, California  
May 2020

A Personal Account

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## **PART II**

### **GOING OUT**

**Isolation Deescalated. . .**

**A Daily Log  
Selected Entries**

## WEEK 8

### DAY 50

#### SUNDAY, MAY 3

OMG! Have we really been in isolation for 50 days? It seems incomprehensible. . .but it's true. Count them. . .50!

As I look at the evolution of information, ideas, and emotions during this time—the highs and lows of it all, I feel proud of Gary and me. We have always loved each other. . .and better yet, have typically liked and respected each other. . .but who knew what a 24-hour-a-day exclusivity would bring to our relationship? None of us was meant to be together without a break in the pattern for 24-hours a day. . .for 50 days and counting!

As we begin week 8 of sheltering at home, I am aware that after a few false starts, we have found our stride. We have always been inner-dependent within our interdependence as a couple. Gary had his job, his garden, his friends, his reading material (magazines, short non-fiction), and interests (his focus upon sports is definitely not shared by me; my obsession with crossword puzzles and board games, not shared by him), and long distant walking; I had my job, my friends, my reading material (detective novels), swimming, writing, etc. And then, we have had shared interests: family, mutual friends, hiking, cooking, restaurants, music, art, travel, and what have you. We have for the last 30 years (ever since our boys left home) met every night by whatever fireplace (indoor or outdoor) the weather permitted, to drink a little wine, eat our dinner and share our insights of the day. But now, without all the filler in between, I wondered if it would be enough. What would we talk about now that there was less external stimulus? Would anxiety get in the way of enjoyment? Would we get tired of the same old, same old? Would the stress of insecurity and uncertainty about the future sour the experience of now?

Well, I'm happy to report that we are alive and well and actually kind of enjoying this time of reliance upon one another. We have not tired of each other. . .while still being tired of the underlying need for exclusivity. We still spend much of our time in our own spaces, doing our

own thing, and while the choices for both space and activity being more limited can be challenging, we are just as happy to be together when we meet each evening.

Although we are aware that we'll be happy when doors open, and we can go out or have friends in, choose to go to restaurants, run errands, walk on the beach, and the myriad of other tiny niceties inherent in the concept of freedom, we are also aware that in this strange new world of dos and don'ts, of seclusion, we still have each other. I have never been more thankful than I am now for this special man who has been my partner in everything that was and is good in my life.

## DAY 53

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

The beaches in Laguna Beach have reopened! In celebration, we arose at 6:30 a.m. this morning, not really our usual fare during these days of less than non-existent plans, had a few sips of coffee, and were on our way, hats on unruly hair, sunglasses perched upon our noses, bandannas tied loosely around our necks to serve as masks, should they be needed, flip flops on our feet. Thalia Street beach, here we come. Although, I hate to admit it, although we used to go to the beach every weekend in younger days, we hadn't been there in several years. Regardless of that, this morning we felt compelled to revisit this formerly much loved place.

As we walked down Anita Street and crossed over to Thalia, we were imagining the beach as a quiet place, free of people (nobody would actually be out at this hour!), waves breaking to smash upon the wide, white beach just for our personal enjoyment. As we walked down the small stretch of Thalia, between the Coast Highway and the beach stairs, we got a bit of an inkling that our fantasy was not to be. We peered over the stairway, (no apparent sign telling whether these stairs were for entry or egress), to discover the ocean of our dreams. . .*spotted with surfers*, perhaps 75 to 100 of them bobbing up and down on their boards, waiting for the perfect wave. We forged ahead down the stairs to the beach. On the beach were the other 50 surfers, joined by swimmers, joggers, walkers, parents who were getting their children out to play in the sand, looky-loos, and what have you. . .and to make matters worse, it was high tide, which created less space for moving about on the sand.

It was at the *bottom* of the stairway, that we found *the sign*. . .telling us that this stairway was for beach entry only! Oh, Oh. . .trapped! We started up the beach to find the next exit stairway, making our way around the crowd of surfers who appeared to be just standing and watching the water. What are they looking for. . .just get in. . .and out of our way! Don't these people know that there is to be no loitering? There was no apparent notice of social distancing between them, either. . .in fact, they were a mini-crowd unto themselves!

Once around the surfers, we were met by the joggers, walkers, children and dogs running amok. At any other time, I, no doubt, would have found this melee a welcome sign of healthy life-style in forward motion. . .and would have enjoyed people-watching. That was then. Now, all I could think of, as I cowered into my bandanna, was that there were way too many of them . . .and they were seemingly all coming straight towards *me*. It was kind of like one of those Disney rides where you're rolling along and scary surprises keep popping out at you. . .the only thing missing here was darkness and the screaming!

It felt like forever before we found an exit stairway. . .it was Cleo Street, only 3 streets down from Thalia. . .but, for me, a very long walk through the "Garden of Good and Evil." We returned home through deserted streets. . .no mystery there. . .we know exactly where all the people are. No more beach visits in the near future for us!

DAY 55

FRIDAY, MAY 8

It is clear to me today that the Governor's "Resilience Roadmap" provides for a long and arduous trek through both an emotional mine field, and dramatic financial and societal change. While Orange County is still reporting numerous new cases of Covid-19 (Laguna Beach now stands at 40 cases, up from 37 last week), with 5 related deaths yesterday, the state of California is now entering Stage 2 of a 4-phase recovery plan. Stage 2 allows for the incremental re-opening of some non-essential, yet lower-risk work places: small clothing stores, book stores, and sporting goods stores, within specified guidelines—curbside pick-up, only. Stage 3 is described as the opening of higher risk workplaces, which I take to mean department stores, larger companies, restaurants, etc. And Stage 4 will be an end to the "stay at home" order. I suspect what this means for many of us is that we will be sporting colorful masks, and sometimes gloves for a long time to come!

Societal change is already in the air. Way back in March, when walking along a shared sidewalk, it wasn't unusual for a person to unconsciously bump against another without even looking up to make eye-contact, let alone to acknowledge being in the personal space allocated to each of us. Although it was sometimes jarring, none of us considered such encounters unhealthy. . .if impolite!

On today's walk down Ocean Way to Moss Point, I noticed that to a person, those we met along the way moved *away* from us (which formerly, would have been considered anti-social, at the very least), while still holding eye-contact, smiling and/or offering a verbal greeting. People going by on bicycles waved, and smiled through their chin straps, as if we were valued friends (maybe we were, hard to recognize folks under helmets and masks!).

I like to think that we are taking the first step towards the recovery of altered priorities as participants of the Human Race. . .even in this small acknowledgement of each other as valuable beings. This is one outcome I hope will continue when all of this is behind us and we are back into the hustle bustle of the old normal.

Some of the elements of this experience that I will be glad to let go of are:

- 1) Germ phobia (OCD hand-washing has left little but scaly skin on my already aging hands!)
  - a. The related malady of fear of touching virtually anything that offers shared use (although I'm sure this will be a long-held condition. At the onset of our traumatic beach foray on Thursday, being conditioned to hanging onto hand rails lest I fall flat on my face, I reached out to barely touch the rail as I started down to the beach. . . (an apparently habitual behavior) before the awful truth hit me. . .that the cute surfer-boy just ahead of me had also touched it! Until I got down to the water where I could rinse my fingers and rub them using the abrasiveness of the sand to create the friction necessary to clean off whatever might be lurking there, I could almost feel the germs crawling up my arms! Is this crazy behavior, or what?)
- 2) The lack of welcome to my home for friends and family. . .and the unwillingness to enter anyone else's home
- 3) Zoom meetings (although this has been helpful, I much prefer in person gatherings)
- 4) Relying on someone else to do my shopping!

That's it for now. . .I'm sure in the next 10 minutes, I'll come up with another hundred or so.

## DAY 56

### SATURDAY, MAY 9

For days, every time we go into the backyard, we see a dove wandering around. . .yes, that's right, she's not flying, but walking on the pathways throughout the garden. It's not that this bird can't fly, it appears that she is on a mission.

This happens each year, in the springtime, which brings to mind the bird who, a few years ago, built a nest in the hanging planter right next to our back door. Because our back door is elevated above a staircase, the basket hangs directly next to the door. . .I mean one foot away. Apparently this bird wasn't very bright (to be kind, maybe she was a first-timer with the nest thing—a teenage mother!), but then, neither were we. As soon as we realized that there were two eggs in this flimsy little nest, which was set amongst the branches of our beautiful flowering plant, we immediately stopped using that door. . .and watering that plant, lest we disturb the nesting bird. Gary even put caution tape at the bottom of the staircase to remind us not to use it. Instead, when we needed to go into the back yard we either went out the front door, and went in through the side gate (which we sometimes found locked, necessitating a trek through the house to the upper back door, whereupon we hiked back down through the garden to the side gate to open the inner padlock!). This went on for the 18-21 days it takes for the eggs to hatch, and then the additional time for the fledglings to leave the nest! Of course by then, the plant was dead. Additionally, this less than bright bird, apparently finally feeling freaked out by the humans in *her* yard, kicked both babies out onto the ground. Upon finding them, I immediately got Gary to do the dirty work of disposal.

It was definite that we didn't want a repeat of that scenario. What was this bird up to? Although we've tried spying on her, she's sneaky. When we're around, she pretends she just out for a stroll. This morning I was determined to find the nest. . .if there was one. I immediately went to the planter next to the back door (these birds mate for life, and often return to the same nesting site, year after year)—nothing there. I check under the vines covering our fence. . .that would be a nice place for a nest—nothing there. Finally, I checked the lamps mounted on the

back of the house. . .they have a flat surface on top, and are warm when turned on. . .ideal for nesting. And there it was nestled into the space of one of these lamps—a pile of twigs! Eureka!

As yet, although the bird is still lurking, we've seen no sign of a setting bird *on* that nest. Hopefully this sneaky little bird hasn't pulled the feathers over our eyes. . .stealthily placing her nest somewhere that will kill another plant! Ah. . .the beauty of nature!

## WEEK 9

### DAY 57

#### SUNDAY, MAY 10

Today is Mother's Day. . .and the sky is as gray as my mood. I am having a teary day! It's not that I don't feel celebrated on this day. . .I've received cards and flowers from my boys in celebration of motherhood. . .and calls from grandchildren. . .and truly I'm not a person who needs to feel *celebrated*. I'm happy in who I am, and secure in my relationships with family. It's just that, today, I miss seeing them. I want to hug them and spend time eating and drinking together with all the warmth and conversation of yesteryear.

For many years, it's been our pattern on this day to drive to Seal Beach to meet with Damon and Jen, and Greg and Molly for brunch. Typically, we'd sit around a table eating good breakfast fare and drinking mimosas, before taking a long walk through the streets of the village there. It has been a much loved tradition.

While I have noticed others gradually moving out of their isolation boxes recently, widening their social contact groups (Greg will return to work tomorrow; Damon and Jen had a small socially distant gathering last night in their backyard; my friend Anne's birthday went on as planned yesterday; people are going to beaches, hiking trails [although trailheads in Laguna are not yet open], and golf courses), Gary and I have remained steadfast in our decision to keep to ourselves. Although we believe this to be the right decision for us, it makes for an, if not rocky, at the very least uneven emotional pathway.

I am a believer in the idea that, as humans, there is very little that is truly in our direct control. . .except for our own attitude. Further, I feel that it is the responsibility of each of us to maintain balance through our right to choose our attitude about whatever is happening around us. We can *choose* to feel frustration, sadness, glee, boredom, or what have you. With this belief in place, I know when I'm feeling blue, that it's by my own doing.

Sometimes this knowledge just pisses me off! Especially because though it doesn't happen often, I just want to wallow in my own miserableness. I'm just sure that I have that right! Then again, by very definition, being miserable isn't all that much fun. While talking to both Damon, and Greg (and later Molly), I felt my eyes watering, the wetness of tears on my cheeks, even though we were talking of happy things. . .talk about a downer! Hopefully they didn't notice.

I have decided to go take a shower, to wash all of this sadness down the drain, and to reemerge from the steam as a new person. . .one with a better attitude.

On a high note, my wheat bread flour arrived this morning. . .I haven't been able to find any in my foraging efforts, but Amazon to the rescue! Baking bread is constructive. . .and, as a result the house is filled with warm bakery smells for the rest of the day!

On the little blackboard hanging in my kitchen, our grandson, Gareth, as a 12-year-old, had written the positive affirmation, "Small Happinesses." I loved it so much that I've carefully preserved this sweet wisdom. From the mouths of babes. . . The mere act of baking bread is, for me, one of those "small happinesses"! The child becomes the teacher!

DAY 59

TUESDAY, MAY 12

What do people who are sequestered for weeks on end, as the whole world seems to be within the reality of this pandemic, do with lots of time and an environment pared down to the walls of a single abode? Oh yeah. . .people are allowed out to walk the dog. . .and to exercise. That takes care of one of the 24 hours in a day!

I've seen pictures of families hunched over a table full of jigsaw puzzle pieces, binge watching *Game of Thrones* or *Bosch*, playing board games, and all manner of entertainment. . . but what do they *do* all day?

What am *I* doing with my time? Well, besides writing, I'm cooking more elaborate meals and baking. When I smelled the lovely warm aroma of oatmeal cookies baking yesterday, I wondered why I had ever stopped baking cookies. Then after discovering that Gary had eaten seven of them *after* dinner, I remembered. The man has no self-control when it comes to goodies. Yes, this is the same person who sent himself to the emergency room with a gall bladder attack after eating a whole pound of See's candy just before Christmas one year. The truth is that he has never had trouble with his weight—no weight problem at all, so, no need to carefully watch what he puts into his mouth! He still weighs within five pounds of what he weighed when we got married, while I'm twenty pounds heavier, even while intermittently dieting for at least two months out of each of the last fifty or so years. Not fair, I know, but I've stopped worrying about fair. I told him last night that he could be arranging it so that he gets to go back to the ER (where the real germy people hang out), if he doesn't watch it—fair warning. . .could be working on pre-diabetic shock!

What does *he* do with his time while I'm cooking, baking, and then cleaning up the mess that is inherent in the process? He fixes things. . .and in the most creative ways. . .with stuff he finds tucked away somewhere in the garage. Yesterday his project was a sun screen. He had discovered that the beautifully flowering Fuchsia basket hanging towards the back of our yard, was getting too much direct sunshine in the afternoon. . .apparently Fuchsias like indirect light

only. It would have seemed easier to simply move the plant to a shadier place (my logical brain suggests), but no, Gary likes it where it is. . .and he likes the challenge of figuring out how he will fix the problem. He came up with the idea of a shade screen which could be hung up for the few necessary hours in the late afternoon each day. Now he just needed to find the necessary materials to create one, and with the limited probability of running to the hardware store. After searching around for half a day, he happened on an old picture frame, and a discarded screen door. Removing the screening, he triple folded it, tacked it into the picture frame, and Voila!. . . a sun screen. I'm always amazed at what he comes up with, using anything at hand. Such a right brain, creative intelligence in this left-brain person. . . probably what made him a good engineer—he could still use his right brain!

DAY 60

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13

It's very strange in an emotional climate such as we're experiencing, what looks like an attractive activity. Today I spent at least 2 hours, stripping down the kitchen. . .scrubbing cabinets, tile, stove, sink, and floor until everything was sparkling and the whole house smelled like. . .a hospital! Was this actual fun. . .? No, but it did feel productive.

