

Life Stories – Pandemic Memoirs & More

Urbandale Public Library

Updated December 2020

2020 – The Odd Year

Submitted by Beth

The year began normal enough. I'd had four big adventures in 2019 and while I had nothing major planned I was looking forward to seeing what 2020 might bring. In early January I started my part-time job as a clerk in the Iowa Senate. There were a few stories about a new virus that was impacting folks in China, but no one seemed particularly concerned.

In February more stories on the new coronavirus, now called COVID 19, started to be heard in the media, but still people weren't terribly concerned. That started to change in early March as the virus spread. On March 11th the clerks were told not to come in the next day as it was likely the legislature would be suspended for a period of time.

Meanwhile, I had been considering purchasing a long arm quilting machine and was thinking the end of the session (mid-April) would be a good time as I wouldn't be working, had no trips planned and would have time to learn how to use it over the summer. I had been looking at used machines, but hadn't seen anything that struck my fancy and was getting ready to place an order for a new one when I decided I should look on Facebook Marketplace one more time. I found just what I was looking for and it was nearby, in Marshalltown, seemed like it was meant to be! I took advantage of having the day off, contacted the seller and arranged to go up and look at it. It was in excellent condition, and a reasonable price, so I got it. Whoo whoo, a new toy!

Early the following week a friend from Cedar Rapids contacted me asking if I had a mask pattern, which I didn't, but on the 19th I was lying in bed watching the morning news when a story came on about someone in Florida making masks for the local hospital. My niece works in a clinic in Norwalk so I emailed her asking if the clinic needed masks. The answer came back in 30 minutes saying yes! Later I found out in the short time period between me emailing her and her response, Genny had emailed the doctors and the manager of the clinic and they all responded the same. One of the clinic doctors, Dr. Roman, had already been asked to work on the problem, so she & I collaborated. I made a couple of prototypes and took them down to Norwalk. Dr. Roman also asked if I could make some gowns for them.

The clinic supplied material for both the gowns and masks, so off I went. The gowns were made from a pattern Dr. Roman had made from their disposable gowns and the masks were made from the Olson mask pattern found on the internet. Meanwhile, I had also sent a mask pattern to my friend in Cedar Rapids and she started a group of people making masks for one of the hospitals there.

While Dr. Roman was out purchasing material for the gowns, a sales clerk mentioned that Broadlawns Hospital was looking for people to make masks for them. They had kits already made up for 500 masks. I knew it wasn't something I could tackle on my own, but I belong to the Des Moines Area Quilters Guild and they are very giving group of people. I called the Guild President and asked if this is something that the Guild might be interested doing. She said yes, so I worked on tracking down the appropriate person at Broadlawns. When I found her, I discovered that they weren't wanting "pretty" masks, but masks that could be put in an autoclave to be sterilized, which meant everything had to be 100% cotton.

She had 500 kits ready to go to seamstresses and I think she was a little startled when I suggested we could probably do all of them. Another Guild member, Kim Peterson, became our mask coordinator. Kim organized folks into tasks, some cutting muslin, or cutting batting, others cutting flour sack towels for the outer cover of the masks and still another group doing the sewing. I'm not sure how many of the original 500 masks guild members (and friends of guild members) made, but when everyone realized that this was going to go on for a while, the hospital asked if we could do 5000 masks for them. We actually made 6400 of the surgical masks, plus almost 1800 regular masks that the hospital could hand out to people who came to the facility without a mask.

We made another 5700 masks that went to organizations like: Child Serve, Mosaic of Iowa, Bishop Drumm Home, Iowa Coalition against Domestic Violence, the VA Hospital, Creative Visions, Children & Families of Iowa, the Des Moines Police Department, and Mercy One.

When the masks for Broadlawns were done, we snuck in a little break in mask making, then the guild was contacted by the Des Moines Public School District – could we make 12,000 masks for their students, and they were needed by mid-August. Why, yes we could!

Friends have asked how many masks have you made, and I don't honestly know – I stopped counting when I hit 200 and that was around the end of March. I think I've made every kind

of mask out there, surgical, Olsen, DIY, pleated and probably some that there wasn't a name for.

