

LGBTQI+

Anthology

“Seeing 2020”

Writing

Workshop

Volume 3



**SOUTHERN
ARIZONA
SENIOR
PRIDE**

SOUTHERN ARIZONA SENIOR PRIDE

Celebrating, Supporting, and Uniting LGBTQI+ Older Adults

“Seeing 2020”

Senior Pride held its third annual writing workshop in June/July 2020. These successful workshops have been instructed by Cat Belue. Eleven LGBTQI+ older adults attended four, 2 hour classes on Zoom. Each class was intimate, fun, and fascinating. Our stories, written and read out loud, reflected our innermost thoughts and feelings. We were all ready to connect and share our vulnerability in the face of the global pandemic we are living with.

Here is how Cat invited writers to the workshop:

“I don’t know what any of you thought the year 2020 would look like, but I guarantee it wasn’t this! I can’t think of a more important time to document what this worldwide event has meant to you. This will be a class where you can share how Covid-19 has impacted and perhaps changed your life forever.”
Cat Belue

About the Instructor:

Cat Belue is a Southerner by birth and desert rat by choice, calling the Old Pueblo home.

A daily journaler, Cat shares her life with an adorable grown up puppy and her stories with the Tucson group, **Female Storytellers**, aka *FST!*

We hope you enjoy this anthology. It is a wonderful, insightful collection of stories that will inspire and delight.

THE IMPACT

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Author: Judy Jennings

When it was February my friends who live out in the desert hadn't even begun to consider they might need to paint their phone numbers on the sides of their horses and release them into national forest to escape a forest fire. "We don't have a trailer," one explained, "and our neighbors who do are going to be busy with their own problems, if it comes to that." When it was February I did not go out after dark to watch the line of fire moving across the Catalinas, an infuriated inferno devouring the length of the mountain from west to east, and then over the Rincons to descend to within five miles of my friends. Right now they're feeling optimistic that things won't actually come to that.

For me, February was a giddy month. I'd been in a long, grim tunnel of agony with a clogged artery for the previous four months while Dr. Useless, who I liked because whenever I saw her she patted me on the shoulder and called me "my dear", did nothing. After a second opinion promptly sent me to the ER I finally had surgery at the end of January, and in February I got my life back. I didn't pay much attention to the reports of a new virus in China. February was the month between agony and the onset of fear, and the most important thing was still U of A Women's basketball.

It was March when I began to cry. I cried over the shocking reports coming from Italy, and then more over basketball and the squashed dreams of the season that could have been, even though it seemed ridiculous to be grieving over a sport in the middle of a pandemic. Grief, apparently, has a life of its own and very little logic. In March people all over the world began singing together, Italians serenaded from balconies over eerily empty streets, the Chinese in Wuhan sang together through open windows until authorities forced them shut, and Americans turned to parody and bravado. This was the moment before our country began to panic and tear itself apart.

This was also the time when I got back in touch with my sister who I hadn't spoken to in 22 years. It was an encouraging telephone reunion where Marilynn avoided religious proselytizing and I skipped the political tirades. In a way I suppose you could say it was the pandemic that brought us back together. If this were to be our final point of contact I wanted to at least be kind enough to respond, she was visiting my niece in Colorado and wanted to come see me and for a moment I was open to the idea. Who knew when we might have another chance? But Covid-19 was just beginning to explode in the western states and I began to have misgivings, and hard as it was, I told my sister not to come. It wasn't long until she sent me a text saying she was sick, sicker than she'd ever been in her life.

“No, my test result hasn’t come back yet,” my niece told me when I inquired about her mom, “but I’m sort of hoping it’ll be positive so I’ll develop immunity.” She’d felt mild symptoms the week before, so she had the swab, which eventually did show positive for Covid -19. She didn’t quarantine herself and she made no mention of the fact that she had probably infected her entire household, including her 77 year-old mother who ultimately managed to survive. I was stunned. I had no idea at the time that this was my first inkling of the frightening social climate that was about to develop.

I read somewhere that before a pandemic everything you do seems like overkill, but afterwards nothing seems like it was enough. March was the month when we started hunkering down in earnest here in Tucson, waiting for the storm to hit. But it didn’t, not really, not here, not yet. So we waited, washing our hands, sanitizing everything that came into the house, we sang upbeat songs and crowded together on the Internet for connection. In March I cried over basketball and in June I would cry over horses, but having no idea what else to do or what was to come, in March I settled into sheltering in place and hoped that would be enough

Now it’s July and the pandemic rages on. The enormous impact of Covid-19 seems to be everywhere, there have been 135,000 deaths from it in the U.S. and the count is still mounting, healthcare is in crisis, and the country is seething with anger over racially motivated police violence. But even as these tides continue to rise the biggest impact on me has been by way of small things. I’ve learned to wave in lieu of a smile, to accept that handshakes are most likely a thing of the past, and I’ve started thinking of swim goggles as acceptable public attire. It’s the friendly arm around the shoulder, the toothy grins, the mornings shared over coffees, these are the things have impacted me greatly in their absence.

For me, though, the pandemic has mostly been an inconvenience. And in that sentence there’s so much information. It announces I haven’t gotten sick with Covid-19 and no one I love has died from it. It implies I still have a monthly check coming in and a safe place to live, and that I have systems in place for getting food. So much is contained in that simple sentence.

It’s fair to say the biggest impact the pandemic has had on me psychologically has been watching our country lay bare the ugly side of its personality, and again that statement implies so much more. It positively shouts of my white reality. It seems as unlikely that an American person of color would be writing about their shock at finally seeing the ugly underbelly of our culture as it would be for a person in Asia to be expressing shock and defiance at the idea of wearing a mask. Still, the ugliness leaves me reeling and this time I will say it without disclaimer because it is my truth. Some days that leaves me blinded and grieving, stinging with complicated tears.

When there was nothing else to do I did this. I kept going. During the early days of pandemic I actually felt like I was thriving, and there are moments when I still do. When there was nothing else to do I started saying I love you to my friends a lot more. I stopped taking them for granted and I started holding my breath for their lives, which have never seemed so fragile or more precious. I tried not to fall into fear or sink into hatred. When there was nothing else to do I grasped at the light and at all that is good in our sweet lives.

I want to remember that all is not lost, that the pendulum swings and will swing again. That it's fear that makes people dangerous. I'd like to be able to remember that I've learned to feel compassion for that fear, but in all honesty I don't.

I want you to know that even though some days it feels like we're in a surreal boxing ring where the fight has been fixed and we're being pummeled from all sides, the kindness we show each other does not go unnoticed. That even on days when bad news will not seem to stop there's still a spark that won't go out, still a glimpse of a small beam that defies reason, the daily news, tragedy and grief and ultimately even violence. There's a light with a life of its own that keeps coming back on, and it has nothing to do with my willpower or determination, it's not about my self-discipline or even intention. Honestly, I think I just have the temperament of a good dog. Despite myself I am resilient, I'm interested and I keep finding a way.

As it turns out, things didn't actually come to all of that for the horses, Pato and Bertie are still in their own field and without phone numbers. My sister is back home in North Carolina sewing masks, and I've just adopted a Chihuahua.

I think that undefinable, irrepressible light is Hope.

