

Please consider my short piece (excerpts from two separate Sawdust Stories columns on keeping a daily Covid journal for a year).

Best,

Patti

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History as It Happens

For over a year, my handwritten Covid journal captured some mundane aspect of the day: what I made for supper or which friends and kids beamed into our kitchen to video-chat or who won the card games my husband and I played. A part of me appreciated these quiet days with Bruce. We may never have this much time together again. Garrison Keillor captures how “a joy at the heart of the lockdown . . . is the daily reassurance that you married the right person.” We dance to our apocalypse playlist: “Make the World Go Away” and “You Ain’t a-Goin’ Nowhere.”

Ironically, in my pandemic-inspired journal, I rarely mention the coronavirus, except when I have unpaid furlough days or to occasionally report the number of virus-related deaths in the US and in June the first death in the Chippewa Valley. It will be many months before I document the first two casualties I know: beloved high school teacher, Warren Bowe, who died after weeks in the hospital and my former co-worker, Paul Frenette, who died before he could get there. They were both just a few years older than me.

The school year begins: Twenty of my first-year students six feet apart in a room built for 50, all of us in Blugold masks. I’m wearing a 4-inch photo button of myself as if to announce, “Look how big I can smile if only you could see me.”

I’m rereading poet Jack Gilbert when I find this: “We think of lifetimes as mostly the exceptional and sorrows . . . The uncommon parts. But the best is often when nothing is happening.” Welcome to our world. We got through this winter the way we always did: hunkered down with reading materials and multiple remotes. While my Facebook friends take up piano or purge every closet or bake so much sourdough they beg for people to take bread off their hands, I transition from 2020 articles like “6 Ways to Turn Self Isolation into Self Improvement” to 2021’s “Stop Trying to be Productive.”

In April, I go to Leinie Lodge. Vaccinated? Then come celebrate with beer. Genius marketing, “Beer and Shots.” Bruce and I are two of the first 1867 people who sign up online. The number reflects the year Leinenkugel’s began brewing. Also genius.

One-hundred years from now, if Leinenkugel’s Brewing Company commemorates the end of this pandemic, how quaint it will seem to future Chippewa Valley residents—perhaps arriving on their hovercrafts—that in 2021 people toasted their vaccinations with a pint of Leinie’s. But today I know: I am a witness to history. We show our vaccination certificates, take off our masks and drink the best kind of beer: Chippewa-made, ice cold, and free.

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