

## **PLAGUE JOURNAL MARCH 11-MAY 18, 2020**

### **Wednesday, March 11:**

The first reported Coronavirus related death was declared on February 29<sup>th</sup> in the State of Washington, but later it was found that actually the first American Coronavirus death occurred February 6<sup>th</sup> in Santa Clara County, California,<sup>1</sup> and the source of the woman's infection is thought to have been within her community rather than connected to China.<sup>2</sup> The evening of March 10, 2020 was when California's governor Gavin Newsom declared a shelter-in-place order. This was when all of the big changes started happening at once.

The first big change for me was waking up to an email from Berkeley City College, where I had been taking a course on Adobe InDesign, saying that face to face courses were cancelled for the rest of the week.

I received an email from the Griot Institute at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, that a speaking engagement was cancelled as all of their courses were going remote. They offered to do the speaking engagement via Zoom, but later, that plan fell through. The plan had been for us to go on to New York City from Lewisburg, where my father and mother were going to audition actors for his new play about the New York art world, but those plans got cancelled as well. We had been planning that trip since March 25, 2019.

We were also supposed to go on a day trip to Fresno for a speaking engagement Friday, March 13<sup>th</sup>. Our correspondent there emailed me shortly after the Griot Institute did, saying that the university wasn't allowing speaking engagements from non-local people on campus, and that they wanted to do the event via Zoom.

I spent the better part of the day cancelling flights, train tickets and hotel rooms. All of the reservation agents were very helpful and pleasant, which made the extreme disappointment that I was feeling subside a little. American Airlines told me that I would get credit towards purchasing another ticket as long as I purchased it by January 16, 2021. The way predictions of the future sound, I have a feeling we will be out of that money.

### **Thursday, March 12-Sunday, March 15:**

I woke up the next morning feeling the sadness and disappointment from the big trip East being cancelled.

Another email came from Berkeley City College saying that Spring break was moved from April 13-19 to March 16-22. Beyond that, there was no telling what would happen.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.axios.com/first-us-coronavirus-death-earlier-autopsy-dbc72f86-30ed-47e5-b5d8-6811643f9853.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/26/health/coronavirus-cdc-usa.html>

That Saturday I got an email from the downtown Berkeley Y saying that it would be closed from March 15th-March 18th. My physical therapist suggested that I exercise outside. We went to Golden Bear Track and the Emeryville Marina, but people were not practicing the social distancing rule. They would take up the entire path, walking or running in groups or riding their bikes. We decided it was best to just walk around our neighborhood, and we still do, at least every other day. Neighborhood people, for the most part, are practicing social distancing, except for the newer gentrifiers running or walking their dogs, sometimes without masks, but here we have the option to go out into the street to create the six feet of separation, without worry, because there are so few cars on the road.

That Saturday our household cleaning routine changed. Besides doing the dishes, dusting, vacuuming and laundry we now wipe down the doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, faucets, sinks, kitchen counters, remotes, telephones and electronics.

That Sunday I learned that my aunt and uncle's 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration that was scheduled for June 12th-14th in Santa Fe, New Mexico was also cancelled. We were refunded for our room at the Fort Marcy Hotel, but Southwest would only give us credit for our tickets. We have to fly by February 7, 2021. I have a feeling we will be out of that money too.

#### **The Week of Sunday, March 15<sup>th</sup>:**

I began to think about what the next steps should be for me, for how I organize my time, now that everything was changing rapidly. That Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, I decided to buy a new computer, a 16 inch MacBook Pro. I had been saving up for one for a few years, and now that it was confirmed that my InDesign course was going to be online starting April 6<sup>th</sup>, I had to be able to download the Adobe software at home, because it was necessary to complete the course assignments. My desktop computer is eight years old and wouldn't support the current software. My goal is to be able to format programs, posters and web sites, enhance photos and create new artworks with this technology. I got a call the next day from my physical therapist saying that now our sessions would be going remote because they were telling people to stay away from the hospital unless they have COVID symptoms. This would happen with my other doctors as well.