Whenever the cleanliness bug bites, more often now than ever in the past, the question of why not hire a cleaning person arises. And then I remember. We did. . .in fact, we hired a team of two cleaning people, a husband and wife who also worked for a friend of ours.

It started out okay. . .they came twice a month on a regularly scheduled day, stayed for two or three hours, until the house both looked and smelled clean, and then left. That went on for several months. . .then they began to call to reschedule, both the day and the time of day that *they* were available. Hey wait a minute. . .*who* works for *whom*? The answer to that question became blurry. . .unclear. Why were we sitting in our backyard at 6:00 p.m. while these people took over our home during a time when we would ordinarily be preparing and eating our dinner? There is another question we couldn't answer.

In time, the cleaning became unacceptable; *I* actually had to clean up after *them*! The last straw came when Gary noticed that the dining room table, with the sun glinting across its surface, just didn't look right. It turns out that it had been sprayed with wax cleaner, but not wiped off. Thankfully it wasn't ruined. . .but we were done with them, for sure!

During my childhood, it wasn't the custom, even in Malibu, where I lived, to have house keepers, except of course for the very rich. My parents weren't the very rich, just normal working folks, intellectual types looking for an alternate lifestyle where they could raise a family on lots of land with room for a menagerie of animals. I grew up in a mid-century modern home built by my father from materials that he had obtained from the Douglas Aircraft Company's surplus shop. Beautiful rosewood, apparently left over after DAC had completed the interiors of planes ordered by some European aircraft company, covered the walls of the living room. Formica,

chartreuse as I remember it, served as countertops in our kitchen. Cork flooring tile, perhaps used as some sort of a soundproofing material in planes, was installed throughout, and grass wall matting ran down the main hallway. The décor was very spare and ultra 1950s. This house was always clean. . .but I can't, for the life of me, remember how it got that way. I don't recall ever seeing my mother scrubbing like I did today, or even dusting the sleek furniture. I do remember her dragging the vacuum cleaner around once or twice, but not that often. How did that house stay so clean with five people living in it? Maybe the elves came in during the night. . .

The fact of the matter is that we become what we live as children. Regardless of whether we'd been happy with the cleaning crew and schedule, neither Gary nor I ever got to the place where we could wrap our heads around having others in to do the maintenance work in our home. It definitely wasn't something either of us had 'lived' as children. So, for now, we'll just have to continue thinking of the joint chore of cleaning house as productive activity.

## DAY 63

### SATURDAY, MAY 16

This morning's newspaper sported a colorful front page on the 'Saturday' section, which was the background for a variety of pandemic outgrowths from various readers which they thought were worth holding on to.

It seems that in some ways, we have returned to the days of yore—back to my childhood—when things were simpler. No lavish parties, no over-the-top restaurants, no bi-monthly hair and nails, no spas or workout centers, and a general lack of focus upon luxuries.

When this is all finally over and we've returned to activities that in the past have been a normal part of life, which of those elements growing out of the pandemic and the resulting 'stay at home' order, are worth hanging onto. Here is my list of keepers:

- 1) Getting exercise in any way we can without the necessity of monthly payments to whatever service. For us, as it appears to be for many people, it has been daily walks. Even when I'm able to go back to the pool for swims several days a week, I'll still want to walk with Gary a few days per week.
- 2) Making do with what we have. When we don't have the indulgence of getting whatever we think we need, whenever we think we need it, we use our own resources to get the job done. . .or rethink whether we even *need* to get it done. Baking bread has been fun, if not slimming.
- 3) Fostering neighborhood connections—we've loved our Friday night asphalt parties. I am hopeful that, even when we all return to other outside foci, we will still gather along Anita street a couple of times a month, weather permitting, for these warm and wonderful gatherings.
- 4) Frequently having small groups of friends over without the necessity of toilsome preparations—maybe take-out food. We'll provide the wine!
- 5) Natural nails; not so sure about the hair yet.

- 6) Sleeping until my body is ready to wake up. I'm not proud to say that sometimes it's been after 8:30 a.m.!
- 7) Less concern with being made-up and coiffed each and every day.
- 8) Less frenzy in our days.
- 9) Enjoyment of the natural world around us; gardening.

Although you can be sure that this is not a complete list, it is a start. More later.

## WEEK 10

### DAY 65

MONDAY, MAY 18

After our morning walk, I decided that I really do need to find some information about the state of the remapping of California. I can't allow myself to remain in the dark regarding something as important as this pandemic and its effects.

Having nowhere else to go, I went to the internet. What I found is what I had suspected—California is still in the second phase of reopening. People are still under a stay-at-home order (although many of them appear to be loosening up a bit. . .even gathering in groups). While I suspect that virtually all of us are tired of feelings of restriction, the alternative looks less attractive—more lives lost. The question that keeps coming up for me is, am I overreacting in my need to keep myself and my family safe by continuing to remain in isolation? Have I become *too* reliant upon significant others out there—those who are supposed to be in the know? Do we really know anything about what is actually happening?

After taking a hard look at myself and my beliefs about this dilemma, and doing a lot of reading up on the subject. . .I think I am not overreacting. . .at least for me. What I am doing is trying hard to understand the risks of infecting ourselves and others, and to steer clear of them. It appears that the greatest risk to us are indoor areas, large social groups promoting close proximity to others, the workplace, where many congregate on a daily basis, bringing whatever they've encountered in the days before with them, and, sadly restaurants. It doesn't appear to be the food in restaurants which is lethal, but the high density of humans in a small place. . .hence the good sense of no contact, take-out orders. Although some folks will have no choice in returning to work, for us this is no longer a factor. But when choice is a factor, I am fairly clear that it will be a very long time before I feel comfortable going out to eat sushi, hanging with friends at some other restaurant, or attending a large, or even small party—however socially

distant. Strangely, although cruise ships have gotten a bad rap, it seems, they didn't rank very high on the list of rapid viral transmission—at least in one study. . . Was that per capita? This doesn't make sense to me. . . maybe they didn't rank because of the relatively small number of ships as opposed to the numerous and varied work places. When considering data, it is all about which factors have been controlled for in a study. . .and in who conducted it.

So, after all is said and done, it appears that all we can really do is to collect the information available to us, which changes on a daily basis as those in the 'know' find out more and more about this new enemy, and then run it through our common sense machine to determine what works for each of us and what doesn't. While I'm sure there is something in between total isolation and returning to life as we *once* knew it, I'm not sure the time has come for Gary and me to even begin to understand what that new social configuration will look like. That being said, my common sense machine continues to work overtime trying to figure it all out . . .I'm afraid that before long it will simply stop all together—maybe I should give it a rest!

## DAY 67

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

I don't know what is getting into us. This morning we actually decided to *go* to the grocery store! I mean, to actually *go into* a public place! Oh, Joy. . .I haven't been to the grocery store for 9 weeks. . .and counting. But now, kind of on a whim—we haven't been able to get our favorite ice cream; priorities. . .Covid-19. . .ice cream ?. . .the ice cream apparently won, and off to Gelson's we went!

When we looked at the Gelson's website, we found that the store is opening its doors between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. to elders, those with handicaps, and care-givers only—a dedicated time for folks just like us. We decided that this would be a relatively safe time to go. As we drove up the long drive-way to the parking lot at 7:05 this morning, we saw a woman with a walker making her way toward the store. . .no mask. . .oh, wait. . .there it is hanging on the handle of her walker, right in front of her hand. Good. Who knew that we would develop into the kind of people who obsessed over the minute details of safety.

We entered through the one door that was opened for access at this hour. . .and guarded by a store employee. . . apparently making sure that we fit the category—old or infirm. We had read that during this early hour we may have to show ID upon entering. . .reverse proof of age. . .this time making sure we're not too *young* for the experience at hand. . .but no, I guess we look older than I thought we did! There were few people, most of them stocking shelves, but not one was without a mask. Comforting to one who is just learning how to reemerge.

As we made our way through the produce area—jam packed with delights not seen in weeks—senses that had of late been out for the count, suddenly came alive. I started grabbing things. . .no matter if I needed them or not. Who knows, I might not get back to a grocery store for a while. Corn on the cob, artichokes, apples, bananas, celery, and whatever else I could get without causing a stir, flew into my cart. Then we moved to the bread aisle. . .oh. . .look at all the choices! We made our way through the store, filling our cart. . .remembering not to forget the ice cream in our excitement. Gary balked at the \$10 per pound hamburger, but. . .whatever!

We're paying for the privilege of having our own time scheduled into the day! And, oh my. . .did we pay! But, again . . .whatever. Who knew that I'd be craving such an experience. . .that I could *ever* get to the level of deprivation that I'd even think about a trip to the grocery store as an outing. . .but, that's what happened! Even I don't believe it!

Knowing that there would no doubt be an hour dedicated to the rituals we've created around bringing 'foreign' matter into our house, the spraying, wiping, washing in scalding hot water, allowing non-perishables to sit in the sun. . .etc., couldn't even dampen my spirit. Today was a red letter day! Apparently, it doesn't take much! So, what's next. . .in the remarkable world of the shut-in? Maybe we'll think about sneaking into Costco during *their* old people's hour. . .but, then again, maybe not. . .I'm not sure we're that desperate yet. . .

DAY 68

THURSDAY, MAY 21

Last night when we were sitting by the fire, Gary reminded me that, although this pandemic feels like a totally unique experience to most of us, it is *not* the first time during our lifetime that we have lived through something similar.

He remembers well the polio epidemic of the mid-forties and early fifties. When he brought this up, I had an immediate mental image of my mother, concern reflected from eyes wide with insecurity, as she warned up not to touch the gutter water. . .if we did, we may get Polio and never walk again. Although I was still too young for a lasting impression of the climate of fear which was promoted by the media, both over the radio, and via newsreels in every movie theater, Gary has vivid memories of being particularly afraid of the iron lung experience—photographs of this respiration machine were virtually everywhere, showing only the disembodied head of some unfortunate child sticking out of one end of a metal apparatus (looking not unlike early MRI machines), creating a bizarre picture not easily erased from the malleable minds of the children viewing them.

The emphasis on the race for a vaccine that we are in the earliest stages of today, is not unlike what was going on during that time—Jonas Salk and his dead virus, vs. Albert Sabin and his live one. As it turned out, Salk, with help from the March of Dimes, won the race, first conducting successful trials on monkeys, and then in 1952, on institutionalized children—both those in mental hospitals, and those in orphanages—no need for consent there! In 1954, Salk moved his trials into school settings. Gary was one of the approximately 2 million children who were guinea pigs for this vaccine. He clearly remembers the boys at Ramsey Military School, where he was enrolled for 10 years, lining up to get their polio shot. I'm not sure what the rules regarding parental consent were at that time, but I have a hard time visualizing parents of today giving their okay for some unknown foreign substance to be injected directly into the system of their precious child!

I don't remember ever having a polio shot. . .or an oral dose of the later Sabin solution. In retrospect, the fear of people infected with polio, which apparently, along with standing water, could also be transmitted through food and from person to person, may have had some bearing on our move to the isolated hills of Malibu in 1951. Although this was never discussed, I can now see it as motive—simply to take us up the hill to the house which was set in the middle of seven acres. . .less exposure, less danger.

This is all very interesting, but for me, the most concerning bit of information coming out of this conversation, sparked by an American Experience television program, was the amount of time it took to eradicate polio from the planet—it was not until 1994, 44 years from the time that Salk first came up with a vaccine, that this deadly virus was finally declared gone.

If we equate that time frame to the medical emergency of today. . .this gives pause for concern. . .we may have a long wait before our lives can truly return to normal!

DAY 69

FRIDAY, MAY 22

Last night, during what has lately become a Thursday night tradition—cocktails in the driveway with Anne: picnic basket, wine, and small folding table, required. . .masks not so much, we'll be more than 6 feet apart and it's hard to eat, drink, and converse through a mask—a conversation regarding bias and prejudice came up surrounding how each of us views the world and the people in it.

I know that recently *I've* been taxed with tromping down feelings of concern about the choices that others are making surrounding *going out*—judgments, really. How is it that I think I get to make judgments about the lives of others? Intellectually, I get that keeping my own life in order is *my* job, and that it is the job of each of those others to do the same with theirs, but still, when faced with these situations of individual choice, feelings of '*what are they thinking*' keep creeping into my mind as a first, unthinking reaction.

What a strange time it is when these types of feelings are erupting about whether one person chooses to go to a party, and another doesn't. This very probably isn't a life-altering decision. . .or at least we hope it isn't.

How do we, people who are relatively intelligent and caring, develop judgments about others who are different from us, and how many undiscovered biases do we carry around within each of us which feel so normal as to be not worthy of notice?

My parents taught by example. Smart and arty themselves, they hung out with others who were smart and arty. As a child, I truly wasn't ever exposed to negativity towards those who didn't have the qualities that my parents valued. . .those people just simply weren't invited into our world. So, how did this affect the adult that I am today? I'd like to think that I am bias-free, but that would be a lie. Although, I've never thought of it as a bias, I do tend to seek out people who are like those that I grew up with.

Beliefs, ideals, life-style, politics, ethnicity, age, and cultural values, are all common targets for bias. . .each offering fodder for divisiveness. Our personal position on any one of

these issues, and without question, there are a million and one different takes to *any* subject out there, feels like truth, so much so that many of us have a high need to be *right* about that position—hence, the need to feel that others then, must be wrong. Now, in the recent society of Covid-19, it appears that we have a new target for prejudice—people’s regard for their own health and for that of others.

Having identified this new content for bias, only makes me more concerned about creating judgments focused upon how others are handling the decisions surrounding it. . .and has shed light on the fact that my choices about what is right for me, will decidedly be different for the other person. This is something I will keep at the forefront as we move into this new social landscape.

## WEEK 11

### DAY 71

#### SUNDAY, MAY 24

Several months ago, in answer to a friend's question about how Gary and I spend our time together, I described our typical evenings in front of the fire. . .our music softly flowing around us. . .providing background. She just stared at me like I was an alien. "What in the world do you find to talk about? You're together all the time. . ."

Interesting question. . .especially now that we really are together *all* of the time. . .and have been for weeks and weeks and weeks. So, what *do* we talk about each and every evening when we meet for our wine and food in front of the fireplace? Everything. The sounds of Bob Seger's music flowing around us lends credence to reminiscences about times far in the past, and offers fodder to plan for the future. We talk about something we read, heard, or saw that day; people we've heard from or that we haven't— family members, friends, and neighbors; ideas, past and current; concerns about what's going on around us; where we'll walk the next day; the weather. . . Sounds somewhat mundane. . .but, it turns out that it's not actually the content of the talk that's important, it's the talking. . .and the benefits therein.

It's never been more apparent to me than it is now, during this pandemic, that human contact is both mentally stimulating, and emotionally stabilizing. . .it's kind of like regular physical exercise works towards whole body wellness; talking with another human, relating—especially a loved one—works towards whole psychological wellness. Our evenings together, even more than ever, have provided the glue that keeps us from mentally and emotionally fraying at the seams. While our calendar is blank, we still have something simple, yet wonderful to look forward to each day.

It is also during this nightly time period that one or another family member calls to check in, tell us what they are making for dinner, or to give us a piece of news. Last night it was Damon. After talking for some minutes, sharing what was going on with him and his Jen, and with us doing

the same, he ended the conversation with, “Give Hayley a call. She has good news.” Though I prodded him by saying that it wasn’t fair to put out a teaser like that, and then just hang up, he said absolutely not. . .it was *her* news and she should have the pleasure of telling us.