I feel lucky that I had this project to work on, I didn't have time to wonder what I was going to do next, or even what tv show I was going to watch. And the best part of this experience is the number of people who helped, guild members and non-guild members alike. People who didn't want to sew, donated fabric, elastic, or money. As with any disaster, so many people have stepped up and helped when and where they could.

The one downside – that new to me long arm quilting machine, sat unused for months. Someday its turn will come!

#

The Personal Pains/Joys of COVID-19

Submitted by Anonymous

In many ways it feels as if the pandemic has brought the world and my life to a halt. Before the pandemic, as a widow and retiree living alone, I tried, purposely I might add, to spend as much time as possible away from the house. It is lonely and even before the pandemic I felt it more in the evening than in the morning. Hence, my crazy schedule which had me at work before 7am when I was working.

The week before the country shut down, I had spent time at the Urbandale Senior Recreation Center exercising in the morning and then I was off to volunteer for AARP Tax Aide at the Urbandale Library. Then suddenly, I was home almost all the time; it took me three months to go through a tank of gas! I kept thinking of all the people for whom I had provided tax assistance who were out of jobs. Many were just getting by as it was!

So, I decided I needed a schedule, or at least a mental schedule for my days – in many ways it was hard to determine what day of the week it was since they all seemed to run together. Since I have a significant hearing impairment sitting in front of the TV was not likely something I would do – enjoy. Remember I used to exercise a lot!

I signed up for the Urbandale Parks and Recreation virtual 50K which ran from the end of April until the middle of June AND didn't miss a day of exercise. Even after the challenge ended, I kept up my exercise routine and have actually lost weight during the pandemic. Different than 50 years ago right after I got married when I was home a lot and did a lot of baking – gained significant weight during that period.

The kids have been after me to declutter the house and unfortunately, it was a perfect opportunity! But in many ways, it was painful – it was like reliving your life of the last 50 years. (Fifty years ago, I graduated from college and got married.) Old checks and receipts, including the ones for our wedding rings! Trying on old clothes, including my wedding dress which I could get into but was afraid to zip up since no one was around to unzip me.

I had also put cards I received and other items from my husband's passing in a box in the basement; going through that was also painful as was cleaning out the tub of items from my mother's financial records from when she passed away 2 plus years ago.

There were also joys – connecting monthly via zoom with friends across the country for a personal and book discussion. (They are people I studied with in Washington DC in the spring semester of 1969.) Zoom calls with locals and time to undertake some of my creative activities – embarrassingly, I finished a cross stitch mobile for my new grandson who was born in June. The funny part – the bag with the half-finished mobile was from a department store in Springfield, IL. I figure that I bought it when I was pregnant with one of my sons and the youngest in 38! My kids are like Mom you still had that!!! But now my new grandson has a finished mobile!

And I was "all finished" with this "exercise," and then I wasn't. Since I wrote the first draft of this memoir, Iowa experienced a derecho, a hurricane and tropical storm hit the gulf coast (and with the hurricane my sister-in-law had to evacuate from Beaumont to Houston), and wild fires are burning out of control in California. And my brother's mother-in-law passed away. And that's in less than 2 weeks' time. - 2020 will go down as the year of -----

#

Untitled

Submitted by Janet

It is hard to believe that people can vary so much in their beliefs, especially in difficult times.

I lived in my own private homes for thirty-five years before moving to a townhome community twenty years ago. As a homeowner I soon discovered I no longer had total control of what I did to my house, especially on the exterior, but I soon became accustomed abiding by the rules and by-laws. Then I moved to a large 55+ community about a year ago. For me, following the "rules" of living in this environment was merely a transition to rules to which I had become accustomed. Not true for all.

Many of my new neighbors I found came directly for homes they lived in forty, fifty, even sixty years. They were not used to "rules". In mid-March, we were told we could no longer have visitors in the building. Then our pool was closed. Then our fitness center closed. Then the library doors were locked. Then the chairs were removed from all community areas where people tended to congregate. We no longer had any of the community gatherings we had gotten so accustomed to. No one liked it, but most of us realized management was merely following CDC and local government guidelines in an attempt to minimize catching and spreading Covid19 in our little world. Later management asked us to limit the number of trips we made outside the building as well as limiting the number of contacts we had.