#### **Monday, March 23- Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup>:**

Monday was the day we were to leave for the East Coast. Instead, I had meetings with my professor, who continued to reach us via email to update on what was going on with the course, i.e. classes via Zoom, getting the Adobe Creative Cloud suite for free on our home computers up until the end of the semester and what changes he was making to our assignments.

On March 27<sup>th</sup> I received an email from the Bellagio Center Residency Program in Lake Como, Italy that they were delaying their final decision on residency candidates. I had applied for the residency in November. I would have heard as to whether or not I would be going to Italy by the end of April. It was a huge disappointment. The Lombardy region was the part of Italy that was affected the most by COVID-19.

My 16 inch MacBook Pro came in the mail on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, just in time for class to resume, as did the wireless keyboard and mouse I bought to increase the computer's ergonomics. I spent April 2<sup>nd</sup>-April 7<sup>th</sup> getting the computer set up, backing up the hardware and software on an external hard drive and putting my important files on its desktop for easy access.

On April 9<sup>th</sup>, I got a message from Berkeley City College saying Summer 2020 courses were going to be remote.

We also got a treadmill and a rowing machine this week because on March 18<sup>th</sup> we got an email from the Y saying that it would be closed indefinitely. They came on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. I use the treadmill after dinner, which has been part of my physical therapy rehabilitation work out for over a year now, except now I can do it at home, rather than the Y. If some aspects of shelter in place remain advisable for the next two years or so, which sounds likely, at least we have this equipment to keep ourselves patched together physically.

#### **Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>-Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup>:**

The evening of April 16, 2020 six Bay Area counties made it mandatory that everyone wear a mask in public. We went shopping at Safeway in the Rockridge section of Oakland on April 20<sup>th</sup>. Safeway's security guards, who are mainly Black, told one young woman (a Black woman) that she couldn't enter the store unless she had a mask on. However, I saw a young White couple walking around the store with no masks. Most of the other shoppers had a mask on.

The chronic insomnia lingered. My right eye was twitching a lot. I had nonstop dreams, like taking an elevator at a fictitious hospital to see my doctor. The elevator door opens to a floor full of COVID-19 patients on respirators. Doctors and nurses are suited up in surgical gear. Some have those long q-tips they use to shove up people's noses to test them for infection. Since my trips have been cancelled I had a recurring dream about arriving at JFK on an American Airlines flight from SFO. To get to baggage claim we take the underground tunnel from Concourse C to Concourse B at Terminal 8 like in real life, but instead of it being dull looking like in real life, it is lit up in LED lights and has stores like Guess and Nike in it. It is crowded and a flash mob dance is going on. The dream concludes with us getting into a Tel Aviv cab to go to Manhattan and then checking into the La Quinta Inn Central Park West.

#### **Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>-Sunday, May 3:**

I had a lot of angry thoughts that weekend. I upped my dosage of pain medication due to the fact that I was experiencing a severe pain flareup in my neck and low back. While it helps the pain, the side effects include feelings of sadness and anger. I worked on a digital drawing of the Great Blue Hole in Belize. This gives me a new skill that is easier on my hands than using pens or Conté crayons. I was pleased with the piece. Then I took photos of the garden in its full Spring fresh green glory, with climbing roses and native California vines in bloom, which helped lift my mood a little. Later I will learn from my

primary care physician, chronic pain psychotherapist and physical therapist that many people are experiencing higher levels of pain since the pandemic's arrival.

**Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>:**

My anger reached its peak that morning, so I decided to order myself to take an adult time out by working out on the treadmill for 20 minutes before breakfast. That seemed to help. Then to continue to distract myself in a positive way, I took more photos of the back garden, to capture different angles, especially to include the hanging pots of Veronica Waterperry, lobelia and other fresh blooms. I noticed I got a lot of thumbs up on Facebook for the photographs, including the chairperson of the Multimedia Department at Berkeley City College. Then I had my virtual InDesign class that afternoon, which helped the anger subside a lot because I was focusing on the course and was pleased with the feedback I received from my professor regarding how much progress I had made within the last month.

**Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup>:**

The angry thoughts subsided some more. I did another digital drawing of the Great Blue Hole, from the perspective of someone looking down as they are about to dive into the abyss. It was difficult to achieve the underwater effect because it involves creating light and shadow details and the illusion that the hole has 3 dimensions. Then I began preparing for the final assignment in my InDesign class. A sense of normalcy returned after hanging out with my neighbor and her dog. That helped me feel even better.

**Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>:**

I was struggling with the effects of several days of only getting four hours of sleep and having worried thoughts. I was very sluggish and felt the back pain increasing. The angry thoughts started to come back.

**Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>-Wednesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>:**

On May 7<sup>th</sup> we decided to try going to our most favorite local supermarket, Berkeley Bowl, after almost a month of patching things together by using small markets close by our house. The last time we went there the line to enter, following social distancing protocols, was around the block because it was the week of Passover and Easter. The smaller markets did not have long lines, but their prices were higher and of course they did not have a wide selection of things. Berkeley Bowl had a line that wrapped around the block this time as well, probably because that upcoming Sunday was Mother's Day. People for the most part practiced social distancing and wore masks both in the line and in the store, but some pushed past us and I even got bumped into. The angry thoughts began to stir up again. We were there for maybe two hours, between standing in line and grocery shopping. But as local and national TV channels reported, compared to the long lines of cars waiting too many hours to get food bank donations, with some turned away when supplies ran out, we have no right to complain.

On May 8<sup>th</sup> I did errands in downtown Berkeley. It was the first time I had been there in two months. Shattuck Avenue had its usual amount of car traffic. There wasn't the usual amount foot traffic like there is when schools are in session and the Y is open, although

some homeless people were in their usual corners, and people rode their bikes on the sidewalk, again not following social distancing. On University Avenue I even saw people dining at restaurants (outside because it was warm) but most of the restaurants in the area only offered take out.

From May 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> I finally got back to my preferred 7-8 hour sleeping schedule. I had weened myself off the daytime medication again because I noticed that the longer I take that medicine, the less affective it seems to be. I felt much calmer even though I had to deal with a little bit of silliness from people in the neighborhood, including fourth grade name games. Guess sheltering-in-place is getting to everyone.

The evening of May 10<sup>th</sup> to May 11<sup>th</sup> I had a dream that I was able to go back to the Berkeley City College campus because it was open again. In the dream I was worried about the bus because it was usually crowded. I said, "I guess it won't be as crowded because the high school students and U.C. Berkeley students aren't going to be on the bus." That afternoon I received an email from Berkeley City College saying that now Fall 2020 courses are going to be virtual. A week later I enrolled in a Photoshop course and had a Zoom meeting with my professor to start planning for it.

#### **Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup>:**

In the early morning I had a dream that I was walking down Telegraph Avenue from the UC Berkeley campus to our home. The restaurants around the university had opened up. I had my mask on but no one else was wearing a mask or practicing social distancing. It was crowded and noisy from conversations, coffee machines and loud music. People were cramped inside, sitting at tables, standing in line or waiting for their orders at the counter. They were also sitting outside taking up the entire sidewalk. I was angry. I walked out into the street to avoid everyone. No one seemed to notice.

I woke up from the dream feeling the pain from the pinched nerve flare up again. I took my pain medication, (referred to in my family as my moody meds) but didn't have angry thoughts this time. Instead I continued to work on my final project. I didn't like the look of the maps that I made using Google My Maps, so followed a link I saw, asking me if I wanted to make a map in Google Earth instead. When I tried making my maps that way, they looked much better.

That morning I received a letter signed by Donald Trump regarding my "stimulus" check and how my safety and health are his top priority. He said the he "proudly" signed the CARES Act into law and he thanked Congress and the Senate and that we will rise as a nation stronger than before. But I was relieved to receive the check. It was emblazoned with two signatures: the Treasury secretary on the payer's line, with Trump's on the subject line. I believe this is the first time a president has signed U.S. government checks. It was bizarre.