Hayley, since graduating from UC Davis with a degree in Animal Sciences, has been working to find what it is she wants to do with all that knowledge. About a year ago, she was employed by the university as a vet tech, and a little later after telling the administrative office that she needed more hours, she signed on as an apprentice farrier. . .but after a year, she was still only part-time. Knowing that it wouldn’t be long until she had aged out of the category which would allow her dad to carry her on his medical insurance, had created anxiety about the need to find a full-time job. . .with benefits. This has been weighing on her because there are few openings for full-time vet techs since the students of veterinary medicine at the university require internships, and have priority when these types of jobs open up. The real dilemma for Hayley has been that she loves working with animals, and that she’s good at it—hence, she hadn’t really wanted to move on to a job she would hate getting up in the morning for. . .

After Damon hung up, we immediately called Hayley. . .telling her that we’d talked to her dad, and he’d said that she had good news! She shared her news. . .she was now a full-time UC Davis employee. The veterinary hospital had reopened. . .and she’d been called on to come in several times to assist with MRI’s and whatever else they needed. I’m sure she made a great impression because by the end of the week she was hired full-time. She said it was because, the students who would ordinarily be helping out had not returned to campus, and most likely wouldn’t be around anytime soon since many UC classes will be offered remotely for the summer and maybe into the fall—a hybrid model rather than the normal on-site classes. I say that while that may be true, Hayley comes with an array of skills, uniquely specialized to this kind of work (she enjoys both the intellectual challenge. . .and the mechanical work. . .she built her own chicken house, and created her computer from the ground up. . .maybe she’ll even be able to fix the MRI machine when it breaks down. . . and further, she appears to be an animal whisperer!). Although it’s sometimes hard to see the silver linings, especially during rough times, this pandemic (along with Hayley’s skill-set), created an opportunity that would have perhaps been a

long time coming without it. As Damon quotes, luck is just being prepared when opportunity comes knocking.

Yippee! We're so excited for our girl. Good job, Hayles!

## DAY 74

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

Because, these days, both Gary and I both have become frighteningly contented within the security of our home, and with the company of each other, we decided that we had to make ourselves go out into the world this morning. We decided to take his rag-top convertible out for a spin—maybe to San Clemente. Then, like any sane person, we'd simply turn around and go home—"There we did it!" we could say with emphasis, as we tucked the car away into its slot in our garage.

Only, when we woke up this morning, it was drearily foggy, damp, and cool outside. Not so good for driving with the top down. So we stalled. Instead we talked ourselves into a morning walk. . . before it gets too hot, I said. After walking for an hour, we returned home with the sun shining and a newfound resolve to make ourselves go out. While Gary ate lunch, I primped a bit . . .okay, a shower would have been better, but I *did* have one yesterday. . .a lick and a promise would have to do today. As I looked through nearsighted eyes at my image reflected in the mirror, I was assured that it was not so bad. . .from a distance. . .and at this point what else is there? This could work for those of us who don't, at this point in our lives, improve with too close a scrutiny.

All this *content while isolated* has given me pause to wonder if we've created a monster . . .agoraphobia? Already a slightly anxious introvert, it's not so far out there in left field for me to develop a fear of the outdoors—anywhere there are crowds. . .and the thought of using someone else's bathroom! But, Gary? Although he has only a smattering of close relationships outside the family, he is extraverted in that he will talk to virtually anybody. . .and can converse on practically any subject. . .he seems to gain energy from others. His willingness to engage with folks, previously unknown to us, is what has created most of our social life throughout our marriage. Will *he* be able to hold out as a shut-in forever? No, I think not. Hopefully, he'll push me out of the nest once he feels it's safe to get back into the swing of things.

I'm happy to report that we actually *did* go out for a drive today. . .and I survived. . .even enjoyed it. I've always loved riding with the top down, but this time it was *really* therapeutic. Never one who has subscribed to the hat thing in a convertible, I have always let the wind tear through my hair whenever out on the road, only hoping that some would be left on my head when we were done with our adventure. Today, I let the wind blow away my cares, imaging that we were off for a romantic weekend and that our world was healthy and hearty. Sometimes, in the moment, we must let go of harsh reality and engage our energy elsewhere, simply as a means to maintaining even a modicum of sanity.

## DAY 76

FRIDAY, MAY 29

Yesterday morning, as Gary was surfing through the early morning TV news, he caught a snippet from Dr. Oz regarding one of the many differences in the way men and women are handling the content of this pandemic.

What Gary heard him say, was that women are much more likely to internalize what they hear—to fret about it. . .while men listen (kind of) before switching to another channel. . .just get on with it, so to speak. I don't know how such a statement could be made in reference to all women in the world, but it certainly did sound true in our case.

In our family, I am the fixer of emotional upset; Gary is the fixer of everything else. When our kids need to know what kind of grass seed, wine, or barbecue is best, where to go on the west coast for a mini-vacation, which restaurants are new and interesting, or how to prune a tree, they call Dad. When they want to just feel better, they call Mom. In my lifetime, it's always been that way. . . even in my family of origin. As the baby in the family, my role was to temper the emotional climate—I was the barometer. . .and the fixer. Then, because I had nothing else in my repertoire, I fell back on humor. . .make a joke, do something funny, act like an idiot. . . anything to relieve the atmosphere of stress! And strangely, it worked. As a teenager, I was the one that all of the friends came to for advice. . .go figure, getting advice from a 15-year-old! As a mom, I wiped the tears, bandaged the knees, hugged away sadness. . .and worried. . .and worried. I still worry about our boys and they're in their 50's! Gary says that if I had nothing to worry about, I'd worry about why there was nothing to worry about!

Now, I worry about the virus. . .and the outcomes of the virus. Gary just does his thing. . . pretty much operating as usual. . .except he's not going out much. . .but still, he doesn't worry about it—he just does it!

So, when Gary told me about what he had heard from Dr. Oz, I wanted to know more and was hopeful that this had been a *tease* designed to get people to watch the afternoon show later in the day. At 3:00 I tuned in to the Dr. Oz show to hear his words of wisdom. . . Instead I heard

about Endometriosis, micro-wave cooking, twins, and who knows what. . .but nothing about how folks are handling the stress of the pandemic.

Despite my best efforts, I was not to hear what Dr. Oz had to say about the malady that apparently, all women out there in the world share. As always, I will just have to rely on my own powers of observation, my intuition, and my intellect to understand what is going on both in the external world of the pandemic, and in the internal world of my own psyche. I figure it is my job to just keep breathing in and out. . .in and out. . .what will be, will be.

## DAY 77

### SATURDAY, MAY 30

About a week ago, I started researching how to create a home-made sourdough starter. I'm not sure what prompted me to create my own natural leavening agent, with fully ten packets of instant, fast rising yeast in my pantry. . .but, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Maybe during our next lock down, I won't have any yeast left; it's always good to be prepared, I thought, in an attempt to rationalize my bizarre behavior.

I found that there are about a billion recipes for sour dough starters out there, but I was looking for something special. . .as in easy. The first piece of news was that I would need a 4-cup mason jar. I quickly bought two large Ball jars from Amazon and waited for their arrival while continuing to search the internet for how-to clues. I finally lit upon a video that sure enough looked easy as pie. I watched the entire 20 minute, day-by-day instructions. As I watched, I began to realize that this would be a real commitment.

My first snag was that the baker gave most of the measures, which she said must be exact, in grams. . .she actually had a food scale. Who knows from grams? I measure the old fashioned way. . .by eye. Back to the internet I went to figure out how to convert grams to cups. It turns out that I would need one-half cup of filtered water and one cup of wheat flour. . .why didn't she just say that?

I started the process, which according to the internet baker, would take a minimum of 7 days of continuous watching and feeding this glob of dough. I mixed it up. . .immediately noticing that my dough looked a bit lumpy and thick, not exactly like the peanut butter consistency described on-line. I threw the first batch away. I started again, but this time adding flour only until I felt I had achieved the right consistency. Then I put the mixture into the Ball jar, covered it lightly, and began to search my kitchen to find the warmest place. . .I had learned that it must be kept at between 70° and 80°; my house typically stays at about 69° at this time of year. Oh, no. . .will it survive in these cool conditions. . .I was suddenly thrown back into life with a toddler

. . .or a recalcitrant teenager. . . worry, worry, worry. I finally decided to put it on top of the microwave oven. . .that ought to be a bit warmer.

I had been directed to check the jar after 24 hours to see if there was any activity. . . but, no difference on that first morning. I was immediately sure that I had done something wrong. Maybe my metric conversions were off; Gary just shook his head and said that people had been doing this for hundreds of years. . .it can't be that difficult! I determined that I would not check on my glob again for another 24-hours. . .

This morning, I went into the kitchen to make coffee, and glanced at my baby. . .Oh, my goodness, wonder of wonders, she had grown. The glob was taller and fluffier! I looked for the skid marks on the sides of the jar that had been described by the internet baker, which would tell me that my glob was hungry. . .there they were.

I took out one-half cup of the starter, and added it to a fresh cup of white flour and the prescribed half-cup of water. Mixing it thoroughly, I then put it into a clean jar (I guess that's why they sell them in twos!). Now all I have to do is keep an eye on it, feed it regularly (once a day for the first three days, and then twice a day for the next four days, or until it doubles in size within a few hours). After I realized that I had begun to refer to my glob as *she*, my attitude began to change! This thing is alive! Let's face it, anything that requires this much care and feeding, that grows and changes . . .deserves something better than glob as a reference. I decided to name her *Venus Fl-our Trap*.

It's a good thing we have nothing pressing on our social calendar, this glob. . .oops, I mean Venus, is capable of sapping all available energy! When all is said and done, the bread I make from this starter better be damn good!

## WEEK 12

### DAY 78

#### SUNDAY, MAY 31

Do you ever feel like you just don't want to hear another word from your spouse? Well, yesterday, all the signs were there that Gary was over listening to me. How do I know this? Because sometimes I don't want to hear another word from him. . .the signs are generally the same—he gets pissed and reactive; I get hurt and reactive. . .never a good thing. This seldom happens. . .and considering that we've been cooped up with each other 24/7 for going on 12 weeks, we're doing well.

At times like these, we've found that it's best to move away from each other. . .find some space and do whatever it is that brings peace to each of us, and/or find a distraction. For peace, Gary goes into his garden, where nothing talks back, and where his plants show their appreciation for his constant attendance by flowering and bearing fruit; for distraction, he watches some sporting event . . .at least he did when there *were* sporting events. . .at this point I think he's resorted to my stored up home improvement and cooking shows! For peace and balance, I go into my hide-out at the top of the stairs to write, read, do crosswords, or binge watch Rom-Coms—nothing with any substance will do (thank God for Netflix and Prime Video) . . .I don't need external stimulus for angst when I'm looking for peace and distraction. I long for the solace of my swims, which typically have provided a natural emotional balance. . .but our community pool remains closed. . .until who knows when. . .and even when it does reopen. . .will I feel safe there?

And so, like others everywhere, I've had to look elsewhere (within the confines of my new perimeters) for activities which provide a similar sense of calm. A new peace-seeking activity for me has been baking bread. . .although I can't say that my venture into the world of sour dough starters has actually been peaceful, in fact, I've become obsessed with this homely, smelly thing. Yesterday, my glob, after being fed the required flour and water mixture for the second time in

12 hours, seemed to be doing fine at first. . .at least until she just flopped. . .and hasn't moved since. I swear that when I decided to feed her a *second* time, all of the signs that she was hungry were there. . .she grew to almost twice her size and then slid back a little. . . leaving skid marks on the sides of the jar. . . the internet baker had assured all of us out here in YouTube land that this was the sign that more feeding was required.

At this point, I'm not sure it's good to call her by name, because I think I just killed her. . . or at the very least contributed to her death. . .*she* actually did the overeating! Naming her has personified her to the point that I actually feel a sense of loss with her demise. Tomorrow, if she doesn't spring back to life with a rancid smell and lots of bubbles, down the drain she goes. If I ever do this again, I will not make the mistake of naming my bacteria. Glob, it is!

In defiance—just to show the glob that I didn't really need her anyway, I used one of my several packs of yeast (ever more precious now, with the knowledge that it's not so easy to create a *natural* leavening agent), to make my simple French bread. The bread was delicious, and went perfectly with the delightful pasta that Gary made for dinner. He proclaimed it to be better than any bread we had ever eaten. . .even in France! I think I did good! That selfish glob didn't even notice!

DAY 79

MONDAY, JUNE 1

Folks around the country have been gathering all weekend in organized protest of the officer involved death of a young black man in Minnesota during an arrest last week. Yesterday, along with the protesters, rioters came to Santa Monica, long a place of refuge for Gary and me. It was sad to see the areas that we had enjoyed over the years, broken into, looted and even set on fire. Familiar streets that we had wandered down in the days of yore, lined with storefronts now boarded over, looked like a hurricane was expected—debris piling up, and people milling around in close proximity to one another, many without masks or anything to protect them from the *other* war that we have been fighting in recent months. It is distressing to imagine the precursors to the level of discontent demonstrated today here and all across our country.

I'm thinking back to other times—better times, spent in the haven that, to us, was Santa Monica. Our high school years at Santa Monica High School, our first apartment on 9<sup>th</sup> Street, and then our second on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the birth of our Greg at St. John's Hospital. . .and after we moved to Orange County, our return visits to Santa Monica for romantic weekends over the years.

Gary and I have often returned to the *known* as an escape from the rigors of daily life. Malibu, where we both grew up, offered such a weekend respite. There, we would stay at the Casa Malibu, a 1940's beachfront motel which resembled a set right out of a Humphrey Bogart movie during the era of film noir. There was nothing fancy about this place, but the waves crashing right under our windows at high tide, and long walks along the beach at low tide made up for anything lacking in the ambiance of the interior décor. There were plenty of restaurants close enough for us to walk to. . .and lots of familiar places to visit that sparked many happy memories. When Malibu began to change, from the sleepy beach town of the 1950s, '60s, and even the '70s, into the playground of the rich and famous, we stopped going. . .it was no longer *our* place.

Santa Monica held the same kind of magic for us. We would stay at the wonderfully vintage, Georgian Hotel on Ocean Avenue, right across the street from the pier. Gary has happy memories of fishing off that pier as a boy, and even as adults, we rammed into each other in the bumper cars there, played pinball and air hockey in the arcade, and rode the 1920's merry-go-round. The Westside has always had food that was superior to Orange County restaurants—when we wanted *really* good food, we would go to Santa Monica.

The last time we stopped in Santa Monica—I think it was on our way home from Carmel last October—we were faced with a different town. . .one full of motorized scooters, gangs of kids roaming the streets, and homeless people. Again, we were faced with the knowledge that it was no longer *our* place.

But the reality is that Santa Monica *is somebody's* place. . .and now it has been ransacked by an angry mob, presumably organized by opportunists just waiting for a time when the local police would be busy elsewhere, as they were with the relatively peaceful demonstration on this day, to create havoc and to break into and loot empty stores. After months of closures, and financial crisis, the merchants in this town, which has become a big city, will have to deal with a loss of the goods that had lain fallow, reserved for the day when the shops could reopen. . .now, sadly there will be little to sell. We have come to a very sad state within our country today.