In March after a few weeks into the Corona Virus it became apparent wearing a mask was probably going to be something we would all be doing. Sure, I found it strange that we Americans would suddenly be like those in Asian countries we see on TV wearing a mask while doing their day-to-day activities during SARS and other health situations. In very short order we were urged to wear a mask anytime we were outside our own apartments.

I am continually amazed that while some residents fear even stepping outside of their apartments, others refused to don a mask. They said they were old enough to make their own decisions about their health. No one could convince them it was for the safety of others as well as for their own safety.

And these were the people who continued to congregate with others, sans a mask or social distancing. I wonder if this childlike behavior may be what is meant by going into a “second childhood”.

#

COVID Memoir

Submitted by Christine

2020 has been a wild ride. Coronavirus (Covid-19) has been in the headlines for over six months, and has over-shadowed news of protests and riots, a presidential election, murder hornets, a derecho, hurricanes, and wildfires. Covid-19 is not the only thing that changed my life this year.

I retired on March 20, 2020. I debated for months about retiring early and questioned my good fortune of being able to do so. Covid-19 certainly changed my expectations of retirement. My husband, Bill, and I had planned trips, lazy lunches at our favorite restaurants, and visiting friends. Instead, we had a shut down that began the week of my retirement. All non-essential businesses were closed. People were told not to leave their homes except for groceries and medical necessities. Fear of an unseen invader permeated the population. We were taught how to wash our hands to ensure all germs were removed. We were told not to touch our faces (impossible for me!) and stay home if we felt sick. Social distancing was force fed to us – stay at least 6 feet away from anyone not in your household. Don't let anyone in your house.

The economy floundered in the shutdown. Millions filed for unemployment. The government passed packages to bail out businesses and halt evictions of those who could no longer pay rent. Travel was restricted. Toilet paper was hoarded and became impossible to find. Don't ask me to explain why; I haven't figured it out yet. It was like living in a science fiction movie. Then masks became a flashpoint; could they help stop the spread of Covid-19? I find them uncomfortable. They fog up my glasses. I wear a mask only where required.

At the beginning of the shutdown, my husband and I went virtually nowhere, saw no one. I had a great deal of anxiety as Bill is considered high risk due to his age and asthma but, guess what? Living life that way is not living and is not sustainable. We got brave and went to a friend's house for dinner. Bill joined a friend twice a week to help him with a project. The

shutdown was lifted. I got a haircut and a pedicure. We ate in a restaurant with two other couples. We took trips to different areas to enjoy our state parks and the majestic Mississippi River. We stayed in hotels and went to museums. The retirement I had planned began to appear. Nothing bad happened.

There are countless illnesses and calamities that can befall us. Destroying our economy and hiding in our basements in fear of just one of them is unpalatable to me. We will be living with Covid-19 for a long time, and that's exactly what I plan to do. Live.

#

Memoir

Submitted by Anna

I was in the middle of the second semester of my first year of college when all of this began to unravel. Beginning in about January, I started hearing about this “new virus” that had been discovered in China but didn’t really think much of it. It seemed very far away from me and my concerns, with a whole ocean and half a country separating us.

The first time I became aware of it in relation to me was when I received an email from my school about some people who had visited from China and had to be quarantined before they could tour campus. I only really paid attention to that because of the uproar that occurred on campus because of how the school handled that situation. Still, once that resolved, I pretty easily dismissed any thoughts of the virus. Things began changing quickly in March though. We started hearing more about its spread throughout the world and that it had come to the United States. They told us that it might result in changing how we operated school, but I still didn’t think it would actually happen. I didn’t spend much time thinking about it because we were approaching mid-terms and so I was spending all my time taking notes and doing readings. I had more important things to worry about, or so I thought.