A Dialogue with Coronavirus

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Author: Sue Pennington

“Hey, Sue! I overheard all of you Saturday while I was also Zooming. I’m talking about all the trashing you and your wimpy co-writing friends were attempting. Your facilitator, Cat Belue, tried to reduce me, COVID-19, to a ONE word emotion to describe your experience with me. Haaah! What a joke. I’m the genetically related virus to SARS-COV-1. Remember? 2002. Again, a native of China, like me. As I listened with my invincible universal powers, I was tickled at how you, Sue, pathetically related to each person’s word. Each emotion from every person. You’re feeble, Sue. You didn’t even mention the one strong, initial emotion you had toward me. Resentment. Remember? Oh how you resented having to cancel many of your precious social events—Ms. Southern Magnolia—flitting around in your dream state. Yep! You strongly resented me. Well, suck it up!”

“Yes! I resent you, COVID-19. You are uninvited. Unwelcome. Despicable. Killing so many people. I canceled New York. Seeing Adrienne Warren, Tony Award winner in the Tina Turner musical. Canceled my trip to Alabama. My summer in the White Mountains. My October cruise to Canada.”

“Go on, Sue. Spew it out! I love being in control. I have omnipresent power. I’m everywhere. New York. Alabama. Canada. You are not my ally. I have cohorts in higher places than you who support my cause. No silly masks. Masks cause problems, too, saith the little big man. None of this absurd social distancing. What nonsense that Dr. Fauci is putting out. Infection Control expert. That’s an oxymoron when it comes to my control of the universe. Ahaah! Some people actually believe him!”

“Yes, Coronavirus Disease 2019. I was resentful and angry. I was confused- befuddled. In denial and total disbelief. This can’t be happening. It will go away soon. Loss of freedom. Stay at home. What if it doesn’t go away- for days? Weeks? Months? Fear! Oh the fear. ‘Call Fear and it will appear!’ That’s what Lester Levenson noted. By placing continual emphasis on avoiding what we fear—we just call it back to mind over and over again. Terror. I live alone. I remembered getting sick at the beginning of your insidious invasion. Asthma. I got a kenalog injection from Dr. Miller. Then a sinusitis. What’s happening to my body? More fear.

The dreams. Oh my, the dreams! My deceased Fran. Four years gone; You came in a vivid dream one night. You were not sick—even walking and being in charge. Happy. Smiling. Then you were in bed next to me. I reached over to touch you—I could not feel you. I knew you were beside me. As real as life. I woke up calling your name. I even got up, looking for you as I was dead certain you were alive and present.

Then back to the uncertainty. What is happening? I can't breath. OMG! I watched, over and over, the filming of George Floyd trying to breathe while he was being killed. He didn't want to die. I don't want to die."

"Oh for Corona sakes! How feeble you're sounding, Sue. Boo-hoo! Remember that little Sedona technique you learned when Fran was trying to transition from her invalid human body? You didn't want to let her go. Shame on you."

"I remember. I remember the technique. It helped me then. I'm gonna use it now. 'Under Control, I release my fears of dying.' Yes, I said the release over and over. I say it now. I smudged my house to cleanse it of any bad spirits lurking about. I burned sage and incense. 'If you are of the goodness and likeness of God, I welcome you to stay. If you are not of the goodness and likeness of God, I COMMAND you to leave now.' Am I prepared to die? My fear and terror of dying are less. I'm not wanting to die yet. I want to dejunk my house. Is anyone ever ready to die? What really happens when you die? I ask myself this a lot. My Fran, my life-long partner, is waiting to reincarnate with me, my telepathic guru tells me. I expect to live well past the predicted Dooms Day-July 22nd. My 80th! I will celebrate it big time when you leave us, you microscopic piece of shit! You will be eradicated. Count on it."

"Rant on, Sue! Makes me all the more powerful. Uncertainty, fear, terror-all are potent tonics to strengthen me while depleting you. Your releasing theory is about as valid as Dr. Fauci's theory—no one knows what really works. Nothing to fear but fear itself. Sue, FEAR ON!"

"So, Shithead, I'm releasing my fear, my negativity and embracing the light —What do you say about this?"

"Hey! I'm just doing my job! Trying to make the world great again!"

"You know what, COVID 19—YOU are sounding like a weakling. Blameless. Irresponsible. Irreproachable."

"Whatever! I will continue to oppress and control. Your scientists are trying to find a vaccination to lessen my powers. My! My! They are still working on SARS, malaria..."

"True, but we have vaccines for TB, Smallpox, Polio, hepatitis A & B..."

"Oh, Please!——"

"Oh, Please You! I'm becoming an Octogenarian in a couple days...22nd. I've had seven generations of world-setbacks but more of progress. I lived through the aftermath of the depression in rural Alabama. I remember many things—country living. Big organic gardens. No electricity until I was around 6 or 7 years of age. Then, electric stoves, refrigerators. Microwaves. Telephones. Eight-party lines. What fun listening in on neighbors gossip. Prank calls. 'Do you have Prince Albert in the can?' Drive-in theatre. One dollar per car.

I was a nurse who wore the stiff starched white uniform, white hose, white shoes, white nurses cap. I looked good. No hair on collar. I had long hair then. No nail polish. No jewelry except wedding ring. Only watches with second-hand to check pulse. I lived through Katrina swallowing my alma mater hospitals, Charity for pediatric nursing and St. Vincent de Paul, psychiatric nursing. I smoked my first cigarette and had my first mixed drink at Pat O'Brien's, home of the infamous Hurricane, French Quarter. We students were forbidden to go there by the Nuns; that was the first place we landed. I still wish I had my Hurricane glass. I kept it, for years, full of beads from the Mardi Gras parades. I fell hopelessly in love at Preservation Hall—with Dixieland jazz.

I lived through polio, TB, AIDS. I was horrified when our President was assassinated; also when Pope John Paul, of all holy people, to be shot. 1981. I survived White Only. Colored Only. The loud message was: For the opulent white earthling sapiens vs. for the inglorious colored. Big signs posted at water fountains, bathrooms, waiting rooms. What hateful ignorance. I was emotionally scared with the Birmingham 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. 1963. Four little girls, senselessly murdered from ignorant prejudice. I have lived through wars, with a front row seat for the VN War working at VA with veterans. My Fran suffered from PTSD the rest of her life...she was stationed in Pleiku, during the TET Offensive, and at a most fired upon medical centershe was a triage nurse.

I watched the first man land on the moon. I have survived (sometimes thrived) with the many trends—big hair, bell bottoms, mini-skirts; Elvis, Beatles, Little Richard, Donna Summer, Neil Diamond. I saw us move from glass to plastic. Presently, I am saddened to lose my fellow Octogenarian hero—Congressman John Robert Lewis. A true Saint, if ever there was one. He was willing to die for his cause. I'm definitely not that brave. The change: Edmund Pettus PAST bridged to John Lewis' FUTURE.

“So, Sue, are you through rambling? I was bored at first—but, Sue! We have some common traits. We are strong. Resilient. Tenacious. You have survived and indeed, thrived. Congratulations on turning 80...you wear it well. Maybe you could lose a few pounds.”

“COVID- You are a living thing. I will try not to hate or fear you. Your purpose is unclear to me. My purpose is unclear but this I know to be true—we only have the moment of NOW. NOW— I choose to face and release my fears. I am at peace. I'm even at peace with you.... Yeah—I can afford to shed a few pounds.”