For me and Gary. . .we must rely on our memories of those places in better times. . .and look for new areas to visit which will become *our* places for the future.

## DAY 81

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

People everywhere are feeling stressed out over the unrest in major cities across our country—and unsafe. I had thought that we would have protests only over the weekend. . .which in times when, typically, people have to go to work or back to school on weekdays may have been case. . .if these were *typical* times. But folks have been cooped up for months, with not much to do but social media; many have been sent home from school, lost jobs and financial security, and are living in less than ideal conditions. Talk about a perfect storm!

Still, one wonders when this unrest will begin to wane. Even folks who are committed to a cause, lose steam after a while. . .they make their statement and then go home. Although, police officers have made some arrests, cities have leveed curfews and posted limited parking, I assume as deterrents, the people continue to gather. . .day after day. Cars left too long in metered areas have been impounded, and bicycles stolen. It has become decidedly inconvenient, to say the least, even to take part in a peaceful demonstration. Being human, we lose interest after a time, even when things aren't inconvenient. . .and, the people continue to gather.

In the meanwhile, those of us who were just beginning to feel comfortable leaving our homes after almost 3 months inside, will need to figure out how to handle the personal anxiety born of a prevalence of this kind of discontent.

Gary and I handle the internal stress in different ways, but we agree that it's not a good thing for us to immerse ourselves in the external stimulus of the prevalent news of the day. A couple of nights ago, when I exited my recorded programs, which are generally speaking the only TV shows I watch—my way of controlling the content, the news came on before I could shut off the TV. Big mistake! In just those few minutes, I saw way too much. . .angry folks amidst the peaceful protesters, looting, talking of disabling the police forces, and making lewd gestures as their personal statement to the public.

By the time I had made my way down the stairs to our bedroom, I had a roiling in my stomach, and just a general feeling of anxiety. That night I lay awake wondering where all of this

would lead. . .wondering about the spike I had seen in the Orange County graphs depicting new cases of Covid-19 that day, and wondering how these large groups of people gathering together, many without masks or protective gear of any kind, would affect the overall spread of the disease. In their anger, and commitment to change, they seem to have forgotten that they are opening themselves up to a different kind of danger. . .one which may be potentially damaging to them and to those they love. It's like that old shampoo commercial, where one person tells another person, and that person tells someone, and that person tells someone. . .and on and on—spreading the good news. . . unfortunately, although the analogy works regarding the spread of something. . . when it is a virulent germ we are passing on. . .even one person at a time, the results invariably add up to *bad* news.

## DAY 82

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

This morning, my newly acquired instantaneous response to anyone walking towards me on a sidewalk (holding my breath until *they* have passed, or until *I* turn blue, whichever comes first), was alive and well, as we walked south on Coast Highway. Reflecting on this as we continued our walk, brought to mind other bizarre and unwanted behaviors that have emerged in me, and I would suspect in many of us, since this pandemic and the subsequent lock down began.

The shutting down of America, an unprecedented act by the government to protect us from rampant germs carried by others in our immediate surroundings, was ample cause for concern that there was danger of contracting this thing called COVID-19, which we knew virtually nothing about. . .except there was no known way to protect ourselves against it (except to stay away from other people), or to *treat* it, if we were to fall prey. With this reality firmly in place, along with the prospect of isolation for literally months with no respite in view, the ever changing theories flitting about out there in media land added emphasis to the situation, and I used my very active brain, which was currently without the fodder of my usual daily routines and social connections, to extrapolate and extend. There seemed nothing else to think about. . .and, so, with every new detail about the spread of this disease, with the statistics about the numbers of cases, and deaths (without any *real* information about extenuating circumstances). . .I created the context for fear to creep into my life.

The existence of fear in our everydayness does weird things to the psyche. It makes us lay awake at night, stirs up anxiety, sadness and even anger, which typically I don't feel all that often in my *normal* life. Fear allows for thoughts and feelings, worries really, way outside of the box of our existence as it used to be (say, in February). Psychosomatic behaviors creep into our being, and we become overly occupied with suspicions (primarily of other humans), patterns emerge replicating obsessive-compulsive behaviors which we didn't know we had, paranoia focuses on going into places or hanging with any group of more than a few (people well-known

to us, of course), and for some, even thoughts of conspiracy sneak in. It doesn't take a genius to know that nothing good can come of a growing internal environment based on fear.

We've heard that the Corona virus and COVID-19 won't be going anywhere anytime soon. As a result, what we've come up with for today, a view that we are finding morphs over time, making it subject to change, is that until there is an effective vaccine available to us, we will, in the months to come, be faced with social compromises—small outdoor gatherings where we've considered the risk, and made a decision based on our best interest, and on that of the others in the group. . .sometimes we'll go. . .sometimes not.

Still on my walk, with these thoughts swirling around in my overly-imaginative brain and traffic noises abounding, a runner suddenly comes up close on my back, panting "Hello," as she passes. . .way too close, in my opinion! Even after all the considerations and good intentions to curb unwanted negative thoughts and feelings, the first thing that goes through my mind is, I hope she didn't spray me with COVID-19 droplets! Then I begin to feel the germs slithering towards my nose and mouth. . .I guess I still have a lot of work to do!

## WEEK 13

### DAY 86

#### MONDAY, JUNE 8

Last Friday, there were apparently more new cases of Covid-19 in Orange County since the start of the pandemic. . .not a good sign! But expected, to some degree. This is the two-week point since OC cities reopened some businesses over the Memorial Day weekend—the numbers have been fluctuating for about a week. It's difficult to understand just what those numbers mean, since they are so up and down—no obvious trend. . .but Friday definitely got my attention. We can, no doubt, expect a continued trend, as cases erupt over the next weeks as a result of the protest and other gatherings.

We had a long talk with Greg and Molly last night. . .about the state of this pandemic, and the waning probability of our family gathering in Mammoth in August. At this moment, both Gary and I feel concern about the 6-hour drive, which, at our age, necessitates our using pretty grimy bathrooms along the way, and shopping in a grocery store that has the highest volume of output of any Pavilions store in California—which means that it is constantly inundated with swarms of people coming together from God knows where, with as many different perspectives regarding safety as there are people.

And then there is the communal living—never a problem with family members before now. Typically, we all gather around a 2 ½ ' X 6 ' table for meals and nightly games in the largest of the two side-by-side cabins. . .no real way for social distancing there. Of course, we could gather around the outside table on the deck where the open air has been reported to limit the spread of germs, but in this mountainous area, at nearly 9,300 feet of elevation, the plunging air temperatures in the evening hours would, no doubt, prohibit that choice. In the world of today, with even those we love, each coming from different types of exposure, one never knows what might happen. The worse possible outcome would, of course, be that one of us might be carrying the virus, and subsequently all of us would be infected. Not one of us would be able to handle

that scenario. . .the thought of this danger to those we love makes the choice of whether to go to Mammoth, more a non-choice!

Up until now, the possibility of gathering with family for our traditional summer vacation has provided a bright spot. . .something to look forward to—a beacon which has helped in dealing with other deficits in our daily life. Now. . .I'm not so sure if it's a beacon. . .or a warning light. . . Beware. For months we've been making the necessary sacrifices to keep ourselves and others safe. . .we don't want to make an unwise decision now, when the others involved are so loved by us. Time will tell—we'll make a decision by July 1<sup>st</sup>. . . which, with the continuing new eruptions of Covid-19 still in our midst, seems ever closer.

## DAY 89

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

Yesterday was Hayley's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. It seems like just yesterday that we were awaiting the births of our two beloved grandchildren, and seemingly within the Nanosecond of the passage of time, the two of them are suddenly adults! We had what has become a new celebratory tradition necessary to the times—a Zoom party, and talked of things that families talk about while sitting around a table. If not an in-person gathering, we're thankful that we've been able to have these whole family gatherings more often than is our norm.

Since our grandchildren have grown up and moved out of town to pursue education at UC Davis, and then stayed on in the central California valley for jobs, we gather as a whole group only for Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Even vacation, which had in earlier years been a *given*, has become difficult for the grandchildren to join into. . . vacation time is sparse to those newly hired . . . and when one is supporting oneself for the first time, regular income is a high priority.

We've made up for that loss in various ways. Last year, because the grandkids couldn't make it up to Mammoth in August, we took everybody to the Mission Ranch in Carmel, which has long been a favorite getaway destination for Gary and me, in late October. For some reason this timeframe worked better than August for the kids. . . I think, for Gareth, it was because the Legislature was not in session between October and January, and for Hayley, fortunately, her Vet was on vacation. . . anyway, it just worked for all of us. Each couple drove up separately, stopping along the way to visit favorite places, and we met Gareth and Hayley there, both of whom had driven over from the Sacramento/Davis area. Upon seeing this beautiful and serene haven for the first time, Hayley proclaimed the view to be "just like Ireland." Gary had reserved 5 rooms, one for each couple—each of which was perched high above the Carmel River Beach meadow, which daily was filled with woolly sheep, and with a view of the scape of Point Lobos reaching far out to the sea, plus two side-by-side rooms for the cousins.

During the days, we did our own thing, but we gathered for breakfast at the Ranch, and dinner at a favorite restaurant. Each evening started at 5:00 at the hammered copper 1940s

piano bar at the Ranch. What a wonderful time we all had. . .I'm sure they'd love to do that again . . .but with things so iffy out there in the world, who knows what will be possible.

It may be a long, cold winter. . .without the respite of whole family gatherings. . . perhaps we can fly the kids down for weekends now and then for sushi, or a lobster fest, or just for the company. For me, I think that this loss would be diminished if we could gather the old folks (Greg, Molly, Damon, Jen, and me and Gary) once a month in one of our backyards. . .just to visit. I love my family. . .and am missing them.

## DAY 90

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

Well, we did it! Today we made the dreaded trip to Costco. Mind you, we have not been into any public establishment (except one trip to our small Laguna Beach Gelson's during senior hours) since this all began. . .but, we *have* heard the stories! One doesn't need to stretch hard to be able to imagine the images swirling through my head as we neared this site of notorious lines and shortages. Just to be clear, I'll elaborate. . .in the 15 minutes between home and the Capo-Beach Costco, my imagination had conjured up an army of unmasked people crowded tightly into an enclosed space (which in my mind had shrunk considerably), all lunging at me as they foraged for paper goods, and limited meat products.

I had checked online the week before to see if Costco offered any specific shopping hours reserved for the old and weak (or maybe, simply the faint of heart). Indeed, I found that the hour between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m., Monday through Friday, was set aside just for us. . .well, and maybe the million or so other folks in the area fitting the description.

Be that as it may, when we drove into the parking lot. . .there were actually available parking spaces much closer to the entry than we had ever seen. . .it was nice to know that we wouldn't have to walk from the San Clemente side of the humongous parking lot even before walking the miles *inside* the store! That was heartening.

We entered the store to find that there were few people shopping at this hour. . .or maybe it just looked that way in the space that had grown much larger than it had been (minutes before) in my mind's eye. . .and, wonder of wonders. . .every single person wore a mask! Older folks are so cool! Although not so many of these cool people wore disposable gloves, as we did, that didn't bother me. . . anything they touched would only be touched by the plastic covering my hands. . . disposable gloves that would be placed into the brown paper trash bag just inside the hatchback of my car (of course, that would happen only after the groceries were loaded in and locked down tight, and before we entered the sanctity of our car's pristine interior).

Not only had my mind fabricated masses of people inside the store, but also a general lack of goods. In fact, we found no limits, no empty shelves, no substitutions. We found everything that we had on our list. . .and more (per usual on a trip to Costco). We even found toilet paper (which we had never bought before at Costco. . .after all, which two people need 36 packages of toilet paper at any one time; if they do. . .I don't want to know!). Anyway, we bought one. . .never mind the 27 rolls we still have stored in our garage!

Next week, I think I'll go to CVS. I wonder if *they* have senior hours.

## DAY 91

### SATURDAY, JUNE 13

Today we went to Damon and Jen's for lunch. It sounds so normal. . .but within this new normal. . .not so much. It took everything I had to just relax and go for it!

Damon had asked if I would bring potato salad. This recipe had come all the way from the mid-west with my mother's family when they migrated to California in the mid-1930s—a simple, yet delicious version of this generally well-loved picnic food, which is creamy and savory, without being vinegary. We all love it.

Yesterday, at Costco, in preparation for its creation, I had searched for white potatoes, a thinner skinned potato which has much less starch and is firmer when boiled than the common Russet potato. . . making it perfect for salad. No luck, they had only Russets. To continue the search, we stopped at Gelson's on the way home and I ran in. . .to find Russets, yams, and sweet potatoes. I already had Russets. . .so this time I used Russets in my potato salad. . .a pandemic version!

With the salad in hand, and a bottle of wine to offer as a gift, we set off to drive north on the Coast Highway towards Seal Beach, usually about a 45-to-50-minute drive. Oh my goodness, how *could* we have forgotten about. . .*traffic*! Where in the hell are all of these people going? We went down the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street hill and through the upper streets of North Laguna to insure a speedy get-a-way, and it still took 15 minutes just to get out of our town. . .people, people, everywhere! From there we inched along through the small town of Corona del Mar and into Newport where the traffic thinned out a bit. . .until we hit the Mariners Mile. . .and then into Huntington Beach which was a veritable zoo! We saw one family biking along the highway. . .with no helmets! In fact, there were lots of folks biking out in the traffic. . .looking like they were having a fine time. . .with no helmets. Hmmm. . .not sure what they're thinking. Anyway, we finally arrived. . .15 minutes late. . .which for Gary, is a cardinal sin.

Seeing family is like food for the soul. I've talked to them all at least once a week, but seeing them is definitely different. We sat in their lovely backyard, which has just been redone

with a seating area around a fire pit, a large outdoor kitchen with poured concrete countertops, barbecues and smokers galore, and a raised vegetable garden off to the side, against the fence. They've made their own haven which, even during these times, has become a safe outdoor space for small groups of their friends to gather. After each small group gathering, Jen gets out her antiseptic wipes and rubs every surface down, just for good measure. . .and then invites the next group in. I can't imagine what will happen to this party space when it's actually *safe* to gather in groups. I'm sure the neighbors will love it!

Despite worse traffic than we had seen that morning (if that's even possible), we drove home during the afternoon of this glorious day with the convertible top of the car down, happily thinking of the value of family . . .

## WEEK 14

### DAY 92

#### SUNDAY, JUNE 14

Today marks the first day of the 14<sup>th</sup> week since this all began—the declaration of a world pandemic, and the beginning of our isolation. Although the pandemic is still in full swing, and life around us is returning to a semi-normal pace, our experience of structured isolation, the ever present fear of going outside of our home, feels all but over. . .at least for now. Still, we are living in an altered state, suspended in time. . .waiting for a sign. . .an indication that this danger is truly over. So far there are only the slightest hints that the virus is abating: businesses reopening, people swarming the beaches, restaurants, and shops of our small coastal village, but no green light to continue our lives as they were. In fact, just when it looks like the number of new cases in Orange County are abating, there is a sudden spike in the numbers, and our hopes are dashed. It has indeed been an up and downhill ride. Back to normal? . . .that may never happen. . .perhaps the days of wine and roses have simply passed us by.

There is always the possibility that even after the pandemic is over, we will, as an aftermath of the experience, continue to shy away from close face-to-face conversation, do most of our entertaining outdoors (in that case, there will be some long, lonely winters. . .or we'll start wearing our woolies so we can see friends!), hang back from large group gatherings, or at the very least, with our awareness so heightened to the passing of germs, feel ever so slightly uncomfortable in close social situations.