I was actually in the middle of studying for an upcoming exam when we got the news that we would be going home. I was sitting in a study area with a friend and left for a couple minutes to use the bathroom. When I got back, I saw that nearly everyone around me was on a phone

call. Another friend approached me and told me that they had sent out an email telling us that we would be doing the remainder of the semester online and that we'd have to be off campus in a week and a half. I of course immediately sat down to read it and then called my mom. We made some preliminary plans based the information given to us and then I hung up. I tried to get back to studying but there was no way I could focus on what I had been trying to read. My mind was spinning with questions. What would the rest of the semester look like? How was I going to pack everything while trying to take exams? When would I be back on campus? Was it really this serious? Luckily, my professor wound up cancelling the exam I was supposed to take that afternoon. Most of my midterms were postponed until after spring break so I spent most of my remaining time that week putting my stuff in boxes. I had spent a lot of time decorating my room and had finally gotten it to how I like it. It was painful to take all that down and see the bare walls again.

My last night at school was one of my best though. My classes ended early that morning, so I spent the afternoon packing. I tried to finish it because a friend had invited a group of us to go get ice cream at the local place near campus, which was opening up for the season that night. We waited in line for a while, but it was worth it just to talk to these people who I had come to admire so much. We ate our ice cream as we walked back to campus and I invited them to hang out in my room for as long as they wanted. We spent time talking there and eventually some more friends I had invited showed up and we wound up sitting in a circle on the floor playing get-to-know-you games like it was our first day on campus again. Eventually it got late enough that the original group started filing out.

My other friends invited me out to a party they'd heard was going on that night. I desperately wanted to keep spending time with them, so I agreed. One friend went to change before we left and another said she wasn't feeling well and considered not going with us because of that, but she started feeling better to my relief and came with us. The party was super crowded and uncomfortably hot, so we didn't stay for longer than five minutes. We probably spent more time looking for it than we actually did inside. We said hello to some people, took pictures and went back to my room again, where we spent the rest of the night eating some snacks I had and talking.

The next morning, I woke up early to the sound of my alarm. I put some last-minute items in my boxes and waited for my mom and grandpa to show up with his truck. That day, I had told a friend that I would give her a ride to the airport and store some of her stuff. I was lucky enough to only live an hour away from campus and have easy transportation, so I wanted to help those

I knew get home. I drove her back and after we got lunch, we met up with some other friends before her flight. We dropped her off at the airport and then went to the mall to do some shopping and get dinner. Looking back, it feels weird to say we did that. We were at the very beginning of a pandemic, had no idea what we were facing or how fast it would spread, and we still went out shopping.

The next day, I got up early again because I had promised some other friends, Adam and Emma, that they could stay with me until they were able to get transport home. My grandpa and mom drove his truck down again and I arrived back at school with my mom's car around noon to pick them up. As we were in the middle of packing Adam's stuff up, some of our friends in the dorm stopped by and put temporary tattoos on us to remember them by. It rubbed off after a few hours. When we got his stuff packed, we said goodbyes to our friends and headed over to Emma's dorm. Her stuff was harder to pack because she didn't have easy street access, but we eventually got everything in and headed back. By the time we got back in town, we were all hungry, so I stopped by a restaurant to get some dinner. Again, that feels weird to say. I picture us now, eating casually in a restaurant, no precautions, no anxieties, no idea how big this would get. At the time, we still thought it would all blow over in month or two. It seems like another world.

Some of my high school friends were getting back in town around that time so we made plans to get dinner the next night, all of us at a few tables in a Perkins. People were starting to avoid restaurants more, so we were among the only groups there that night, and by far the youngest. My best friend had actually planned to come out with us, but her mom was ahead of the curve in taking this seriously and forbade her to come out with us. When we were finished eating, we went back to my house again and sat in my living room, talking about people's different experiences at school and what they thought would happen in the upcoming semester. At that point, my friends who went to state schools thought that they'd be back on campus after a few weeks, once they figured out what to do. Eventually, my high school friends left, and we all went to bed.