A CONVERSATION WITH COVID-19

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Author: Kay Smith

*“This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all...
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.” Rumi*

This morning Covid-19 was at my front door. My puppy Barkley was very excited thinking a visitor was here to meet him! He loves everyone. When I saw who it was I felt like hiding behind the drapes. Covid-19 at the door? This was scary :Covid-19 is everywhere and nowhere but not HERE. My mind was boggled. The Buddhists suggest inviting your demons in while laughing and have tea with them and talk.

So I met Covid-19 at the door; not laughing, but I didn't send them away. I asked “Why are you here?” No answer. I told them “You are causing a lot of suffering. Everyone is afraid of you and all the world wants you to leave.” I wanted to know how long Covid is staying. It already seemed like an eternity since March 15th when I began sheltering at home. I felt angry, helpless, desperate, scared. Next I said “I don't want you in my house. You're a filthy ugly virus and you're evil”.

They come in anyway and we sit at the table. This is how the conversation went.

Covid: *“I have something to tell you.”*

Me: *“I don't trust you and I'm not sure I want to hear what you have to say.”*

Covid: *“This is your chance to learn something important and if you don't learn it now it will continue to visit you over and over again for the rest of your life until you know what it is that you need to learn.”*

Me: *“I understand that concept.....I’ve had that happen in life and always wished I had learned what I needed to the first time around. But you are not an easy messenger to understand. When I see you I think of death, sickness, insecurity,*

Covid: *“This is not just about you. Of course you have a personal role and your part to discern just as everyone does. But this message is about everyone and it’s currently beyond your comprehension. It’s such a profound message that it can’t be seen , heard or understood until experienced fully. And that requires living in the now, in this moment which is sometimes agonizingly painful and sometimes joyful. This means being in a special kind of no where - no answer space while at peace with not knowing.”*

Me: *“You are exhausting to be with and I’m finding your message confusing. It’s dawn now and in the sky there are clouds outlined in gray and filled with pink; the baby hawks in the old pine tree next door are crying for their parents to bring food and I’m ready to walk in the desert with my pup Barkley. This is a startling time, an exhilarating time of change, a stressful, bewildering time, that is both terrifying and exciting and right now I need a break from you, Covid. Maybe we can talk again later. I’m leaving now.”*

As I walked out into the desert I knew there was much more for me to learn. I felt at peace with that and knew that more will be revealed. I felt secure in my not knowing and will continue to live one day at a time in this amazing adventure of uncertainty.

“Over the nowhere arches the everywhere.” Maria Rainer Rilke

Systemic Pandemics

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Author: Jeanne Bjorn

The western medical establishment has not been able to develop an effective vaccine for HIV, SARS, Lyme or the common cold in the past 200 years. Worldwide, 32 million people have died from HIV. That's almost 1 million people per year for 32 years. Why don't we hear the daily counts for those people? Do we really want to know?

At the start of the civil war, slaves as property, were worth more than all banks, factories and railroads put together. In 1860, slaves were 16% of total home assets. Today, that equals 10 Trillion Dollars. It's too late to say, we don't know.

Our for profit healthcare system, has plenty of MRIs but no PPE.

Cops have tanks – nurses have garbage bags. And, why are Nutritionists and

Naturopaths receiving FDA sponsored letters of threat, for suggesting Vitamin C? As a Nutritionist, I want to know, don't you?

Did you know COVID-19 enters the lungs through the ACE receptors cells? 80 million Americans take ACE inhibitors for high blood pressure. Why then, isn't the public being advised to find a substitute for ace inhibitors? Don't you think we really need to know that?

50 million buffalo were murdered to starve indigenous tribes. Their skulls - stacked into a perfect pyramid. One of my European American ancestors proudly stands on top of those skulls. What happened to that pyramid of extinction? It was sent to China to make plates for people who actually had food. Why don't we already know this?

Forced Relocation. An ex of mine used to say, they try things out on people of color first, and if it works, then they try the same thing on poor and low-income white people. On May 28th, my landlord appeared at my door with a 25% rent increase to my yearly lease. My neighbors received the same letter. Some signed because they were afraid not to. Some didn't sign and I was one of them. I was still afraid. I tried to organize my neighbors to strike. I composed a letter of demand. I called and emailed city, state and federal housing offices. I stopped sleeping. I knew that I could no longer sign a 38 page bogus low-income yearly lease with a corporation that writes one-way agreements. I would need to move.

I've never felt safe or secure, so when I'm afraid of losing protection or shelter, I start planning out the rooms in my car. I called a friend. She knew a friend. He knew a land woman.

A week later, I looked at the apartment. It's small. It's doable. It will carry me through another year. I can sleep again. Now I watch through my window as neighbors move out. How many of us will they take to court.

This has been happening all along. It's not new....ask the buffalo. It just reached my level of entitlement. Do I worry about COVID? No, I worry about the future I see, growing old in this "free market" economy. I've known this from a distance – now I know it - close up.

Do I have Hope For The Future? Yes! Why?

Cuba used preventative homeopathy successfully, for the virus. It's inexpensive. It's gentle. It's easily administered. Why don't we know more about that?

"We don't believe you anymore." "We want an end to this American Empire."

That's what protestors are saying to neo-liberals, neo-fascists and corporate media. They are having an immune response to their own threatened lives. Why can't we feel that? Why can't we feel them?

Personally, I've warped myself out as much as I can to try to fit into this dry-ass reality. I don't want to go back to normal – whatever that was. At a BLM rally, I watched from a distance, as two people hugged each other for a very long time. They didn't have masks on. I didn't care. I wondered how that must have felt. I was so happy to be able to see them hold each other. Maybe they were gaining humoral herd immunity. Or maybe the tenderness I imagined there, just instantly healed both of them. I know that it can.

I'm not saying we should make friends with this virus. From my four week experience with it, it came from evil intent. But the bigger question is, Why is it here now? And why are we here now – with it? Could it be possible that we've built up too much immunity/resistance to the injustices that we live with every day? I'm not even close to having immunity/protection from housing worries.

Immunity means you don't need to have a response. You don't even need to notice. Maybe the virus is trying to tell us that we have been immune to injustice and heartlessness for too long. Maybe it's saying that we have become too immune/unaffected to the problems of the world, and now we all need to mount a response to these issues.

If, as I believe, we are in the process of seeing every stone overturned, so we can see what's underneath, we can no longer afford to not have a response.

For everything that has been hidden, to receive the healing light it deserves -- it needs a strong immune response. Look how hard it's trying to get our attention. How much louder does it have to get? We can't just kick that essence to the curb anymore.

What if the virus is trying to show us that we have had too much immunity/lack of response to racism, xenophobia, classicism, neoliberalism, homophobia, sexism, and warrior medicine. That in our levels of comfort, we've been able not to notice. We've been able to act as if it doesn't affect us – that we are immune/invulnerable to it.

So, yes, I am hopeful about our future. Just imagine, if the virus doesn't need to get our attention anymore, maybe it won't hang around.

Remember back in March.....when everyone went home?

Dolphins visited Venice

Oceans were clean

Skies were clear

Goats visited villages and kicked down walls because goats don't build walls!

It's monsoon season here in the desert. It's that time of afternoon when outdoor theatre happens and it's all free. And when it's over, Mother Nature has left us with that beautiful healing scent of Chaparral in the air. It's healing powers are magical....anticancer, antibacterial, anti-fungal and microbial, and anti-inflammatory. It's free. It's abundant. It's cleansing. It's healthcare for all. Who knew.....