And then again. . .an even worse prospect is that we will return to the dense bubble of our lives without notice of what is happening around us. . .become once again so immersed in our own everydayness that we don't even notice our own wasteful and thoughtless behaviors.

Last night there was an inkling that some things learned will not so easily be erased from my daily pattern and perspective.

During the earliest days of the pandemic, when we were afraid to go into a grocery store, fresh fruits, bread, paper goods, and milk, were in shorter supply than usual. It was at that time that I began to realize how very wasteful we had become. That's when I started baking bread, freezing leftovers, and using cloth dish towels and napkins. Last night when I noticed two mostly dark-skinned over-ripe bananas, I just couldn't throw them away (which formerly would not have even been an issue). Instead, I checked my pantry to see if I had the ingredients for banana bread on hand. I did! At 8:30 at night, Gary and I were enjoying warm from the oven banana bread, oozing with butter. Definitely not the best choice for our body weight and overall health. . .but I felt good about using those bananas. What a difference just a tiny little tweak in one's perspective makes. Tweak. . .and we see a whole new picture!

## DAY 94

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Last Friday night, after our asphalt party was over and done, I received a call from Jolee telling me that the community pool would reopen the next week—she had received an email from the city. When I looked at *my* emails, I saw that I had also received email notification with a link to their website where we were told, we could make an appointment for a lane. Whoa, this was definitely going to be different.

I went into the website, and after several false starts was able to secure three slots (9:00—9:45, T, Th, S) for the next week. Oh joy. . .back to the pool! Typically, when I go to the pool, my workout takes between an hour to an hour and a half. . .this slot was for only 45 minutes. . .but I would at least be getting my Zen back. Water is so stabilizing for me. . .a truly centering experience.

Today was the day. I arrived 15 minutes early to find. . .a line. The stairs were taped off so that people could enter only via the ramp alongside the building, and there were newly installed placement stickers to allow for social distancing. Everybody in line was wearing a face mask. . .oh, oh. . .did I miss something? I quickly rushed back to my car to retrieve my emergency mask from the glove compartment, put it on, and got back in line. At just before nine, the locked door was opened and folks were let in. . .a few at a time to stand on, yet again, a newly installed placement sticker, to wait for the attendant to question each about his/her health, take a temperature and sign each in. . .and off we went to find a lane. As I glanced to the left and right of the entry, I noticed that the bathroom doors were locked. . .hopefully no emergencies!

The water was wonderful. . .and the workout relatively short (but, to be honest, after 3 or more months without swimming, it was plenty of time for a back-to-workout person my age). Many of the people there, I had been seeing and acknowledging for years, although I couldn't tell you the names of most of them, so that part of the experience felt similar to old times. Another familiarity, was the fact that, as always when I swim, my mind filled with thoughts, ideas, and solutions. . .obviously swimming provides another processing experience for me. . .and the time

passed quickly. Suddenly, I looked up, and people were leaving the pool. . .it was 9:45! As we left by the emergency gate (so as not to meet up face-to-face with those people waiting for their 10:00—10:45 slot, with feet glued to their placement sticker outside the front door), the staff was wiping down the folding chair that had been placed at the top of each lane, a place for the personal items of the user, along with the ladder railings, in preparation for the next group.

It's a new world, indeed! All this process. . .but, I must say, I did appreciate the efforts of the staff. . .I'd had my doubts about how things would change. . .*could* change, in accordance with the new safety guidelines. . .but they did it! I did, indeed, feel safe.

DAY 96

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

This morning I took off for my second swim this week. . .In some ways things seem to be lining up to return to normalcy. . .until you look around you to see masked faces, social distancing strategies in place, and more rules and regulations than I've seen in my life.

Geoff and Julie have taken off on a six-week trek in their very beautiful motor home. They will be crossing through the central United States to arrive in Kentucky for an event where their new show horse will be competing with their daughter, Jayme, who will have traveled from Connecticut, as the rider. That all sounds pretty normal. . .although I can't believe that in a week or so, large masses of people will be gathering for a horse show; on the other hand, it is the South . . .which opened early and has stayed open.

Lending no credence to the possibility of the return of typical life are the COVID-19 numbers which pour in daily and hit like a smack in the face, showering us with the true reality of the situation. . .I have no way of knowing what is happening in the rest of the country, but here in Orange County, the scales indicate that new daily cases have remained for the entire week above 200. Normalcy is apparently not coming anytime soon.

To highlight the severity of the situation further, tonight lagunabeach.gov sent out the newest state mandate: for everybody in California, cloth facial masks are now *required* (rather than just for suggested use) . . .no ifs, ands, or buts. Everyone *must* wear a mask. . .while still maintaining social distance.

I sent this out to my group of girlfriends, just in case they missed it. Anne replied with an article about 4 OC restaurants, which had closed due to the discovery of COVID-19 amongst some of their staff. The one that most caught my attention, was Javier's, a posh Mexican restaurant in the nearby Crystal Cove shopping center, in south Newport Beach. It was of note to me because, Javier's is Mary Lou's go-to family favorite. . .they are there often. . .she had recently told me that she and one of her sons, along with his wife, had been there for lunch. She said she felt safe because they ate in the patio. Hopefully the breeze blew the virus in a different direction.

And therein lies the problem. . .within any group, there are people who have a probability of picking up the virus somewhere, unbeknownst to them, and then passing it on, before they are aware they have it, to as many people as have gathered around to eat, drink, and be merry. This is the first time I have heard of restaurant closures due to the virus. . .but it is the reason I don't feel comfortable with even take-out food. For me, this problem has been amplified. . .what I feared *might* happen. . .has. This one has landed too close to home for it to go unnoticed. I will continue to stay away from groups, and to keep my guard up when doing essential errands. I fear that Mammoth will not be safe for any of us. . .I think we just need to throw in the towel.

## DAY 97

FRIDAY, JUNE 19

The news of restaurant closures, along with the rising number of Covid-19 cases continuing to crop up across the state, and of special concern to us, in Orange County, has sealed the case against our family gathering in Mammoth. . .at least for me. The question is, if I don't think it's safe enough for Gary and me up there, why would I invite those I love into such an environment—one where it would be impossible to maintain any semblance of social distancing.

Our inner battle of *to go or not to go* became concrete when early in the day, during an unrelated telephone conversation with Gary, Damon told him that he should probably just cancel Mammoth this year. . .that, in a sense, it would relieve some of the stress of not knowing

Then a bit later, while talking to Molly and Greg, we heard that several weeks ago, one of Molly's parent's care-givers was diagnosed with C-19. Upon hearing this, Molly has been taking care shifts herself, rather than having a new person, one who is unknown to her, come into her parent's environment. . .who are 89 and 91 years old, and not all that well. This went on for a month and left her feeling exhausted. At this point, she is feeling that she has already dodged a bullet—nobody else in the household got sick—and doesn't want to take any unnecessary chances. For her, this was way too close a call. Greg agrees. Although, he of all of us, could get ramped up about going to Mammoth, he won't go without Molly. . .too much chance of bringing something home to her.

Next, I had to let the grandkids know. I texted them a message letting them know the situation. . .and that much as we hated to, we had decided to cancel our much loved August gathering. Both of them got right back to me. Hayley said that although she was sorry we wouldn't be seeing each other, she had been terrified that because she is in and out of the Veterinary hospital on a daily basis, she could inadvertently pass something on to us. Gareth said that he understood completely. . .that it was the right thing to do.

There was one other small, but worrisome element to our Mammoth trip that has been nagging at me. Each year, Jolee and Rob and their kids rent a cabin not far from ours, within the

same timeframe. It has been a tradition for them to come to our small cabin for the evening at some point during the week. Jolee has been so wonderful to us during this time of stress. . .I just don't know how I would tell her that none of them could come into our space. It seems more than inhospitable.

So that about does it. . .we're throwing in the towel. No Mammoth this year. We will ask the people at Wood's Lodge to retain our deposit for the same cabins during the same weeks, next year. . .and hope that by then, this will all be behind us.

## WEEK 15

### DAY 100

MONDAY, JUNE 22

So, now we're into triple digits. . .and I was surprised when the days of isolation moved towards doubles. 100 days and nights. . .no wonder folks are getting tired of this. But just yesterday the new cases of COVID-19 in Orange County reached its highest number ever in one day—434. The bottom line is that we *can* be tired of the limitations within this pandemic, but we must continue to be cautious. . .to keep our guard up.

Again, we declined a small group party last night. To be honest, I didn't even miss it. Today was a day of feeling a bit off balance, light-headed, and stuffy. . .even having been housebound for the past 100 days, immediately I started to conjure up where I might have come in contact with the *germ*. . .think about how far my imagination could have gone with this if I *had* gone to that party! It's amazing what the mind can come up with even without any concrete evidence!

Today was Father's Day. Since our boys have become fathers themselves, we typically haven't gathered for a group celebration on this day. . .Gary, as the patriarch of the family, doesn't like to be fawned over anyway, so a call has always sufficed. But today, as has become our go-to celebratory device, we had a Zoom call. Greg, as always, set it up and emailed us the link to enter. It was wonderful once again to see the bright, shiny faces of these beloved people there in front of me. . .but still a bit strange. . .at least, for me. When I'm in the room with people, I can feel them. . .it's not always a group conversation, but a series of small, intimate talks, touches and emanating warmth. Although I'm so happy that we have the comfort of viewing each other—at least I can see that they are all alive and well—it is also a bit awkward. Conversation goes in fits and starts even with people so well-known to us. . .a screen talk lacks the spontaneity of an in-person conversation; I worry about the youth of today who think that

what they are experiencing on-line is real. The nuances of the reciprocity of conversation are somehow lost in cyberspace.

If this is the case for me when talking with just a few loved ones, imagine the strangeness of a Zoom *meeting*. . .with 20 or more participants. To avoid the melee of everybody trying to get their two cents worth in at the same time, rules truly have to be set up: *everybody put yourself on mute until you have been recognized*. . .otherwise the same old people monopolize screen time. . .all the time, every time. With this thought in mind, I think we'll skip our social club's Commodore's meeting next Thursday (via Zoom), and opt for reading about it later.

Instead, we'll stick to our Thursdays in the drive-way with my friend, Anne!

## DAY 101

TUESDAY, JUNE 23

We are living vicariously through the reports from Julie, as she and Geoff travel across the country to reach their destination of Lexington, Kentucky for the horse show. Yesterday, in Kansas, they had to outrun a tornado (we, knowing what we know about Kansas, were only hoping that they wouldn't be treated to a meeting with the "Wonderful Wizard" . . .or even Toto!). Julie drove the 46-foot motor home for 9 hours, finally arriving at a spot not too far from Lexington, where they planned to spend the night. Wow, what a wild and woolly time they are having out there in the wide world. I'm sure they'll enjoy their cocktails tonight!

Today, we also got the news that Roux. . .the Cajun restaurant nearest in location to our home, had a line cook diagnosed with COVID-19. Of course, they had to shut their doors. This is just one sad story amongst the myriad of others in the restaurant world of today. Roux began about two or three years ago in a space vacated by a popular fish restaurant. Because neither Gary nor I are partial to the New Orleans taste for spice, we had only dined there once before the temperamental chef quit, and they closed their doors. Sometime later they reopened with a new chef, and seemed to be doing fine. . .until the Corona virus made its entry into the lives of all of us. They along with all the other restaurants in California closed their doors once again (except for take-out service), this time to wait out the "Stay-at-Home" order. A few weeks ago, they reopened, hopeful of recouping to partial degree, their losses. . .only to once again be shut down. Who knows whether they will be able to withstand the current storm. . .or whether they will simply succumb to the need to permanently close their doors.

So many, everywhere in the world, have been seriously damaged by this pandemic. It is strange when hearing from others far afield that they are experiencing much of what we are here. A friend living in Switzerland, with a house here as well, said she didn't know when they would be traveling once again to California, or free to see their grandchildren in London.

Although knowing that others are suffering isn't good news, it does shed light on the fact that COVID-19 doesn't discriminate. Across the country, the numbers have resurged. This virus

doesn't care whether we are rich or poor, black, brown or white-skinned, English, Swiss, Chinese, or American. . .it sees us all as fodder. . .flesh to feed on. It turns out that the Corona Virus is the great equalizer. . .not so much the thing we've been looking for, though. . .this thing is creepy, fearsome, and deadly. Hopefully, we will find a way to keep the positive outcomes of this experience, file away the lessons learned into our memory banks, and then quickly discard the fear and stress gathered along the way.

## DAY 104

FRIDAY, JUNE 26

Every time I begin to think I'm crazy paranoid about this thing—this ravenous virus—the numbers surge. Today, there were 7,149 new cases of COVID-19 reported in the state of California! Yes, this alarming rise in numbers appears to indicate that the pandemic is growing rather than ebbing. On the other hand, what do the numbers really mean?

On the day of this 24-hour increase, there were 96,000 tests issued. . .considerably more tests than on any single day before this time. But, according to the Governor, it is the percentage of this huge number which came back positive for the virus that is of interest, along with the hospitalizations of those stricken and those requiring ICU—all of which numbers are up. So this virus continues to spread at a rapid rate.

I'm very much afraid that for some it is just easier to go on with their lives, skewing the news reports to fit, so that their own need for company and the comforts of life as it *was*, can be justified. They will continue to gather with friends, and family until one of them gets to feel the unwelcome presence of fever, chills and achiness. . .and suddenly realizes that he/she can't taste or smell. . .maybe then, it will feel real.

The other day when we were out walking in Heisler Park, we saw whole families out for a day in the park or at the beach. . .no masks, no social distancing from others around them. In fact, there were few people, other than Gary and me, *with* a mask. Of course, there were some valiant folks, but the vast majority either had the mask hanging off their hand, sticking out of a pocket. . .or nowhere to be seen.

Is it uncomfortable to walk with a mask on? Absolutely! The hot air builds up until sweat breaks out, and sunglasses fog over. We end up thinking *what I wouldn't give to feel the cool air in my nostrils. . .just give me one clear breath!* But. . .then there is the alternative. What kind of society have we become that we can't stand a little discomfort in order to save lives?

Hopefully, people will begin to take this world pandemic seriously before they or someone they love is on his or her deathbed!

## DAY 105

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

Well, it's official: After 50 years coloring my hair, I'm going au naturel! . . .at least for now. For several years, I've been considering letting my hair grow out to its natural color. . .which you understand, I have never seen. . .or, at least not anytime lately. My hairdresser assured me that I wouldn't like the grey. . .and so, taking her word for it (she *is*, after all, the professional!), I continued to buy into the maintenance of my blond-streaked mane. But, then, as I aged, the blond-streaked mane aged also. . .I began to lose more hair than was typical for me. . .and some of those strands left behind began breaking off. I tried everything I could think of to stop the breakage including buying and using a genuine silk pillow case, changing hair products multiple times, and taking oral supplements, but truly nothing seemed to help. . .until. . .I was forced to stop hair-color treatments! Since I was due for a hair coloring just one week into our isolation (which I cancelled), I am now five months into the growing out process (almost half a year!). . .and guess what. . .my hair is shiny, and strong, and thick. I know, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the continued use of chemicals over years and years and years, couldn't be healthy for any part of one's body. . .but it was still a surprise for me to see the renewed healthy gloss. The other surprise was that I don't actually *hate* my natural hair color. When I look in the mirror, I still recognize me as me! It turns out that I skipped grey and went directly to white overlaying my natural golden brown. . . not bad, even if I do say so myself.