We spent the next few days just hanging around my house, watching movies and talking. We ventured out to Target one day to pick up some stuff they needed. My friends were taking flights and nervous about being confined in a space with a recycled air supply when a respiratory disease was spreading rapidly, so we looked for masks, even though we didn't know that they helped at that point. In fact, we were being discouraged from buying them

because hospitals were running out of supplies. Either way, we weren't able to find any masks. The hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, and toilet paper were all sold out too.

Adam's flight was scheduled for 6 am a couple days later so I woke up at 4 am to drive him to the airport. And then it was just me and Emma. She had planned to take a bus to Chicago, where she could stay with some friends, but those kept being cancelled, so she eventually just booked a flight for that Friday. It was just the two of us hanging around until then though, so we spent time watching tv, she introduced me to some new shows I'm still meaning to finish. I drove her to the airport Friday afternoon, we said our goodbyes, and then I went back home.

It felt lonely coming back by myself. I had enjoyed having my friends stay with me and I was now cut off from seeing anyone from school. I was also officially on spring break now though, so I tried to enjoy what time I could before I had to figure out online classes. We always hear about college kids' spring break being a time of crazy parties and beach vacations, but my first spring break of college was spent in my childhood bedroom, devouring books and tv shows like I could never get enough. While I'd initially had more plans to see friends, we started hearing and learning more about the spread, so we cancelled those. I began to settle into a routine of staying home and learning how to occupy myself there. Now it's been 5 months and I'm still doing more or less the same things. Once again, I'm waiting for school to start and wishing I could see my friends. Of course, at the same time, the whole world has changed. Nearly 200,000 American deaths so far, millions of cases, and the refusal to do anything about it. And I am still sitting in my house. It feels like I've stayed in one spot and the whole world has shifted around me.

#

Taking Inventory, Clearing Out

Submitted by Laura

The first few weeks of the pandemic shut down are a blur, so I'm not sure exactly when the urge to do a complete purge of my home started. I remember evenings and weekends where

I'd just sit and stare at the TV with little energy for anything else. Then I started finding myself making to-do lists alongside my grocery lists. Over time, I started mapping out a strategy for taking stock/getting an inventory of what I own and clearing out what I didn't need.

I consulted various experts that I found via Google and Pinterest searches. I've always found Marie Kondo's minimalist approach (KonMari method) appealing, so hers was the heaviest influence.

The plan was to clean out every closet and drawer. I sat down with a calendar and assigned tasks to each workweek and weekend for a 30-day period.

A typical Saturday might involve cleaning out a chest of drawers: Empty the drawer, wipe it out with a damp cloth, then meticulously sort through each item in the drawer. Next to me would be a trash bag and a "to donate" bag. There was a method to putting away any items that survived this purge. Like items were placed together; items were placed in logical locations within said chest of drawers; and items that could be folded were done so according to the KonMari method. (I usually had my phone nearby as well. That way, I could do a quick "KonMari Method – folding socks" online search if need be.)

Once I'd made my way through all of my tasks, it was time to move on to deep cleaning. Again, I spent time plotting out my strategy – researching the best way to clean the fridge and whiten grout. I bought a cart on wheels from the Container Store (curbside pickup, of course), and spent my weekends wheeling a cart of cleaning supplies from room to room, not unlike a middle school janitor.

Growing weary of the growing mass of plastic grocery sacks I had begun to acquire from cooking at home, I spent a lonely Saturday afternoon folding them into small triangles. I was so pleased with my space-saving, clever solution, I sent photos to my friends. As it turned out, they too, had been purging/cleaning and sent me photos of their own progress.

With my home organized and my cleaning schedule in place, I began to feel prepared for anything that might come my way. Inside my home, I felt in control – regardless of the chaos happening in the outside world.

#

Culinary Tales

Submitted by Kathleen

The Turtle

Learning to cook was my way of sharing quality time with Mom. In the 1960s, my culinary skills improved gradually with each success and failure. It must have been challenging for Mom observing my many attempts to cook or bake.

I made an apple crisp once mistaking baking soda for baking powder and the inside of the aluminum baking dish turned a blackish color. When Mom poured milk over her bowl of warm apple crisp, it bubbled over the side of her bowl.

A horrified look came over her face, “Kathleen what did you do?” Her eyes trailed back to the discolored baking dish and then to the milk foaming in her bowl.