#### **Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup>:**

We went grocery shopping at Berkeley Bowl for the third time since shelter-in-place began in March. There was no line this time because we arrived before 10 AM, during

Senior/Disabled hour and it wasn't a major holiday. Everyone was wearing masks but not everyone practiced the social distancing rule as the aisles won't accommodate six feet of separation and there were people who leaned over people, reached over people, pushed past people and took up the entire aisle with their carts. One woman was coughing. I told about three or four people that they needed to stay six feet away. They gave me a blank stare and then continued with their shopping. I began to feel that this pandemic is bringing out an ugliness in people that is similar to Post 9-11. By the time we left there was a line waiting to enter the store.

Later on in the day I watched the KPIX Channel 5 News at 5. Similar to the commentary around Mother's Day Weekend, the newscasters discussed how people might ignore social distancing at Oakland's Lake Merritt during Memorial Day Weekend, especially as the meteorologist was predicting a warm weekend. They focused on the habits of Black people, to barbecue, and that Asian and Black kids have been seen playing in blocked off playground areas. This is especially concerning because the equipment is not disinfected. Some Black people called other Black people "ignorant" about the fact that they were partying on Mother's Day. The Black people who were partying said they were tired of being inside and wanted to enjoy themselves. The segment ended with Oakland's mayor, Libby Schaaf, scolding the partygoers like they were naughty school children.

#### **Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup>-Monday, May 17<sup>th</sup>:**

I began to feel angry again. People on Facebook and other social media platforms were talking about how they didn't want to wear masks, didn't want to vote by mail in November, and because they believe a microchip would be embedded in their bodies when a COVID-19 vaccine becomes available, they will refuse to get vaccinated. I felt that these people were careless and selfish, drinking the fake news Clorox.

#### **The Week of Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup>:**

Monday May 18<sup>th</sup>, was the last day of what was a very weird semester. The night before, I had another dream about traveling on the bus to my InDesign class because Berkeley City College had reopened. The class had thirty people in it at the beginning of the semester. When it became remote the class size dropped down to six people. We all got an "A" for staying until the end and doing the work. For my responses to the last three graphic assignments, I researched Kinshasa, capitol of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It worked out well. I went from not knowing anything about InDesign to becoming comfortable with it.

My poetry collection, which I have been working on for the last eight years, was slated to be published June 2<sup>nd</sup>, but now it has been delayed indefinitely, I guess due to the pandemic's effect.

I am not seeing or hearing much from friends so much at the moment, but I know they are having a hard time. My normal sleep schedule is non-existent. I stay up until one o'clock in the morning streaming historical dramas on Netflix, Amazon and Hulu or I go to bed early but wake up at 3:30 and watch TV and look at my iPad until 6 or 6:30. Then I wake up again at 8:30. I constantly worry about getting sick when I do go out of the

house, even though I follow all the protocols about washing or using sanitizer on my hands, wearing a face mask, not touching my face, etc. I found out I could get Hello Kitty and Disney Princess 100 percent printed cotton masks on the Etsy site. Now *The New York Times* is saying that a clear plastic full face shield might be the best production. Authorities still don't really know a lot about how to best protect ourselves against this disease.

This week Alameda County, where I live, has surpassed Santa Clara County as having the most COVID-19 cases in the Bay Area. I sometimes feel stir crazy. I have good days and bad days. I do enjoy being a homebody working on this *Konch* project amongst other things and now I don't have to worry about saying "no" to events that I don't want to attend. I just got word that the neighbors are going back to work next week. They will have to follow all the protocols that are ordered for San Francisco Bay Area businesses, and they are worried their businesses are in for a hard time for a long time. But this means that they again need me to regularly walk their increasingly stubborn and deaf dog, that turned 16 years old on May 11th. This makes me happy, to again be seeing that sweet face on a regular basis. I realize that I am luckier than a lot of people.

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