Before

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Author: Gary Gardner

My pandemic story comes in several phases. I will not pay much attention to the chronology, especially in the beginning. I will get the sequence of events messed up because it was such an unreal blur at the time. Surreal. The safety and surety of my daily existence vanished.

March 13, 2020 was my 68th birthday. That birthday had served as a yardstick for me for several decades. My father, who had lived a much healthier lifestyle than I ever did, had died just before his 68th birthday. Cancer. I had always expected to die before him. I planned for decades how my family would be taken care of when I did. I always had plenty of life insurance, and, if I could just make it into my late fifties, my kids would be old enough to handle it. And now here I was, 68, my kids adults and (mostly) launched. I had come out, at least to myself, about 5 years earlier and was feeling much more comfortable about being gay. And, as my mother said, 2020 was a beautiful, symmetric year, bound to be a good one.

We had a small, very casual, low key lunch celebration at my ex-wife's house. Both kids were there, they made BLTs and we chatted and laughed and had a nice time. We joked about not hugging and about washing hands, but no one was overly concerned. We have not all been together since.

The next day my son came over to my house, and rather than go to a restaurant for breakfast as we usually did, we cooked up some eggs and toast and ate at home. Afterwards we went for a walk on the Loop path along the Rillito. We tried to keep some distance from others but didn't worry about it much.

I knew something was happening. The week before that party I had stopped going to classes at Osher LifeLong Learning Institute (known as OLLI) and had notified TIHAN that I could no longer volunteer in person, I went to the grocery store and bought 2 weeks of food to weather a quarantine. I had added CoronaVirus to the agenda of the Senior Pride Steering Committee for the first week of March and decided not to attend the Speakers meeting. My world had already started to contract.

Then things started getting canceled. The Festival of Books was the first that I remember. But quickly others and the closure of schools, bars, and restaurants. It felt unreal. Senior Pride canceled its live events for a month or two so this could blow over.

I followed the news from Iran and Italy, the daily totals, the lock downs and overwhelmed hospitals, the bodies piling up. That won't happen here. Not in the United States, I thought. We have better healthcare.

The stock market crashed and suddenly my comfortable retirement seemed in jeopardy. A feeling of financial insecurity is one of my biggest panic triggers. The market went down, and my anxiety went up.

First, I stopped seeing my Mom and my brother Lee, then my son Ben, then my daughter Klair. My covid bubble became my ex-wife Carrie, her Doctor's office, the pharmacy, the grocery store, and the Tobacco Barn. I spent many, many hours alone. No classes from Olli, no Senior Pride events, no volunteering at Tihan. Just me and the news. Depression set in and it became difficult to do anything. Simple things like sweeping the kitchen became too much. I sat in my chair in the living room and listened to NPR all day in a state of generalized anxiety and fear. I followed the numbers from Seattle and then New York. It was definitely happening here.

The only person I saw was Carrie for an hour or so every week or two. We would talk and play a few games of cards or dice.

Two weeks after my first quarantine shopping trip, I went shopping again. It felt scary to go out and be exposed to other people. I grabbed a cart and walked into the store. First, I came to the fresh fruits and vegetables. I realized with shock that it was almost empty. Empty shelves everywhere. Not even any potatoes. In a daze, I went up and down the aisles. No refried beans, no pasta, no soup. Every aisle was mostly empty. The frozen food section was still stocked so I bought a lot of frozen dinners. I came to the paper goods aisle and it was totally bare. Not only was there no toilet paper, there were no napkins, no paper towels, no tissues, and no paper plates. Nothing. I was very frightened. This is real. This is bad. This is scary.

I am not a very adventuresome person. I like to have a sense of normalcy and control. Change is scary. New things are scary. This pandemic took away any sense of normalcy, any sense of a stable foundation for my life. I didn't know what was going to happen or when. The lack of clear data and information was incredibly frustrating. All this contributed to my anxiety and sense of impending doom.

My mother asked me, via a text, how long it would be before we could resume our weekly outing for Mexican food and an hour or two of Quiddler. Probably July, I said, thinking I was being a little pessimistic.

I walked for an hour every morning along a little-used stretch of the Loop trail. Other than that, I stayed home

Then things started coming back. Olli started offering a few classes via Zoom. Senior Pride started Zoom meetings and events. My depression improved. I had moments of joy during a beautiful spring. I managed some personal growth through managing fear and change. I let go

of financial worries. I donated my stimulus check to the Food Bank and Senior Pride. I began to feel that I could wait this out, that the country could wait this out. That the damage so many people were suffering would be temporary. And I just endured, day by day.

Then George Floyd was murdered. An obvious, gratuitous, racist murder. The country erupted. The data had already begun to come out about the disproportionate numbers of black and brown people dying from Covid. Poor people, people who can't isolate. And now we are being forced to confront that they are not safe from our police. I know the facts and events. I know about the history of slavery and racism in our country. Now I was being forced to acknowledge the lived experience of the people affected by these events. The real and daily injustice of that experience.

I had to face my own internal racism, and it was a lot like facing my own homophobia. I was reminded of the experiences I had as a young man. I was a hippie in the late 60's and early 70's. I remember feeling like an outlaw and a target for the cops because I had long hair and smoked dope. This memory is a point of connection to their experience, not equivalence. I could, and did cut my hair, I could and did stop using illegal drugs. I got married and got a good job and lived a comfortable and safe life of straight white privilege. I could choose to be safe. I could choose to not be gay.

I wish I were optimistic about the movement making a lasting change. I am not. As a veteran of the sixties protest movements, I am skeptical of making big and lasting change. I hope I'm wrong.

Arizona opened up bars and restaurants and gyms and hair salons. But not for me. My hair hasn't been cut for months and it's driving me crazy. Few were wearing masks. I made only one change. I started meeting with family again. Outside and socially distant, but some contact at last.

And now Arizona is one of the states leading the country into a new peak of infections. I find that incredibly depressing and am disgusted by how we, as a country, have responded to this challenge. I remember a podcast I heard last year with a sociologist talking about tight and loose societies. A tight society places more value on following the rules and the welfare of the group over the individual. A loose society places more value on individual rights and not following the rules is often celebrated. It is the tight societies like Germany, South Korea, and Japan that are handling the pandemic well. It is the loose societies like Britain and the US which are struggling. I like living in a loose society, but it sucks during a pandemic

It is becoming apparent that those of us who are older and at-risk are in for a very long period of continued isolation. A year, maybe two, and then emerging into a new normal that is not what life used to be. I heard a guy on NPR talking about the future of restaurants use the

term “Before”. Not before Covid, just Before. I think soon we will all be saying Before. This is what schools were like Before. This is what movies and concerts were like Before. There used to be restaurants Before. I don’t know what the future will be like. But with a vaccine sometime next year that is at best 40 to 50% effective, risk calculation will become a way of life. Things will be different.

I am an introvert and a loner and so do not need people as much as some. But I have not touched another human being since early March. And I miss that.



Food For Thought

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Author: Penelope Starr

I stand on tippy toe to reach an extra-large bowl stored on the top shelf in my pantry. It's not something I use every day but it holds all the shredded cabbage needed to make a quart batch of sauerkraut. After thinly slicing a medium sized head of cabbage, I layer it in the bowl with teaspoons of salt and let it sit a spell.