So, a couple of weeks ago, when our hairdresser texted to check in and also to let us know that she was finally open for business, we congratulated her on reopening, while saying that we would be in when we felt more comfortable with indoor spaces and close quarters, despite Gary's silver curls flipping up over his collar, and my long, colorless hair. I didn't actually tell her that I very probably would not be returning to processed hair. We'll see.

Similarly, when my manicurist texted me to let me know that her shop had reopened, I felt reluctant to begin the nail thing again. For sure, my nails don't look ready for a close up, but they do look natural and they are mine. I got back to her to let her know how happy I was that

she was back at work, and as much as I wanted to support her, that I would be taking a break from my product covered nails.

Yes, things are changing. . .and, at a fairly rapid rate. . .but one thing that hasn't changed is that today is the birthday of three people in my life who have been very much beloved by me: Martha, my oldest sibling, who died of a brain tumor almost two years ago; Molly, our darling daughter-in-law, Greg's wife of over 30 years, and Gareth's mom; and our dear neighbor, Jolee. It is remarkable that three such lovely women would all be born on the same day, albeit in different years. There must be something magically significant in this date. Today, I will watch for signs of magic.

# **PART III**

## **A MODIFICATION MODE**

**An Attempt at Mitigating the Numbers. . .**

**Selections from a Daily Log**

## WEEK 16

### DAY 106

#### SUNDAY, JUNE 28

We are truly living in a unique and remarkable time. . . a time, the likes of which, none of us in conscious memory has had the opportunity to experience during our lifetime. In such a time there are bound to be ups and downs, happiness and sadness, positives and negatives. . . and a new and unwelcome ambient uncertainty—fear even. And then there is the sameness of days filled with less. . . and less. The only certainty in all this, as I see it, is that we will experience change, and within that context, we will be met with the opportunity to learn—to adapt, and to grow. Some of the things we learn, and the behaviors we must adapt to, we will want to hang onto, and others we will want to shed, much as a reptile sheds an old skin. . . a shield against nature that is no longer of any discernable use. Somewhere in this complicated mass of emotion, we must search out our own *small happinesses*. . . I often find mine in the routines of my daily existence.

Late last week I received an email from the Recreation Department in Laguna, saying that the new appointment calendar would be available at 7:00 a.m. on Friday (so much more convenient for me than midnight!). Previously, I not only had difficulty navigating the website, but also found that by the time I finally connected with the calendar, only a few open slots were left on the weekly schedule. Although, I eventually found 3 open slots—the allocated number per person—they were on odd days (clumped up), and later times, which had the potential to make the day seem fragmented. Not that good an experience, to say the least.

This week, I popped out of bed at 6:50 on Friday, made my coffee and rushed upstairs to my computer to log on to the Rec site. Wonder of wonders. . . there were only a few people signed up for *any* day. I got my three days, evenly spaced throughout the week, and fairly early on each morning. Small happinesses. . . translation: Yippee! As I swam this morning, I reflected

on how thankful I was to have this one small thing handled. . .the week to come was all set up—it felt kind of like a tiny bit of control in a sea of question marks.

Even the *thought* of swimming calms me and gives me a focus. Oh, I'm not saying that there aren't times when it is cold out. . .or at least cool, that I haven't considered whether I really want to experience that first shock of water that feels cooler than the air, but, when it's over, I'm truly never sorry that I went.

As a kid, I was an ocean swimmer, but as I aged I found that I didn't like the cold, rough water and the sandy residue, which, I might add, had never before been a problem. So, just like that, I stopped swimming. For years I worked out at a gym, which I did while hating every moment simply because I could squeeze it into my day in between family, working full-time, and commuting. But eventually, recurring work-out related back injuries put me on the sidelines. As a remedy, I started an Aquafit class, directed water aerobics, at our local community pool. I immediately fell back into love with the water. The class was fun, but eventually I found that what I really loved was the autonomy of lap swimming. And that's where I've stayed for the last 5 years, both swimming laps and doing some water aerobic exercises (using the water resistance against webbed hand-mitts and Styrofoam weights). For me, this system works both for physical toning and internal balance. As soon as I hit the water, the world goes away, and I am submerged into my own being. The repetitive movement stimulates right brain activity—creative thoughts swirl around and around making problems seem miniscule and solutions simple. When I get out, I often go home to sit immediately at my computer. . .to write. . .before the creative juices are obliterated by rigors of daily life. What a gift!

## DAY 107

MONDAY, JUNE 29

Several weeks ago, when I noticed that some of my herbs had grown to maturity and would soon begin to flower, I harvested them and hung the bundles in the garage. Other years, I would have let the herbs bloom and allowed myself to enjoy the flowers before they went to seed, but life being what it is, I decided that I didn't want to waste the potential for their use in soups, stews, sauces, and what have you. This morning I went out to check on them. . . they were ready! I took the bundles into my kitchen and began the process. . .the very long process, I was to find, of removing the dried leaves from each stem. I started with the thyme. . . bad idea. . . after 45 minutes, I had about two tablespoons of dried leaves—and that's all I was to get. At that point, with a newfound understanding of why people are willing to spend \$8.00, \$9.00, or \$10.00 for a small jar of the precious leaves, I decided to simply fold up the strands of dill before placing them in an airtight baggie, and save the oregano until later. It appears that time is money. . .

It's not that I don't have time. . .just that it seems a weird way to spend my time. It's so easy just to throw a bottle of herbs or spices into my grocery cart. Life before conveniences was tough. . .and it may be going back in that direction again.

Yesterday, Gary shared that he had heard that, due to heightened numbers of COVID-19, Governor Gavin Newsom had once again mandated the closure of bars in several counties, mostly in the northern part of the state, but including Los Angeles County in Southern California. California is now one of the top seven states in the number of current hospitalizations due to COVID. So, like a concerned parent who doesn't know what else to do with a wayward teen, Newsom took away a privilege in the counties whose numbers show no signs of abating. . .and are, in fact, spiking. People, being who they are, will probably be protesting their right to gather in bars by tomorrow. Apparently, hanging out in bars is a higher priority for some, than saving lives. I don't get it. Well, maybe I do get it . . .people feel comfortable engaging in familiar behaviors . . .and they are just plain tired of life as it is today. Humans engage in behaviors for a variety of reasons: convenience, avoidance, diversion, passion, emotional balance, beliefs. . .

basically we engage in whatever we can conjure up as a way of making ourselves feel better. . . pastimes that allow us to relieve a bit of the stress and anxiety that are a part of life today. . .and which just plain make it all seem easier.

In the state of California, there have been approximately 215,000 total cases; further there has been a 45% increase in positive cases over the last 7 days. . .and the percentages of positive cases to number of tests continues to rise. A few weeks ago the number of new cases was at 4.5 %; in the last 14 days it has moved to 5.5%, with a 5.9% rise in the last seven days— definitely an unhealthy trend.

So, why put the “dimmer” on some counties and not others? Apparently, the red flag is a ratio of more than 25 new cases of Covid-19 per 100,000 people within a 14-day period, and/or more than an 8% positivity testing rate per 100,000 people within a 14-day period. So far, Orange County is not on the list. . .here, for some reason, case numbers have been slower to grow. . .time will tell.

## DAY 109

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 30

What a grey day. . .this morning when I peered out my kitchen window into our backyard, it was actually wet and a bit drippy out there. I know. . .I shouldn't be surprised at this type of weather, even though technically summer started more than a week ago. I've lived at the beach for my entire life. . .and it's always like this in coastal Southern California at this time of year. I remember during my childhood knowing that I could count on the sun by July 4<sup>th</sup>—there has always been an expectation for May grey and June gloom. . .but still, I think I'd like to wake up to the sun shining brightly through the windows. . .it would at least *feel* like a bright spot.

This comes to mind because our nationally beloved holiday—the 4<sup>th</sup> of July is on the horizon. . .but, certainly not the traditional celebration we look forward to each year. Virtually all community celebrations which might draw crowds to Laguna Beach, were cancelled more than a month ago. . .with no fireworks, no barbecues. . .really no communal celebration of this holiday commemorating the birth of a free nation, of any kind—it will just be another weekend amongst many—a sea of them, in fact, where we'll simply be holed up at home. Home is not so bad, you understand. . .just not what we're used to. . .especially on this day. . .well, I guess we'd better get used to it. This thing doesn't appear to be dying down—instead it continues to ramp up.

Was it just the other day that I said that in Orange County cases of COVID-19 had been slower to mount up. . .? I should have kept my mouth shut. . .apparently we were one of the counties on the Governor's watch list, and yesterday, O.C. showed the highest number of positive COVID-19 cases to date—570. Because of this, bars, indoor restaurants, beach parking lots, and perhaps the beaches themselves will be closed as of Thursday night. . .and for the next 3 weeks. Apparently, at least for the holiday weekend, as a way of keeping folks off the beaches, lifeguards will be standing guard and requiring anyone violating the order to vacate. Restaurants are being encouraged to move tables outdoors, when possible, in order to stay open.

It is such a surreal environment. . .I don't really know anyone who thought that this epidemic would even last *this* long, let alone last this long and then continue to grow. It has created a pall. . .to say the least.

I think I'll go down to my kitchen and bake oatmeal cookies, and make a big pot of spaghetti sauce! Productivity is good for the blahs!

## DAY 112

### SATURDAY, JULY 4

Several weeks ago, our friend Mary Lou, who always hosts a fourth of July party, asked if I thought she should do it this year. This was long before the spike in COVID-19 cases in Orange County shut down bars and beaches, but we, even then, had been advised to not gather in groups, so I allowed as how it was probably not a great idea. . .for us, anyway. I knew I would sorely miss this traditional and festive gathering and the remarkable fireworks display set off over the ocean by the city of Laguna each year, which from the vantage point of Mary Lou's cliff side property appeared to be for our express pleasure alone. But, in this year of the great pandemic, we would be doing without the fireworks display, along with all city sponsored holiday events.

Indeed, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday promised to be somewhat bleak. . .at least it did until yesterday, when we received a flier announcing that Brook Street, which usually hosted a huge block party on this holiday would instead be doing a drive-by greeting in accordance with this year's need for social distancing.

Before going indoors last night, we made plans with the neighbors to be outside at 10:30 to view the parade.

As predicted, the day dawned bright and cheery. It's amazing how much this simple gesture made by people we don't know added to the excitement of the day—a parade. . . something to look forward to. . .and, to plan for. Una brought orange juice, Jolee contributed Champagne for Mimosas for the adults, and Sparkling grape juice for the kids, and Rhianon brought a plateful of pastries. The time passed quickly as we visited. . .until suddenly we could hear the sounds of a motorcade. First came a 1957 Chevy, decorated with flags and pompoms slowly making its way up the street. The parade was made up of classic cars, beach buggies, and just your everyday SUVs and/or convertibles. The occupants of the cars were yelling greetings, playing loud music, honking horns. . .and/or blowing them. The people had decorated their vehicles, each in their own way, and dressed in red, white and blue themselves, hauling kids and dogs and what have you. . .everybody wishing a happy 4<sup>th</sup>. It was over quickly, but I so much

appreciated that these people, during a time that had potential to feel dreary. . .found a way to spread the joy of the holiday. . .and then spent the energy to make it happen. I am ever amazed at and thankful for the tenacity and creative flexibility of humans. Today feels like a holiday, after all.

Still feeling the glow from the holiday parade, while dining in our backyard, we were treated to a surprise air show, directly over our house; four AT-6s—the Condor Squadron—flying in formation, added a thrill to our evening. Today I'm proud to be an American!

## WEEK 17

### DAY 114

#### MONDAY, JULY 6

This afternoon, I realized that I hadn't looked at the county or city COVID cases since last Thursday. On that day, the numbers had risen substantially from the week before, but today when I looked, those *earlier* numbers seemed low in comparison. Orange County showed over 1000 new cases and Laguna Beach had risen from 50 cumulative cases to 75. . .in five days! What the Hell is going on. . .How could this be? That means that in our little town either the positive cases rose on a 10% per day rate, or at the rate of just over 33% for the five days cumulatively!

Searching for answers, I sent out a text to my buddies asking if any of them knew anything more about these incomprehensible numbers. Terri responded immediately to say that she had read that the numbers represented a backlog in positive results. . .Well, that makes more sense . . .kind of. She also sent an article which alluded to the Memorial Day weekend, along with the *Black Lives Matter* protests as the probable culprit in heightening the rate of infection. . .as most cases had erupted two to three weeks after those events.

Further, the article stated that many of the new cases were within the age group of 30-40 years, and that elders, who had stayed at home during these suspected events, were possibly being exposed through younger members of the family. That's scary. Not something any one of us would like to have on our plate of "I wish I hadn't. . ." regrets.

The question of how the State will handle this ongoing crisis continues to crop up. It's definitely not getting any better out there, it's worse! . . .and, even with a *loosening* of restrictions, still, some folks are weary of the lack of freedom. As Americans, we've had it so good, for so long, that apparently some of us are not easily quelled in our quest for personal endeavors. I fear that the immediacy of computer age instant gratification—immediate reward—has made us forget the value of *deferred* gratification; perhaps somewhere along the way we've forgotten that sometimes we must work hard at something in order to see the desired results. . .and that

only then can we enjoy the reward. These folks appear to be enjoying the reward of comradery in the midst of this critical period, ironically spreading the disease while the rest of us are remaining isolated as a means of eradicating it! The opposite of reward is punishment. . .A time like this is not the ideal framework for seeing the *FAIL* sign flash across the computer screen of our lifetime.

Sometimes, the school principal in me emerges, and I want to line these people up and give them a harsh talking to. . .but, on the other hand, the State has already tried a severe “time-out” in the form of its *stay at home* order, and that apparently didn’t work. . .maybe these wayward, free thinkers ( . . .and, not in the positive sense. . .as, in creative—*outside the box!*) will just have to suffer the natural consequences of their rash behavior. . .hopefully, they won’t be taking the rest of us down that well-worn path of broken dreams along with them.

What will the 4<sup>th</sup> of July gatherings result in? I’m feeling an unbridled relief that we opted for staying in!

## DAY 117

THURSDAY, JULY 9

Today while waiting in the socially distant line (6 feet apart) to enter the community pool, for my appointed 45-minute, 3 times per week, swim, I noted that there was no longer any way to identify the other folks in line through facial features alone. We were all masked, and due to the southern California sun, most had donned sunglasses and hats. Hair color, eyes, and mouths, all of which work as elemental towards facial recognition, were completely hidden.

Even so, I recognized the folks around me there. . . it's when I see them out in the world, all done up, that I don't know them. At the pool, even at a distance, I've learned to recognize people by body shape, gait, and even by the bathing suit each wears. Most of us tend to wear the same suit each day until it falls apart due to the chemical levels in the water. . .which happens fairly often. That being said, never have I been less concerned that my suit may fall apart in record time. And never have I felt more comfortable knowing that the pool water is riddled with chemicals. In fact, I'm glad for it. . .knowing that, while not particularly toxic to humans (that we know of), unwanted bacteria and virus can't live for long in there, has become a comfort. Bye-bye COVID!

