

## **I Watch; I Wait; I Try Not to Become a Statistic**

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I finish the daily online New York Times mini-crossword in 3 minutes, 42 seconds. I get faster as the pandemic continues.

I take the dog for a walk, meandering the series of trails that line the natural part of Milwaukee's Kinnickinnic River. I walk as fast as I can, going uphill as often as possible. I tell myself I can outrun Covid-19 with my good health.

After the walk, I stretch with an online yoga class. My husband shouts into the basement, "Have you seen the dog?"

"She's on the sofa in the living room," I yell back, rolling my eyes. I know he just walked past her.

In this life of self-quarantine, I still find many new opportunities. I interrupt some of my routine by driving to Walmart for my online order. It waits in blue plastic bins at #8 in the pick-up zone. The young female associate, with nail polish in corporate colors of yellow and blue, places the filled plastic bags into the trunk of my car. Normally, I prefer cloth bags.

This isn't normal — not for anyone.

I hear my mobile pinging more often than before and it interrupts my newly found quiet. Carol, a former work colleague, still living in her beloved New York City, writes, "I am hunkering down...."

Robert, who owns a number of tap-taps, public transportation vehicles in Haiti's capital city, texts, "There is a slowing of work, but not a complete shutdown."

And Fatima, who is a health promoter in the camps in Lesbos, Greece, tells me on WhatsApp, the refugee camps of people, mostly from Afghanistan and Syria, are overcrowded and unhygienic. "They only receive water for two hours each day," she says. "The people live in un-heated tents and stand in line, waiting for food."

At home, my husband and I put on blue plastic gloves, open the trunk of the car, and use wipes to disinfect each of the objects, placing them into my laundered cloth bags to go inside. When I struggle to get the gloves off, he advises me how to take off the handwear hygienically. Frustrated, I pull them off without proper protocol and throw them into the trash.

Inside, I wash and rewash my hands. I gargle with salt water twice each day. I have no idea if this protects me. A slight post-nasal drip, which has bothered me for some days, does not register a fever or cough. I take my temperature often.

In the afternoon, I wash our bed linens. I wipe down the light switch covers, the doorknobs, the phones, the computers.

I have downtime. I turn, again, to my cellphone. A friend's Facebook account posts a new recipe for his lentils that "won't cook themselves." A video from Ghana shows a man on the golf links, wearing full protective gear. And an associate messages from Portugal a photo of seed packets; she's determined to plant this spring.

I ask Carol what she does for meals. NYC is close to its peak of infected citizens. "I'm using the old-fashioned way," she messages back. "I order in!"

"We use chlorinated water to sterilize," Robert writes. Some people take some measures, "but many people do not seem to care." Haiti has few medical facilities. The director of one of the major hospitals was kidnapped recently. In response, the staff refused to take in new patients.

Fatima tells me her organization has a new protocol. They set up four clinical spaces, assigning the first two to pregnant women and children with fevers and the second two to pregnant women and children without. She was called in to translate from Farsi to English for the doctors on two separate occasions. She was not given a mask.

Social media continues to notify me of friends celebrating birthdays, tweets from colleagues I haven't spoken to in years, photos of people showing good

neighborliness. Here, there is a home remedy for the virus; there, a list of things to do to have fun.

I tell my husband, again, that the dog has not been fed. “I heard you the first time,” he says.

He and I adopted a daily ritual to fix something on our house that needs repair. Yesterday, we put up new blinds, which sat in the closet for a month. Today, we prepare for tomorrow — to paint our bedroom.

At 5:30, we watch the nightly news with a drink in hand — his bourbon; mine, white wine. What does Dr. Fauci have to say today? As Wuhan’s numbers of sick begin to drop, California’s slide up. Wave upon wave of this tsunami engulfs the world. We wait for it.

Carol and I found each other through Facebook after 30 years, but like so many former friends, we still haven’t spoken. I ask her in today’s exchange, “Do you have time to talk by the old-fashioned method — the phone?” She does not answer. Should I worry about our friendship or her health?

Robert texts that the open-air markets are open. “Some of our drivers took a risk to get on the street to make a bit of money,” he says. “We have been obliged to lay off the mechanics.”

Fatima reminds me. Tomorrow is her last day working for the medical nongovernmental organization. Her supervisor, whom she does not think likes her, didn’t renew her contract. There is no one to fill her position; her supervisor asked her to volunteer until they find someone. Fatima will not have any health insurance when she is unemployed. There is too much risk and no reward. “I will say no,” she says.

My husband makes us a light supper from our frozen-food stash. We sit thinking about our limitations — little to do except keep connected, share what we have. Afterward, we watch the new Netflix series, *Unorthodox*. We agree the writing and acting are excellent.

We say, “Goodnight, I love you,” kiss one another lightly, and head to separate bedrooms to ensure we each get a good night’s sleep.

I lie in bed — empty, confused, hoping.

The End