Have you ever made sauerkraut? The traditional way, fermented and left to mellow for weeks, not shortcut sauerkraut soaked in vinegar. You can find the real stuff in the refrigerated case of your grocery store, usually near the sausages, but it's pricey. Cabbage is cheap. So is salt.

After the cabbage rests in the bowl for around an hour I return to massage the squeaky vegetable, breaking down cell walls, releasing its stored water to naturally produce the brine that will preserve it.

The fermentation process can be initiated by yeast as in bread, or by adding bacteria as in cheese-making. Fermented vegetables don't need anything except bacteria floating around in the air. Each batch is influenced by the atmosphere in my kitchen, my house and my neighborhood, making it adaptable and unique. Did the dog come in from the yard and do the shake dance? Has forest fire particulate matter reached my house yet? Who has been in the kitchen lately? All these things will subtly influence the outcome.

After the cabbage is reduced to a small pile, I stuff it into a mason jar, cover it loosely and let mother nature take over. Licking salt from my fingertips, I get a whiff of the fresh and sour smell clinging to my hands.

What lessons have I learned from this ancient craft, especially in times of a pandemic? Adaptability is a good start. The air I breathe has changed; what was a simple necessity of life has become something to fear. I worry about which one of the zillions of molecules comprising each inhalation could kill me. Staying home to avoid someone's exhale is my main strategy. I shop online. Each day brings new information that requires separating truth from lies. If I must leave the house, I go masked and obsess about social distancing. Adjusting to new habits has been a slow process but necessity has forced me, and everyone else, into a new normal.

Making sauerkraut is a fermentation process that uses the action of enzymes to preserve organic material. Cabbage is a sturdy vegetable and if stored properly it will last a long time. But if transformed to a fermented food it will last a whole lot longer. My transformation took a different form. I have morphed from a health-conscious frisky 75-year-old woman

into a “vulnerable older person,” a designation I would have rejected in March but I accept in July. Recognizing that my immune system naturally has limitations gives me the perspective I need to take precautions. It is a description, not a label. My hope is that by respecting my susceptibility by consciously quarantining I will last a whole lot longer.

Fermentation is known to reduce the possibility of eating harmful food. Those brave people who first dipped their fingers into a bowl of sour smelling food had to muster up a lot of courage to quell their fears. Fear is something that I experience daily. Will everyone in the grocery store be wearing a mask? Do I have to wash packages the UPS driver leaves on my doorstep? How much hand washing is enough? The idea of something invisible out to get me is extremely unnerving. Just like early ferment eaters I carefully experiment and trust the results won't kill me.

The physical act of making sauerkraut is predictable and comforting unlike the current climate of political and pandemic unrest. It requires some hand and wrist strength and cut-free fingers or else the salty brine will sting. It's easy to fall into the rhythm like the meditation of kneading bread. To me, food tastes better when I know I contributed to its making. The nurturer in me blossoms when I find creative ways to nourish myself and my partner. Luckily she appreciates my efforts, including sauerkraut.

The thing about sauerkraut is that people love it or hate it. There doesn't seem to be a middle ground and everyone has an opinion.

I think the same could be said about living through these Covid times. There seems to be no middle ground. Many people are suffering physical, financial and emotional hardships that scientists, educators, economists, and social workers, among many others, are working hard to alleviate. On the other hand, there are gun-toting mask-shunning bullies who endanger all of us. The harsh political divide brings out strong emotions from people on both sides.

My partner and I are lucky to be able to work from home and are privileged to be safe and comfortable, something that I am daily grateful and humbled by. Except for not being able to travel, our lives aren't that different than before. More Zoom, more time to make sauerkraut.

I know that there are bacteria that can make people sick or even kill them and that is not what I want in my sauerkraut. I harvest good bacteria to produce lacto-fermentation and enhance digestion. This gastrointestinal microbiota that forms my gut flora keeps me physically and, some say, mentally healthy. If bacteria can be good or bad for you, I wonder if the same is true of a virus? Are they all evil or are there any benefits? It seems that research on plants and animals indicates viruses are good, bad, neutral and symbiotic, a situation where there is mutual benefit.

We are still too close and there are so many unknowns but maybe, sometime in the future, scientists will understand how our society evolved because of the covid-19 intruder. I suppose it is possible that the virus could heal our tired old planet, just like sauerkraut heal can heal our complex guts.

After it's been on the counter for a week, I open the jar and poke a fork into the still crunchy but definitely changed cabbage. The first taste is always a surprise. What will this batch taste like? Does it need more time or is it ready to go into the refrigerator? The jar will last us about a month and then I'll go through the process again. How many more jars of sauerkraut will I make until it's safe to venture out again? And what will the world look like when I do?



“Dear Diary”

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Author: Donna J. Young

Saturday, March 14, 2020

Early AM

Fever. Need to go to ER. Call 911. EMTs come, 6 of them, two big trucks, blocking driveway and fire hydrant.

Why won't they take me to ER?. They just stand around mumbling to each other, and their walkie-talkies.

What should I do? Go back into the house? Why aren't they helping me? My son drives up, Parks on wrong side of street. HOA will be mad.

“There's no ambulances,” say the EMTs.

“Get in the car, Mom.” We drive away, I doze.

Why am I standing here? Where's my son going? Oh, yeah. Go inside. Doors heavy, bullying, But I bully back and we are inside.

We? Oh, my walker and me. Need to get to reception 500 miles across the room.

I say, “it's a UTI” but don't know WHY I said it.

A private room in ER? Paper gowns whisper, whisper, whisper, while techs draw blood, take readings, etc.

*I'm in **another** room? Big machines, bustling hidden people.*

Back to bed, so drowsy, drowsy.

“What hospital do you want to go to?” Firm, but gentle voice wakes me.

“Not Banner,” I blurt, thinking I'm being Sorted into a House.

“OK, if not Banner, where?” Persistent person.

How many hospitals are there? Surgery was at Northwestern last year. But that's so far away. How do I know thee, let me count the ways... Oh, yes, TMC is closer, but I didn't win anything this year.

“TMC,” I mumble.

“OK,” she says. “I'll see if they have a bed.” Whispers hurry away.

Must be meds in that bag hanging above me. I feel a bit better

Doze off again.

Two men swoop into the room, waking me, drop the rails, kick the bed, roll me out.

“Get my walker. I need my walker!”

It's right here, Ma'am.” his voice gentle through his sooper-doooper mask. I sink back to nothing dream.

Outside. Hot. Sun glare, People talking...

OH! I'm tilted into the ambulance.

“What time is it? Finally conscious enough to inquire.

“It’s about 5 pm, ma’am.”

5 pm? I got to ER at 8 am. Where’d the day go?

Techs quiz me with name, address...I quiz back: “Where’d the wreck happen?”

No available ambulances must mean a big wreck.

“Oh, there’s no wreck. It’s the virus. We been running all day.”

Virus? “You mean it’s that serious?”

“Yeah, this is the first non-virus run we’ve had today.”

After years of rumbling, bumping, stopping, lurching by the ambulance, we arrive and are directed to an unfamiliar entrance. I’m offloaded, like so many pallets of toilet paper, pushed through miles of corridors.

Ceiling lights fly by, nauseating me. I close my eyes and vibrate to the wheels’ thumpty thumpty thump.