“I’m not sure, Mom. I thought I followed the recipe correctly.” I replied hanging my head in puzzlement. I always thought I followed the recipes correctly and was surprised when my endeavors turned out less than perfect.

Dad swiftly concluded, “For everyone’s safety, throw the apple crisp in the garbage! No sense taking a chance. It discolored the dish. What will it do to us?”

Dinner ended abruptly without my less than perfect dessert.

I remember baking a loaf of cinnamon bread and mistakenly tried to activate the yeast by using near-boiling water. When it came out of the oven, it could have been easily used to anchor a boat. One of my chocolate cakes was the chewy consistency of putty. Baking cookies was always fun, but they ranged from very good, okay, or challenging to eat.

I am happy to report that my younger siblings learned several valuable “how to do it right” cooking lessons, thanks to me.

On one of our many hiking adventures, my sister, Pat, and I captured a slow-moving snapping turtle. We spotted the turtle sitting next to a stream of water in a patch of long shaggy grass. Pat noticed a discarded cardboard box nearby and I cautiously picked up the turtle and placed it in the box. Giggling along the way home, our pioneering spirits shared our “catch of the day” with everyone we passed.

We arrived home without getting snapped in the turtle’s powerful jaws or panicking and dropping it along the way. Once again, I planned to use my cookbook titled, Bill Cook’s Authentic and Historical Recipes from Waseca, Minnesota. Included in the book were step-by-step instructions on how to clean and prepare a snapping turtle entrée. My great culinary opportunity was in the cardboard box and soon to be the delicious entree I served with dinner. I knew in my heart of hearts everyone would appreciate the turtle's sacrifice to be our special guest of honor that evening. I knew I would.

Preparing the turtle involved four steps;

Step 1: Remove the turtles head.

The snapping turtle did not seem willing or eager to participate in this step and began acting a little cranky. It snapped at me while I attempted to cut off its head using a small hatchet. I wondered, why was the turtle so unwilling to stretch its neck allowing me to quickly proceed to Step 2? Step 1 was proving harder than I anticipated.

A small crowd gathered as I swung the small hatchet attempting to detach the turtles head in one swift painless blow. I felt guilty and frustrated with each miss and the turtle became more agitated, and aggressive. The yard gradually filled with chuckling friends and unhelpful neighbors until my dad came to my rescue. He wrapped a small wire around the turtle’s neck and one split second later, I was ready to begin Step 2.

Step 2: Put the headless turtle into a large vat of boiling water.

I found the large pan mom used for canning and it worked perfectly. This process was to soften the turtle's hard shell enabling it to be easily removed.

Shortly after the headless turtle was placed into the boiling water, the kitchen filled with a sticky cloud of foul-smelling air. Mom turned the floor fan to its highest speed, windows were

opened, and everyone evacuated the kitchen until I concluded, according to the cookbook, the shell was soft enough to be easily removed.

Step 3: Remove the softened shell and carefully cut out the edible portions of turtle meat.

“Kathleen, do that outside!” Mom directed using her stern in-charge voice. “I want to air out the kitchen before it gets any worse. Go outside now!”

“Okay Mom, are you sure? It doesn’t smell that bad to me.”

She almost pushed me out the door as she waved towels around trying to force the stinky air out behind me, the fans still running at top speed, and every window remained open. I left wondering, did it smell that bad?

I moved the messy Step 3 process to an outside picnic table and began cutting away the turtle’s softened shell. I was not prepared for what the inside of a hot snapping turtle looked like. However, feeling determined and up to the challenge, I skillfully cut around the turtle’s warm guts and yuck and removed five edible portions of turtle meat; four stubby legs, and the remainder of one short neck.

Step 4: Cook the turtle.

The book said to fry or make turtle soup. Of course, I chose to fry it. Just like chicken, I battered the turtle to a crispy golden brown.

When I plated and presented my gourmet snapping turtle entree, I quickly discovered that I was going to be the only one brave enough to eat it. I remembered reading that turtle meat takes on the flavor of seven different types of meat. Well, those seven different types of meat must have been very well blended, because I could not distinguish if one bite tasted different than another. I conclude that my turtle entree had the delicious taste of a special short four-legged breed of chicken living under a thick shell.