And, for sure, the virus is lurking out there. . .hopefully not in the air, but still continuing to grow and spread. Between last Monday and Wednesday—a two-day span—the cumulative number of positive cases in Laguna Beach went up from 75 to 82; the number of daily positive cases in Orange County went from 1000 to 1333! Yikes!

It seems that our only recourse is to stay at least 6 feet away from other people, and to wear the dreaded mask. I understand why folks shy away from the practice, masks are uncomfortable, hot, and make conversation difficult. . .and eating and drinking impossible! To add to this already complicated issue, I have a bit of hearing loss (probably from hanging out in venues like the Troubadour throughout the 1970s—I blame the Stones, Willie Nelson, and Bonnie Raitt for this!), so, conversation while masked has become more than iffy. . .formerly, I listened while reading lips. But *now* there are no lips. Additionally, relating while masked, lacks context

. . .no smiling, frowning, or expression of any kind (at least that we can see)—it turns out that lips are important in conversation—they convey meaning to the experience. In interpersonal communication, it is the non-verbal signals which often tell more than the words spoken. Now, we've lost much of the meaning being conveyed through simple conversation. . .sort of like when we text or email—except for the fact that in computerized messaging one can always use a handy emoji to provide the emotion one wishes to convey, or to add to meaning. Maybe we will need to resort to carrying a double sided *happy* and *sad* placard on a stick, to flash when necessary in face to face meetings!

Sad, but not fatal. So, we will allow ourselves to become masked men and women. . .for however long it takes—an option that should definitely be a no brainer!

## DAY 118

FRIDAY, JULY 10

Who still hugs someone upon meeting or leaving during this time of social distancing? And, should we be faced with such, how do we respond in a socially acceptable way?

Yes, the unthinkable happened last night. . .and I was left feeling. . .well not really violated, but without my proper personal space. . .and without my consent!

Our Friday Night Asphalt Party started out just fine—why wouldn't it? The regulars know all the rules: Bring your own chairs; bring your own drinks; bring your own food; stay 6-feet apart; no touching or sharing of objects. . .we all get it. We were even treated to a short skit and song focused upon our newly adopted Friday night ritual, that was written and performed by a trio of neighborhood pre-teen girls. It was starting out to be a wonderful evening.

But then we had some late comers drop by—sometimes neighbors who are perfectly nice people. . .but apparently *they* don't know the rules!

After a pleasant conversation with the woman component of the couple, whom I had not met before, we said our good-byes and then she swooped in for a. . .hug? I was caught completely off guard. . .no time to think about what to do or say. . .so, I just stood there stiffly with my face turned as far away from her as possible. Thankfully it was a short hug.

So now back to my original questions. . .Who *still* engages in this kind of taboo behavior during a social climate which frowns upon it, and what should the recipient do in response?

I truly have no answer for the first part of the question. To hug during an active pandemic is thoughtless and maybe even dangerous behavior. . .and most folks get that. . .but, apparently not all of them. And frankly, I'm unclear about why I should care if I behave in an *appropriate* manner to such an *inappropriate* act. . .but I do. Never one to purposely hurt another person's feelings, I know that I can't stop the caring part of me at this point in my life, and just allow myself to plunge into the uncharted territory of the socially insensitive. . .and, still I don't want to chance being exposed to whatever that other person may be carrying.

Do I slap the outreaching hands and say, “no hugs!” Oh no, . . .that would be touching!  
Do I simply turn my back and pretend like I didn’t notice the attempt? Gary says you take a step or two back while putting your hands up in front of you, palms outward (the universal, STOP signal). For me, I think I just need to be quicker on the uptake. Step back, cross my arms over my chest and say, with a smile. . . “Virtual hug,” before stepping out of the path of the oncoming blunder.

What a world we’ve come to. . .when a hug appears as a harbinger of bad things to come?  
I’m ready for our old world.

## DAY 119

### SATURDAY, JULY 11

Summer has come to coastal southern California. The sun rises in its full glory, and by 7:00 a.m. one can already bask in its warmth. The birds are chirping, and the bees buzzing, June bugs are bouncing off fences and other objects as they fly blindly through the garden. This visual and auditory cacophony truly is the epitome of a perfect southern California summer day.

Today was a swim day. As I did the breast stroke across the 75 feet of my lane, I spied a dragonfly skimming across the water ahead of me. It would lightly touch down on the surface of the water before springing up and then touching down again. The bees are not so adept; frequently I find them floating on the sparkling blue surface, with no hope of survival. But not the dragonfly. . .I have literally never seen a drowning dragonfly. They seem to skirt the consequences of dangerous behavior again and again. . .kind of like the people out there in La La Land who will not subscribe to safety. . .either for themselves or others.

I am reminded of Aesop's fable about the Grasshopper and the Ants. . .wherein all throughout the summer the industrious and responsible ants work diligently to store up necessities for the winter to come; the grasshopper, on the other hand, all the while is dancing and singing. . .irresponsibly not willing to give up the fun, for what may or may not come. As with others of his stories, Aesop points out the downfall of the risky behavior by showing the reader that when winter finally did come, the ants, having prepared, were warm in their hill home—safe, dry, and well fed, while Mr. Party Animal Grasshopper was coping with the rigors of wintery winds, and wet skies, both hungry and cold.

When I look into the face of humanity, I see grasshoppers and ants. The grasshoppers are not concerned about tomorrow. . .they revel in the moment—to defer this gratification would not even cross their minds. Let tomorrow bring what it may. . .we'll think about it then.

For sure, by comparison the life of an ant is sometimes not much fun; planning for the future can be all encompassing. . .it isn't easy being responsible all of the time. . .but, support is

nearby—ants work as a team, until the work is done. . .and then, if there is any time or energy left, they share in the bounty of reserves.

So, the question arises: Am I a grasshopper or an ant? Okay, if I'm being honest, I must admit that I probably lean more towards the ant persona. . .but. . .there is still a little grasshopper in there also, singing and dancing. . .as I hope there is in each of us.

## WEEK 18

### DAY 121

MONDAY, JULY 13

Although not the norm for me, within the social climate of today, I find it most difficult not to feel judgmental towards folks who are unwilling to follow the rules. It's pretty simple: wear a mask when out in public; stay at least 6-feet away from other people; don't gather in groups; don't go to indoor bars and restaurants; stay home if you don't feel well. And yet, some people continue to loll about in old and familiar behavior patterns—*acceptable* 4 months ago. . . *unacceptable* today! What makes this such a hot point for *me*, is that all of humanity has found itself in a situation where the decisions each of us makes about our own health has the potential to affect others, regardless of the decisions they have made for themselves. What ever happened to doing the *greatest good for the greatest number*?

Today as I watched Governor Gavin Newsom reel in the masses by tweaking his former structure for the opening of California, I couldn't help but think he was more than gracious in his comments about why he was hitting the "dimmer switch" for *all* counties in California beginning today. Today the state of California was to begin a plan somewhere in between totally shutting down and totally reopening.

While some counties (my own Orange County, and 29 others—those on the "watch list") were already abiding by some closures, the adapted plan calls for the closures of all indoor dining, bars, theaters, museums, and art galleries, Newsom now called for the same in *all* counties in California, and added the closure of gyms and personal care businesses (hair salons, spas, and nail rooms), as well as in person work places (except for essential workers) in what he is calling a *Modification Mode*. . . a means of gaining control over the growing numbers of positive COVID-19 cases.

Further, like a kindly but determined uncle, Newsom warned that, although there had previously been some talk about viruses not being able to survive in hot weather, this information

has proven to be a fallacious, that the virus seemed to be thriving in places around the world with much higher air temperatures than we typically experience in California—this virus, he said, is not going to simply go away. . .we must actively eradicate it with our actions. . . yes, by *wearing our masks*, and with *social distancing*. . . regardless of the fact that we are tired of it all. Additionally, he shared that the State of California is in for the long haul. . .up to the time of the introduction of an effective vaccine or therapy.

We Californians may find ourselves on time-out for a very long time to come!

## DAY 122

TUESDAY, JULY 14

Today we planted some blue spear-like flowers in the lovely tin urns at the front entrance to the brick walkway which leads to our front door. By the end of the day, Gary had pointed out that these particular plants apparently attracted large, fuzzy bumblebees! Bumblebees. . .? In all the years we've lived in Laguna, I haven't seen even one bumblebee. I went outside to look. . . sure enough. . . bumblebees!

I clearly remember bumblebees as a part of my childhood. My oldest sister was highly allergic to bee venom and was deathly afraid of the little buzzers, but not me! These beautiful, fat bees, with legs heavy with pollen, never seemed as scary to me as their counterparts in the honey bee, yellow jacket, or wasp families. It just couldn't be possible that anything so. . . well. . . *cute* is what comes to mind, could actually sting a person. And so, these teddy-bear-like bees became my friends.

I thought it strange that the bees of my childhood would just suddenly reappear, as if by magic, here in Laguna Beach after years of being in absentia—I immediately looked up the genre of our new blue flowers on the internet to find out what was what. It turns out that they are part of the *Salvia* family which includes all kinds of sage plants. Suddenly I got it. . . the hills of Malibu, where I grew up, were covered with wild sage. . . and these flowers newly planted in our garden, like that sage of yesteryear, somehow attracted only bumblebees.

Once again I am struck by how specific is the world of nature. . . these bees had been nowhere in sight. . . and yet, just hours after being planted in their new environment, these flowers had somehow called out to them to come and partake.

Here is another one of those bright spots in the dark world of a pandemic. I have time now. . . time to notice the things around me. Because I have an allergy to animal dander, although I love animals, I've not been able to have house pets. But now. . . I have bumblebee pets. . . and I don't even have to feed them!

## DAY 125

FRIDAY, JULY 17

Once Los Angeles, the largest school district in California, announced that it would not be opening the doors of its public schools this fall, we knew that a statement regarding the rest of the state's schools wouldn't be far behind.

Earlier, before the positive cases of COVID-19 soared in California, the Governor had said that the decision to open or not to open schools for the fall term would be left to individual districts in the state. Here in Orange County, the powers that be had worked out a viable plan for a hybrid model for its schools that limited the number of on-site students at one time (teachers and students could opt for online, on-site, or a mix of both). However, yesterday, Governor Newsom mandated that all schools on the *Watch* List (those counties with the highest numbers of positive COVID-19 cases, apparently including all southern California counties) would be continuing with distance learning for all students come September and the new school term. He stated further, that schools may not reopen for on-site classes until the county housing them has been off the Watch list for 14 consecutive days, meaning that the trend towards more and more positive cases of COVID-19 has reversed or at the very least flattened out.

Flatten out. . .? During the last month, the positive numbers in Orange County have skyrocketed to include more than 28,000 cases. According to the LA times the number of confirmed infections in OC is doubling every 23.7 days. . .it's not difficult to see why the Governor has us in his sights. So, unless a miracle happens in the next 30 days, our Orange County kids will be studying from home.

This news was met with mixed reviews. Some parents—those lucky enough to be able to stay home to oversee their child's education, reported feelings of relief. . .they felt adamantly that on-site schooling would heighten the probability of their child contracting the virus and then perhaps exposing the whole family to the same. Others—those who have jobs which require them to work at on-site businesses, said that they felt like they were between a rock and a hard place. While they didn't *want* their children exposed, they wondered how they would care for

them at home, let alone oversee a distance learning program, while they worked. And then there were those who felt just a strongly that the kids need to get back to their normal school routines as quickly as possible to ensure psychological balance.

Good points all. . .albeit, with inherent problems embedded. Within the confines of the day, I am ever grateful that Gary and I have moved to a place in our lives where while we worry about others who are not so lucky, we are on the outside of these problems, merely looking in. The other night, a private school administrator, knowing of my background in education, jokingly asked me if I'd like a job. . .I could work from home, she said. Yeah, right, just what I wanted. . . to enter the fray voluntarily! Thanks. . .but, no thanks!

DAY 126

SATURDAY, JULY 18

Today was the day that I made the decision not to go to the golf/birthday lunch scheduled for next week at my friend Mary Lou's house. We've been so careful. . .I don't want to mess it up now, just because I'm pining for my girls.

Added to my own feelings of uneasiness regarding contact with other people in homes other than my own was a story that Anne shared a couple of days ago. Apparently a neighbor of hers had received the news that her grown son had been tested for COVID-19 as a screening procedure before knee surgery, and had come up with a positive result. The parents hadn't seen the son, but their daughter had visited them. . .and had later tested positive as well. Oh my goodness, what a conundrum. . .we can't even visit with our own children without fear. . .so the conclusion I came to is that if I won't even visit my own *children* face-to-face, why would I go to visit friends.

We are all operating in what has become an environment of shadowy perceptions. We *think* someone we meet up with looks healthy. . .but then again. . . What we are finding out is that there is truly no way to know if that someone. . .even one very much loved by us. . .has been exposed in another encounter, and yet unaware of their own malady, has then passed it on to us.

This situation is beginning to feel like the virus is winning. . .Virus, 125,000. . .Humans, 0! Talk about a game of Beat the Clock! While all of the most brilliant people in our world are working 24/7 to find a vaccine or remedy for COVID-19, more and more people everywhere in the world continue to be attacked by this ravenous infection. Only a few days ago, in Florida, which was notably anti-shut-down when the Corona virus landed, there were over 15,000 new cases in one day! That being said, California which *did* shut down, recently (July 5) had a day when there were actually almost 12,000 new cases!

So what's the answer? Apparently nobody knows. . .we're all just doing the best we can in this race for survival against annihilation. One can only hope that the humans will win this one.

## WEEK 19

### DAY 128

#### MONDAY, JULY 20

Gary does a remarkable job of gathering a plethora of information while quickly flipping through the channels on the TV. How does he do that? . . .consequently he knows a tiny little bit about a whole lot. . .that's dangerous! Anyway, this morning he heard the Mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, saying that his city was in such a state that they might be looking at another shut down in LA County.

Oh, oh. We'd better go out today, before this notion spreads to Orange County. So, we made a run to Home Depot. . .a very large warehouse of a store. . .with virtually anything you might need in hardware, plants, paint, building materials and home repair accoutrements. . .but, organized in such a way, that one can't actually find anything easily. . .and, there is literally nobody visible when help is needed.

We spent the first hour of our expedition out into the world walking up and down miles of aisles, picking up this and that: a small palm tree, an orchid, potting soil, Shishito pepper plants, duct tape, garden gloves, etc. Then, in an effort to find the last item on our list, paint thinner, we left our over-laden cart (which was blocked by an equally heavily loaded stocking platform on wheels) to search for signs of paint fumes. Once we found what we were looking for, we heaved a sigh of relief at a job well done, and headed back to where we had left our cart . . .or. . .where we *thought* we'd left it. At first it was almost funny. . .we actually couldn't find our cart. . .and then we started to feel a bit pissed. Where the heck was it? Finally, in desperation, after walking the aisles of this humongous store several time looking for a cart crowned with a palm tree, we sought out a person decked in a red apron (presumably an HD employee) to see if a cart had been turned in. . .and then we heard, "Sir, there's a cart over here. . .is this yours?" We glanced at it. It was just outside the door of the warehouse. . .in the gardening section. No palm tree, no orchid . . .but Gary, spotting a large bag of potting soil in the bottom of the cart, went over to check

further. . .yes, it *was* our cart, but most of what we'd carefully picked out was gone, and there were some other random items in there. . .things that were not ours! OMG! When we needed help, there was nobody in sight, and yet. . .leave the cart for five minutes, and apparently some overly-conscientious employee, confiscates it and carefully returns items to the shelves they came from!