I’m shoved into a room, hooked up to cables, cords, IVs, monitors, finger clips so fast, I hardly have time to see the mysterious gowned, gloved, and masked entities. Then everyone disappears in another whisper of paper gowns.

It seems an hour, probably not, before a another walking paper gown slings a loaded plastic hospital “swag bag” in the direction of my bedside table.

More alert now, I survey my new residence. Ground floor, huge picture window, overlooking a manicured desert garden.

Sparse furnishings, no visitor’s chair and my walker parked in a faraway corner.

Why am I so drowsy?

Drifting, slowly somewhere, somewhen.

Awakened to the presence of two tall, thin, specters

Standing well away from the foot of my bed, paper booties, surgical gowns, gloves, masks, and paper beanie hats hiding all but their eyes from me.

“I’m Doctor Simba,” the woman introduces herself. “I’ll look after you while you’re here.”

“I’m Doctor Gherezghiher, your urologist, and I’ll be operating on you tomorrow. We’ll get you into surgery about 9 am, put in the stint, then see how things go. Any questions?”

“No, I’ve been through this before. I know what’s coming. But I need my walker nearer.”

Dr. Gherezghiher fetches it and parks it right by the corner of the bed, within reach.

Relief. I’m no longer a prisoner of the room.

They float from the room more silent than the others. True specters.

I wonder when dinner will come. Haven’t eaten all day. Getting hungry. I call the operator and ask about dinner. “Oh, just call the kitchen and tell them what you want. It’s all in the pamphlet there.” I reach for the “swag bag” and pull out a brochure.

I don’t see any time listed when food would be brought to the floor, no daily menu. This looks more like a restaurant menu, but there’s no prices. I call down and order a ham sandwich with cheddar cheese and mayo. I wonder if I have to pay for it now, or will it be added to my bill? Either way, hope it’s here soon.

And there it was. And then it's gone, inside of me. M-m-m-m, good.
And sleep shuttles me off to that safe non-world again.

Sunday, March 15, 2020

Early

Indistinct paper-clad people bustling about the room, affixing needles in my arm and wrist, clipping that thing on my finger, strapping the blood pressure torture device on my arm, someone taking my socks off my feet, dressing me in a paper gown, heaving me onto the gurney. And disappearing as quickly as they'd come.

Getting super drowsy. Lights out, folks.

Later

Back in my room, surgery done. Specters staring at me to see if I still breathe. Nod, satisfied. Float out together.

I alternate between sleep and wake, mostly sleep. I am required to call for escort to go to the bathroom two steps from my bed. Otherwise, no one comes into the room. The day passes in less of a haze than the previous two days; my temperature is coming down. Good sign. I forget to eat, again.

Monday, March 16, 2020

Monday morning Dr. Gherezghiher dismisses me, but I must check in with my Primary Care Doctor in the next 48 hours. He seems well pleased with his work. I am, too.

I am told by yet another faceless, gowned, entity to dress and find someone who can come get me, but they can't come in the building, just to curb. Worker bees hidden in paper gowns, masks, gloves, booties, come to help separate me from my IV, blood pressure monitor, oxygen clip, etc. I call my son. He's not happy, but he agrees to pick me up after work. I relay the information to the paper person pushing my wheelchair at a gallop, while I drive my walker ahead of me, like at the airport.

I spend many hours just sitting in my assigned chair in a big, glass-walled, 18-chair waiting room. Later, another person is brought into the enormous room and parked diagonally as far as possible away from me.

My arms are badly bruised. They had tried three different sites to insert a needle for an injection, but failed. Those attempts turned black and blue within minutes. Still waiting.

A silent, gowned, gloved, masked, genderless person wheels me through the corridors, the empty corridors, to a door to the outside. My son sits in his car. I get into the front seat and lay my head on the window. He says nothing. I say nothing. He's wearing a mask.

My bruises amaze me. Only after I get the bills for this little holiday excursion, do I realize I have been given high-powered blood thinners, tranquilizers, "sooper dooper" pain killers, antacids, anti-convulsives, and a host of other "preventative" medications, none of which I normally use.

Ducey recommends canceling groups of more than ten people today.

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

I sleep. I watch crazy people on TV buy truckloads of toilet paper, scream at reporters, interested bystanders, any who question their greed.

Suddenly, it hits me...

I have been near the front lines of the fight against Covid-19 (a reality so new, many don't believe it.) I have seen the hurried, harried actions of those living the reality of the pandemic, (about which we know nothing) as they care for the REALLY sick, and yet, interrupting those hurried, harried lives, to deal with the ordinary problems of ordinary people. I am humbled. I am grateful.

I am worried.

It's just starting.



From the Inside Out

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Author: Kermie Wohlenhaus

This tragic time of the COVID pandemic has been an odd gift in many ways - social distancing, taking the pressure off, stopping busy, forcing early retirement and having the time to finish my book *Creating a Private Writer's Retreat*. I give a writer's retreat workshop to writers and I love watching the participants faces light up with the realization that they too could have solo writer's retreats within their hectic lives and budgets.

Having taken many private writer's retreats myself, teaching the workshop and writing this book has helped me to look upon this COVID time as a very looong writer's retreat. I now have the time and space to write to my heart's desire, as long as I don't catch the virus and die a suffocating death. Then there is that . . .

As with most writer's retreats, inner thoughts, feelings, fears and lurking negative self-talk can emerge. With this particular COVID retreat, not only is there fear of illness, but many of us are self-isolating at home for days on end. For me, my mind did need the rest from the old daily routine, but I became very aware of a circus full of monkeys in my mind running amuck. Wild monkey mind. I needed to grab each one, sit down and listen to what they had to say. Was it valid, true, and where did those thoughts and feelings come from anyway?

I wrote those monkey voices down, shared them with trusted friends and advisors and turned them over to the Universe. I torched my monkey voice writings in my burning bowl on my back porch overlooking the smoldering sacred Mt Lemmon. Our mountain was also purging, and I stood in solidarity with her as she and I smudged, clearing our undergrowth that had accumulated up to this point.

These racing unruly thoughts didn't appear all at once, but gradually began to show themselves. At the beginning of this pandemic siege, I was busy preparing for the shut-down, getting groceries, updating my will, buying medicine, filing taxes, completing license renewals, finishing house projects, and cleaning up the yard. I painted the house, recovered the roof, courageously sat through dental work, and revised my financial plan that got strapped due to decreased income and began to look for affordable housing. But once this immediate preparation was completed and the manuscript sent to the editor, I sat down and said those frightful words, "Now What?" Which opened the door wide for the monkeys to enter one by one.

Like Gremlins they stared me in the face, “Now you have to deal with us”, they said. My niggles, old worn out beliefs, feelings, triggers started bouncing around when there was not much distraction. They were taking turns at my feet, crawling up my leg and into my head, rolling around the center ring and it all began with the questions of self-worth.

What gives me value now that I am retired? Am I worthwhile and what do I have to offer? Leaving a lifetime career where I was of service to patients, a team of co-workers and a solid company, now where is my service? What is my purpose and how can I contribute to the world? I took a long and hard look at my gifts, passions, intentions and most importantly, where was the path the Universe was leading me? I was still in the first dawn light, blinding me so I couldn't make out my next step easily. I knew it was a new day, but which way to go?

This was followed with the question of, “If I don't work for money anymore, what do I work for?” Taking money out of the equation, at least temporarily, due to risk of the virus, what was work? Only to give money and value to my life? What is the deeper root of all work and effort, what gets me up in the morning, what passion will move me out from my cozy and warm bed? Writing does, but is there something more?

Right on the heels of this was the question, “What do I want to do with the rest of my life?” Travel emerged, visions of seeing the country and world. But there are fewer choices each day as travel shuts down and danger of viral exposure increases. So, I had to look at what resources I did have and began to give them attention and time. I fixed my car's air conditioning from lukewarm to arctic blast, I updated the tires, changed the oil, looked for leaks, bubbly hoses, cracked belts. I now had a comfortable mobile writer's retreat isolation pod instead of a means to go to work. I patted its dashboard and asked if it was ready for the adventure? It seemed that my vehicle was itching for the open road to try out its new tires and A/C.

In years past, to escape the Tucson summer heat, I would go up Mt Lemmon. But this year the mountain range was burning and closed to visitors and I needed to find alternatives. I begin to go on day trips around the area, exploring what was within a few hour's drive. I stayed outside or in the car to write and be safe. These little writing retreat trips provided the healing power of nature and gave me a bit of normalcy.

Then regret stepped forward. I had to explore why. What is it I have regretted that I didn't do but still could? I wished I had learned Spanish in High School instead of my immigrant family's German which I have never used since they all died years before. I live in the southwest where many people speak fluent Spanish, yet I haven't had or taken the time to learn. I downloaded Spanish games for children, instruction CDs for my car and watched Spanish YouTube videos. Yesterday, I was amazed as I could read a Spanish billboard by my house. I knew exactly what it said. What? I never knew how to read Spanish before these last 3 months. It just crept up on me. Wow, this really is working.

I also regretted that I never read as many books, magazines and comics which was available to me as a child. All that time I had on my hands, but I got hooked on TV instead. The addiction of media got me early. Even though I loved books, TV was easier and more accessible - just turn it on and instant entertainment. So, I got out my Kindle, Library card, organized the books I did have in new recycled bookshelves and began to read.

I found I wanted to create art again as well. I used to paint murals over 30 years ago and made a meager living on my art. But the lull of a steady paycheck, benefits and security took me down a different yet rewarding career path. Now I am retired from my career what do I want to do with my art? Writing books has been my creative outlet. I have printed Zines and cartoons combining art and writing. I want to draw better and color more, dabble in tech art. I learned to use the Procreate app on my iPad for digital drawings and am amazed at how easy it is to send art via the internet now.

Then the tragedy of George Floyd's death by the hands of police occurred, the outrage made me look at my own fear and insecurity in this world as a woman, lesbian, and senior. I wanted to learn more about white privilege and racism, internal homophobia, ageism, racism, misogyny. I checked out library books and DVDs by black women authors, Maya Angelo, Toni Morrison and others - books, poems and novels. I was able to explore through these writer's eyes their wisdom and strength to find and assist me in this journey.

I explored all this as I deal with isolation, loneliness, sloth, quarantine fatigue, and just plain overwhelm and other times, underwhelm. I have to search and redefine passion again. There are times I have to will myself into good orderly direction, to get a project completed, to exercise, to eat well, to connect with friends, write daily, and open that Spanish book.

I need to stay in gratitude for what I do have: a house, health, outdoor living space, my girlfriend, comfortable chairs, meditation, friendly neighbors, 3 feral cats who have adopted my back yard, Be Kind Tucson, old and new friends, a laptop, air conditioning and of course writing.

What I need each day is different and as each day progresses, I develop a comfortable, yet flexible routine built on current goals and visions for my new life.

I don't want to waste time waiting. Waiting for a vaccine, waiting for a cure, waiting for everything to open up, to go back to the old routine. I don't want to wait for a new president nor continue to complain about the one we have. I need to take action, to live in the life I want to live now and to use all this energy and chaos of the world we live in as springboards.

I have stopped looking back and have turn forward. This is exactly what I have found with this looong COVID writer's retreat. There are times, though, when I want to stop, to go back to where we came from, but I have to move forward, go within, to risk, push through all blocks.

For when I do, the good stuff happens. My writing and life loosen up and somehow transmutes into a joyful experience and I find passion again. This is how I get through, complete goals, keep somewhat sane, grow and strengthen my intentions. I suppose this is how we all evolve – always from the inside out.

COVID-19 YOU DEVIL YOU

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Author: Lena Rothman

It's a good thing I know how to do "this." I really don't. What I mean by "this" is the isolation. I spent a number of years in semi-isolation having MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity). I think I can speak for others that have MCS in that there's such irony, a bit of satisfaction and humor, sad humor in watching the whole population go nuts over wearing masks. You see, most people with MCS have worn masks out in public for the past 30 plus years. We were mistakenly thought of as being germ phobic. And here we are, for real being germ terrified. I had long ago gotten over my feelings of shame and embarrassment. I had occasionally worn a mask to go food shopping. Trying to avoid people's perfumes, colognes, laundry detergent, fabric softener smells. Food shopping and being out in public was an ordeal sometimes causing dizziness, nausea, headaches, swollen glands, brain fog, flu symptoms, and digestive symptoms. Now sometimes when I shop, I kinda delight in being "same".

I have also on occasion wanted to laugh at the irony. Of course, now that everyone, except Corona Trump, has to wear a mask, they miss out on those feelings of embarrassment and shame. It's just a minor satisfaction I feel. I know it's not nice, but not all feelings are nice. Now, I could think that I blend in. That reminds me of the movie "My Cousin Vinny" where Marisa Tomei is making fun of her Italian NY boyfriend Vinny when they're down South and she sarcastically says to Vinny "Yeah, Vinny, Right! You blend!" and rolls her eyes.

One surprising and amazing thing this virus gave me was the ability to finally write my memoir. It made me sit still for 2-3 hours every morning on my swing and write. Of course it wasn't only the virus that made it happen, but it gave me the time to sit still and not run off to lunches, dinners, movies, political rallies or other avoidances.

COVID has made me become so aware of my fear of "lack of", especially toilet paper. I mean, there aren't any tree leaves out here in the desert! It's funny but it wasn't funny when there were shortages. I bought a bidet. I really loved it. Unfortunately I can't use it after attaching it because the pipes in my house are leaching arsenic and I started getting pimples on my ass.

I believe I've been in "shock and awe" since the election of Gruppenfuhrer and it's not shocking to me that now the world has to deal with a lethal virus. A virus that can wipe out millions. I liken that to the non-human alien in the white house. IQ 45 + Covid 19 = Lethal.

The one bright light during this period is the movement for Black Lives. There's hope, there's imagination, there's a movement towards the Light, towards doing things differently. There's a reckoning. The young people are demanding it and they will not settle. It's a crack in the fabric we call "perfect". Yes, perfect life for white people and the wealthy. There's also loss, murder, anger and rage.

Maybe this virus will make us more human? The majority of people in the US have had the privilege of being able bodied. I find it ironic.

I feel like a child everyday knowing I have very little control except for staying safe and isolated. I am very lucky to have that.

So, in a sense I'd say I'm in a state of wonder, sadness, hope and fatality all swimming around at the same time. Corona! You shiny, slimy bearer of suffering and death .