If we hadn't been worried that the state of California was on the brink of re-closure, we might have just simply left the cart and gone home. Instead, after taking all of those random items that were not ours out of the cart, we started our search for the things on our list one more time.

Here's the kicker. . .when I checked into the Governor's update speech for the day, he actually said that he thought we were making progress in the state of California! Well, maybe no shut down in the near future. . .but at least we're well stocked with any hardware or garden items anyone might need for the long haul!

## DAY 129

TUESDAY, JULY 21

Today I read that 144, 000 people have died of COVID-19, and related complications, in the United States. . .that's 28,000 more American lives than those lost in the whole of WW 1. During the last pandemic, the Spanish Flu, in 1918, we lost over 600,000 people (nearly 6 times more than we lost in that same war). Is this where we are headed?

One would think that with the medical knowledge, resources, and technology of today, we'd be in a much better place to fight this dangerous beast—the Corona Virus, than we were during those post-World War I years, but the numbers continue to mount.

I remember the scare of the Aids epidemic. We weren't only worried about unsafe sex, we were also concerned about any medical procedure which broke the skin, either by definition or accident. Even going to the dentist was a concern. As a private school director at that time, I directed my staff to begin to teach young children that blood was private, and that they must not touch anybody else's blood. Within the context of this atmosphere of fear, I found that parents became crazy protective. . .especially when they learned that their child had been bitten by another child. . . breaking the skin! Although we never divulged the name of the biter, the recipient of the bite was perfectly willing to tell his parents who the biter was. Then those parents stormed my office calling for the dismissal of the child who was the *biter*. If biting became a pattern for a child, most of whom were under three years of age, and unable to understand the error of their ways, it was my job to inform the parents of that child that until she grew past this stage of frustrated retaliation, which often coincided with teething and the inability to express oneself clearly with words, she would need to be kept at home. . .away from other children. I always closed by saying that their child would be welcome to try again once the behavior was unlearned. We almost never saw that child again.

I don't envy today's school personnel the job of dealing with the excessive concerns which undoubtedly have emerged in parents who are rightfully fearful for their child's health and well-being during this time of psychological stress. What is it that must be taught to the children of

today in order to keep themselves safe. . .and what will what we teach them, do to their developing social perspective?

There are layers and layers of tiny little outcomes which will naturally materialize within a society living through a pandemic such as this. . .both inner perspectives and overt behaviors will be irreparably changed. Those of us who are lucky enough to live through this scourge. . . will undoubtedly reemerge as different people. . .some developments. . .a psychological plus, others, a deficit.

## DAY 130

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22

As we were driving to Costco this morning, Gary turned to me and said, “It’s amazing that the highlight of our week is running errands!” He’s right. There are so many things that are different now. I’ve been thinking a lot about what I would do first if I were to once again be free to choose.

Would I rush right out and eat in twelve different restaurants during the first week out? To be honest, I haven’t missed eating out all that much. We used to eat out at least once, more often twice a week. . .just because. We might be out on a walk, and stop by the Los Brisas patio for nachos, stop at The Deck on the beach, or pop in to some other favorite spot. Our evening food forages were more often planned for—San Shi Go for sushi, the Wine Bar for short ribs and other sumptuous small plate goodies, or the Brussel’s Bistro for luscious European fare. But. . . that being said, I’m quite enjoying sharing the cooking duties with Gary. . .and our fireside chats. No. . .eating out definitely wouldn’t be my first choice.

What about planning a trip. I must say, I do miss a bit of travel—it’s truly the variety of culture, and scenery that I miss. . .something different from the everydayness experienced of late. Close. . .but, still. . .this would not be my first choice.

A shopping spree? Lunch with friends? A party of more than six people? A movie or live production in an actual theater? All enticing, and very much missed, but. . .No. These activities would not be a first choice.

The first thing I will do when I have the freedom to do whatever I wish. . .will be to gather my family. . .all of them, together. We will fly the grandkids down from the Central Valley of California or travel up there. . .it doesn’t matter where we meet. . .as long as we are all in the same space. I will hug each of them; kiss each of them, and let them know how very much I have missed them. We will talk for hours, without fear of sharing germs, and eat together, and plan to gather again soon. . .and then we actually *will* gather again soon.

A positive outcome of this pandemic is that each of us has had almost unlimited time to consider priorities. . .to sort out what is truly important in our lives from that which is not. . .and hopefully we will keep this new learning at the forefront. . .never letting go of or taking for granted that which we find it difficult to live without.

## DAY 133

SATURDAY, JULY 25

The race for a COVID-19 vaccine is alive and well. . .and moving faster than anybody thought possible. What looks like the most promising news of help on the way is out of Oxford University, where professor Sarah Gilbert is leading the 250-person research team to pioneer an effective vaccine.

I had heard about this research from two separate friends, when lo and behold, in a well-known business magazine that we receive without having subscribed, was a very insightful article about the woman, the process, and the progress in the whirlwind of a discovery project to find a solution to our current problem.

I don't pretend to understand what is actually happening there, but it was written that this lab is ready to begin human trials. . .something which usually only follows years of animal trials. . .which then is followed by years of production. How has this team been able to facilitate a complicated process to the extent that years have been pared off the timeline from initial development of a possible medical remedy to the inoculation procedure?

From the article, I understand that in response to a 2014 call from the World Health Organization (which was dealing with the crisis of Ebola virus at the time) encouraging the University lab to work towards developing methods to rapidly respond to viruses previously unknown to the medical world (Disease X), this team had already developed the technology to speed up the convoluted process that typically spans the years between concept and production. Additionally, much research was already in place from earlier outbreaks to produce a MERS and SARS-CoV-2-vaccine when COVID-19 erupted in China, and by early January, truly as soon as the genetic sequence was published as Corona virus, this lab was ready and able to proceed.

Now, having gone through what appears to be successful testing with monkeys (injected with the vaccine and 28 days later exposed to massive doses of the Corona Virus through multiple sites [eyes, nose, mouth], the monkeys shows no signs of the disease), and having contracted

with a pharmaceutical company to produce hundreds of millions of doses, this lab is ready to start human trials. . .and apparently have 30,000 ready and willing participants.

While promising. . .there was the drawback that swabs inserted into the nostrils of the monkey subjects, found evidence of the disease still present in some. The worry here was that although the subject who received the injection would be safe, if still carrying the virus, he could infect others who had not been vaccinated. This finding was defended by the researchers as being due to the massive amounts of the virus the monkeys had been exposed to; people, they said, would not contract that much virus even when enclosed in a COVID-19 hospital ward!

It should be noted that there are other labs on the brink of discovery as well, here and in China.

Of course we'll wait for more information. . .but if this vaccine becomes available, why not try it? Surely it will, at the very least, protect us to some extent, so that the virus cannot take hold to the extent of causing infectious damage to lungs and other organs. And we can always resort to continuing to wear masks in public to protect others. Sounds like progress to me!

## WEEK 20

### DAY 134

#### SUNDAY, JULY 26

Today I realized that I hadn't talked to my niece, Elinor, for several weeks. Because she's a physician, and keeps abreast of the medical journals, I always value her perspective when considering the numbers of COVID-19 cases. . .as well as the safety precautions. I called her at around 3:30 in the afternoon, forgetting that it was now 6:30 on the East Coast. As it turned out, she and her husband had just finished their dinner and he had gone out onto the back patio to call his parents, apparently a Sunday evening tradition. Perfect timing she said.

As we discussed the humongous numbers of COVID cases flowing and ebbing throughout California, she said that Massachusetts was finally looking better. . .it had mostly reopened after 3 months of ravage. . .the Red Sox were even playing again, if to an empty stadium. Massachusetts was one on those Eastern states hardest hit, along with New York, and New Jersey. The virus had crept in earlier than in the Western states, and ran rampant from March to early June. The state had mandated the closure of certain types of businesses from the start. Non-essential Medical and Dental businesses had been at the top of the list. . .they were to open only by appointment for critical emergencies. Elinor herself took a part-time furlough, and it was fully three months before Elinor's husband, who owns his own dental practice was able to open his office once again. An inconvenience, for sure, but it looks like *something* is working because the numbers are down. . .almost flat. (Early on, when there was so much talk about flattening the curve, we had no idea what that would entail!) Elinor added that in Massachusetts folks have not bucked the need to wear face coverings. . .*there* it against the law not to, and people appear to be complying. Here too, but with differing public response.

When I broached the subject of that "promising" vaccine out of Oxford University, she said that as a pediatrician, she was always a bit leery of new vaccines. . .although it did look

promising to her, she'd not be volunteering to be one of the trial subjects—instead, she'd wait it out until the results are in. Sounds like good advice to me.

That's what we've all been doing. . .waiting it out. What are the choices?

## DAY 135

MONDAY, JULY 27

As penance for neglecting my responsibility to secure swim slots for this week, I know I must do the dreaded walk. . .at least three times before the weekend. I say dreaded not because walking isn't a fine activity, but because it's summer. . .hot and humid. . .and because my right knee appears to be healing up pretty well. I don't want to screw it up now. But all that aside, I will accompany Gary on his walks this week. . .I can't simply do *nothing* to exercise this aging body of mine! But, on this very special week, he'll have to settle for a more reasonable distance than his norm. . .around 45 to 50 minutes would be nice with as little up and downhill travel as possible. . .good luck! Remember this is Laguna—that same place that was built on the sea cliffs of the Pacific sometime in the 1920s. . .the hills are part of the charm! There is only about a mile of flat ground in the whole of our little city. . .and definitely not anywhere nearby.

So off we went this morning. I wore my best walking shoes in support of my knee, however unfashionable. I'm so proud of myself! I shoved my hair inside a ball cap, put on my sunglasses, and mask. . .and shoved gloves into my pockets, just in case. Virtually no one looking on (who's looking anyway?) could even tell that I hadn't showered or put on my face (one of the perks of a pandemic is that with the need for a mask, we no longer have any recognizable facial features. . .so no need for make-up!) and we headed for town to go to the bank (to deposit a check) and to our small local hardware store.

When we reached the bank. . .we found that it was locked. Today *is* Monday, isn't it? . . .remember I had forgotten that it was Friday not so long ago. . .that was when I missed the appointment opportunity to secure my swim slots. . .so, in light of that, not a bad question. Yes . . .it is Monday. Mondays were posted on the door as opening at 9:00 a.m. . .it was already 9:30. Then we saw a small sign. . .*Temporarily Closed*. No explanation. . . the ATM machines outside the bank didn't even work. We went across the street to another bank (where we also have an account), and deposited the check there. This requires an investigation.

As we continued our walk to the hardware store, I noticed that there were signs posted outside every commercial business or shop with the requirement for a face covering, stating further that *it's the law!* . . .that's good news. At the hardware store the sign read: Face-covering required, No mask, No entry. Good for them, some people do need it to hit them smack in the face to get the message! There was even an employee just inside the door to make sure that no unmasked person snuck in!

We reached home with purchases in hand (and without discernable damage to my knee), where I immediately went to my iPad to check out why the bank was closed. Apparently during the month of July many branches of this bank have been "temporarily closed," as a means of protecting both employees and clients, the official statement read. No mention of when those branches that had closed would be reopened. This is yet another sign of the destructive nature of a pandemic.

## DAY 137

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

One industry which looks like it may be making a comeback is motor home sales. Formerly, like Time Shares, resales are much more prevalent than initial sales. . .people think it sounds like a good idea to carry your vacation home around with you. . .and the salesmen are pretty savvy about easily talking folks already harboring the *dream* into the proposition. But then, as always, there is the *reality*! The allure begins to tarnish when the new owners find that they need to drive what is essentially comparable to a Mack truck on winding mountain roads so narrow as to make a Volkswagen Bug feel crowded, dragging their car behind them, and then park it in campgrounds, with *real* campers and all that implies! Then most people simply want to unload the behemoth contraption in order to explore parts unknown in a different, perhaps more civilized way.

The thing is, that the *parts unknown* concept is no longer available to us. There is no international travel available, and frankly even *interstate* air travel is iffy. Places like Massachusetts no longer allow the “Beautiful People” from California to enter their state (without a 14-day quarantine)—we currently hold the US record for the most cumulative cases of COVID-19. . . we’re infested and infected! Nobody wants to allow someone who may be an asymptomatic carrier into their space. And I hear that New York, having finally gained ground in its fight against the disease, is also limiting entrance, along with many other states.

So, for Californians, it is *inner* state travel. . .or *no* travel. In a motor home, one doesn’t have to worry about the inconveniences of stopping for food and bathroom breaks. . .after all it’s a home away from home; people are carrying everything on their backs. And California is such a beautiful state with its coastline, central valleys, and mountains. Even when other places were available, Gary and I often chose to stay in California. . .lots of remarkable places to explore.

Hence, my prediction for more motor home sales now, and perhaps in the future. Then the next surge will undoubtedly be once again in re-sales!

## DAY 140

### SATURDAY, AUGUST 1

I can't believe it. . .August is here. . .or at least that's what the calendar says. In some ways it seems like only yesterday that it was March 15, with the shock of a Pandemic looming over our happy little world. . .and in other ways, the time *before* the sky fell seems like a completely different lifetime. All that was in between is somehow blended in a way that makes everything indistinct. . .truly there was nothing to make one day stand out from the rest. . .or one month. We've now been shackled by the Corona virus for over four months—twenty weeks. Remember when we were going to shut down for just two weeks in the state of California? . . .that was apparently a pipe dream.

It's no wonder that many of us are suffering from feelings of anxiety. That being said, today, as I drove to the pool, I was filled with resolve. . .today was the day for a little therapy session. . .self-help!

I am a believer that one of the few elements that humans truly have control over is their own attitude. . .and I definitely needed an adjustment. By the time I reached the pool, I had given myself a harsh talking to. First I acknowledged that I had absolutely no control over the lives of others, or over this pandemic we are in and its resulting dilemmas. I only have the control I exert over my own life. . .and even that is iffy. I also ask myself if I actually wanted this kind of frenetic worry taking control of my life.

I thought of friends who are actually suffering through life-altering (even potentially deadly) illnesses, while still suffering through familial worries and concerns about the world as it is today. They appear to be surviving in a heroic manner; some have simply gone on with their lives, not willing to allow the situation top priority. Compared to them, my plate is empty. If they can do it. . .so can I!

By the time I entered the pool, I had a plan. I would start with deep breathing (I've even warded off migraines with this strategy; breathe in through the nose. . .out through the mouth), and count my strokes (by the way, in my 45 minutes, I had in 1000 strokes with each arm. . .pretty

amazing for a 75-year old, if I do say so myself!). This breathing/counting strategy has worked as a means of relaxing myself to sleep in the past. . .so why not try it here.

And what do you know. . .it worked. I swam my laps with a fairly clear head. . .and I didn't even have to shake myself to get my own message, which was take care of yourself. . .and let others do the same. . .let the pandemic run its course while protecting yourself as much as is reasonable. Worry (i.e., create a plan) only when you have some control over the situation; if you have no control, offer the support of love while stepping away from the role of fixer. I am reminded of the Serenity Prayer, adopted by others who are also embroiled in various types of compulsive behaviors, when I say. . .*and hopefully, I will have the good sense to know which elements I have the control to change and which I do not.*