Cologne, fabric softener, myriad chemicals that kill us too. We suffer no less. We'll never get rid of the chemicals. Will we get rid of Corona?

One is denied One is not known

Diseases of a Death Culture, a Patriarchal Culture on Earth

From the US to Brazil to England, to China, Italy and Germany around the world

Maybe Mother Nature is forcing us to look at her but only some of us see her

I'm trying to make sense out of no sense.

Dear Mother and Daddy

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Author: Joyce Bolinger

You've been gone for too many years, but now, especially, I wish I could talk with you. I wish I could ask—how did you cope with so many long years of fear and anxiety living through the Depression and, then, World War?

How did it feel as a young man and woman trying to find your first jobs just as the Depression hit in full force? Daddy, you gave up on your dream of studying mathematics. You needed to support your parents on their small Missouri farm where they had retired. Your father, a country doctor in the hardscrabble Ozarks, was often paid by his patients in grain or game, not money to put away for hard times.

Mother, you lived in a rooming house and went door to door trying to sell encyclopedias until you got a job teaching first grade in Gulfport, Mississippi.

Did you both look back on what seemed then like idyllic childhoods and feel that they were unreal and so distant?

Did you fear, like I do now, that the world you knew as predictable only a few months before is gone? Forever. And, that the start of the year seems like ages ago although it is only months.

There is little comfort in knowing that you went on to live long lives because I know the scars that were left on you.

How could I describe to you what has been happening to my world?

Now, funeral homes call for coolers because they lack enough room for bodies and the gun store down the street is sold out every time a new shipment arrives. My friend in New York advises me to fill a bag with cash in case the ATMs stop working and the bank doors close. And the news leads every night with the death count.

I look in the mirror and what is reflected is worry and unruly hair. When I was young and loved Dorothy Parker, Albert Camus and James Dean, I knew then to live with consciousness that every day could be the last and everyone dies alone.

Now as I am nearer and nearer the age when you both died, I sort through my memories of what you told me about how you lived during World War. I have a couple of food ration coupons that you saved. Were they saved as back up because there was always worry that there wouldn't be food? I know, Daddy, you needed to drive to work and it was a constant fear that your car would run out of gas because that, too, was rationed.

Now, in my final years, there are no bearings to help navigate the future. But, of course, there never were really. It is only a question of whether I will ever know what happens after this.

I imagine that if you were here, we would share a laugh.

And now I feel that I have run out of gas. It is a strange kind of calm.

love, MJ



Seeing 2020

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Author: Cat Belue

As I packed up my office and loaded the printer, monitor, laptop, and everything I would need to weather the next couple of weeks working from home, I couldn't fight back the feeling of panic rising in my chest. I wanted to hurry, to run, it felt like a tornado was bearing down on me. I had shopped a few days prior, stunned to see the carnage of empty shelves, grabbing what I could. Now it was St Patty's day and Tucson was closing at 8 pm. I had always loved a green beer but everything suddenly seemed tainted and dirty. I was still sick, had been the whole month. At one point I seemed to get better only to be crushed by a second wave. There were no Covid tests then and I was negative for both flu types. It got bad enough that I talked to my little brother about some end of life issues, just in case. Now everything was shutting down and I just wanted to be home.

It was a beautiful spring if you didn't watch the news or notice that you never saw much more than your own reflection. My mood swung about like an old tire suspended from a tree. Some days I felt incredible hope, others I could barely function. For the next few weeks, I felt like I was running late to get nowhere. The scheduled return date for work came and went as the crisis played out in real-time. I spent days waiting to hear some bit of news that would help it all make sense. Everything suddenly felt futile, empty, and hopeless. Any security I ever thought existed in government was ripped away. There were no big 'National Stockpiles'. No sense of urgency or plans to get PPE and ventilators to NY and other hard-hit areas. Testing was abysmal at best. It was becoming clear, there was no cavalry coming to save us and with growing awareness, I realized there never had been. It was the curtain in the Wizard of Oz or the red pill from The Matrix moment of realization. It was all a house of cards, lies built upon lies. The façade was being stripped away. And that was when I began to have a little glimmer of hope. I had long since known that the system would never change on its own. Maybe this pandemic would last long enough to break the system and force change.

By early April the number of souls lost was already so far beyond what I believed it could be when it all started. Back then the idea of tens of thousands dying seemed inconceivable. Everything felt fuzzy on the edges like I was being filmed on some ancient TV show where I would learn later it was all a joke. But it was real, a train bearing down with no signs of slowing. On April 17th it felt like that train hit me full on when I had to say good-bye to my little dog friend Lexi. She was 15 ½ years young, rarely spotted without a toy in her mouth. For most of her life, I had thrown for her for at least an hour every day. I loved it as much as she did. That little girl played up until the end, a legacy I hope to duplicate. It's so strange to me that

the events in life that should be crystal clear are often the most surreal. It was as though the extreme stress allowed me to lift out from my little earth body to join a much broader and loving presence in order to deal with the pain. Then when I came back to my gravity strapped life it all seemed like it happened far away and dream-like. I am so thankful the virus had allowed me to work from home and share that last month with Lexi and her sister GG. I was acutely aware that Lexi would leave me one day but no preparation is ever enough. She was only 10 pounds but she took up so much space. GG and I were lost, grieving together, and missing our little buddy.

Then came May 25th. It was 8 minutes and 46 seconds that took the life of George Floyd but birthed a renewed fire into the Black Lives Matter movement. We all witnessed the brutal murder perpetrated by those that are sworn to protect and serve. It was truly shocking. Suddenly police brutality and racism overtook the airwaves. We watched protests happening globally, as people of all colors and ages joined in the outrage. I learned about things like the Black Wall Street of Greenwood and Juneteenth that somehow I had never even heard of. How could that be? I've got a college education and for God's sake I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. Yet I had never been taught about all the atrocities going on literally right down the street. I felt betrayed. I had been spoon-fed bits of racism and white superiority my entire childhood and it had taken me years to digest and rebuke that poison. Now I was seeing the ugly truth of what those inequities and glaring white privilege had done to people of color and it made me sick. As the protests grew a forest fire on Mt. Lemmon had been ignited by lightning. And quietly the pandemic and the mountain continued to burn and spread in the background.

When I was growing up my mom was obsessed with the end of the world. I had come to terms with my mortality by my teenage years. To me, the most upsetting thing about dying was missing out on what was going to happen next. I hated the idea of leaving before the 'show' was over. It's July now and the number of deaths due to Covid are approaching 150,000. I look back at all the missed opportunities our inept government made dating back to January. So many lives lost due to greed, ignorance and for political gain. The economy is tanked, schools don't know how to safely re-open and there is no guidance from the White House. And while most people willingly wear masks to protect their neighbors, for some it is too much of an imposition, a sad commentary on how divided we have all become.

But I believe the human spirit remains resolute. All over the US people are joining forces and saying, "No More!" Moms and dads and veterans stand between Black protestors and the paramilitary thugs sent in to silence the uprising. Finally, the hatred sewn into the Confederate flag is being unraveled and purged. And in the falling monuments of traitors, I hear the sound of change coming around. Mom is gone now and I wonder what she would have thought about all this. To me, I've got a front-row seat, and if this is the end of this world, well good. Because

maybe we can finally realize what is really important and what needs to be cast aside. Then perhaps the New World will be a just and fair place for all of us, not just the rich, the privileged, and the white.

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