Pat and I never found or brought home another snapping turtle from other hiking adventures. I struggle to understand why neither she nor Mom felt the depth of that disappointment the way I did. What if, while serving my next turtle entree, each morsel of delicious meat disappears into hungry mouths? I deserved another turtle! I deserved another chance to improve my culinary skill! Drat! Drat! Drat! It never happened!

I love to cook. My culinary creativity sparkled when I shared the kitchen with mom. All of my cooking and baking endeavors usually became memorable dining experiences for everyone's taste buds.

To my patient mother's credit, I followed the directions successfully of many recipes while living at home and more after leaving. I have shelves filled with cookbooks, and boxes of recipes waiting to be compiled into a publication under my name. The content of this publication will include recipe bloopers, failures, and successes, a few humorous stories, historical accounts, and memorable adventures.

I often wonder if Mom regretted my frequent offers to help or attempts to cook something new. Did she want to place yellow caution cones by the kitchen's entrance warning others I was there hard at work? Did I mistake her hovering and reading each line of the recipe several times over as a sign of her limited trust or was it simply out of fear? Was I her nightmare, her gift, or the loveable thorn in her side that kept coming back?

Mom and I shared hours of quality time in the kitchen talking, laughing, baking, and cooking. I admired the courage she displayed trying to harness my enthusiasm while teaching me her version of the culinary arts. With each success and failure, her techniques worked; no one starved, my skills improved, and the family survived my non-stop endeavors in and out of the kitchen.

#

Reconcile

Submitted by Kathleen

My Lord, You said, "Forgive those who hurt you."

And yet, I find this hard to do.

I carry hidden grudges surrounding painful experiences and feelings I failed and fail to acknowledge.

To heal the bleeding wounds alive in a past that will not change is hard to do.

I live with a nagging and continuous need to please.

To forgive and reconcile with the self who hurts me now, is hard to do.

I seek the simple wisdom of being, and to be.

I am sad.

I feel alone.



By KR Rohwer
Pen and Brush Creations

#

Virtual Springfest

Submitted by Pat

I'm going to walk you through the Springfest event we are not having today. You have parked the car and are now walking into the Crown Point Center, where our spring event is being held. The moment you enter the building you are greeted by two cheerful, exuberant, smiling people from the welcome committee. One of them might even be super-duper ebullient. Uh oh. Is that way too much enthusiasm? Okay, I'll take that last one back. All you get today is cheerful, exuberant, and smiling. We'll save ebullient for another event. These two greeters will be more than happy to tell you where to go. Er, um, that is, they will point you to the registration desk where you will stop to have your name checked off as being in attendance; they will tell you where the coat rack is, where to take all that chocolate dessert you've brought for your ever-loyal president, and where the gathering space is.

You haven't forgotten, have you, that I can be bribed? But for any good bribe to be truly worthwhile, the first ingredient **MUST** be chocolate. That's our secret, okay? Maybe someday I'll be brave enough to sing the chocolate chip cookie song for you. But I digress. After being informed where to place that sumptuous 'dish to share,' you will also be told where the rest rooms are, and, first things first, where you can get a drink to get you started on the day's events.

While you are putting your favorite 'dish to share' on the table, you will notice all the other delectable food and decide right then and there which of those dishes you intend to have the biggest helping of. Look at those incredible meatballs, and you just gotta have some of that colorful salad someone brought. That thing must contain every ingredient in the produce aisle. Holy Moly, the only ingredient they forgot was rutabaga. Shush. Nobody needs rutabaga. Is that even a legitimate food? That salad is just fine the way it is. And sweet heaven, if I ever get too much tater tot casserole, it will be the day I die. Hmm. What else can I peruse. Look at all those casseroles in every size, shape, and color. This table is so laden with food, it ought to be considered a sin. I can see though; it's not going to stop you any.

Hey, I saw you sneaking over to the dessert table to see what the world is offering up on this beautiful day. Don't you dare stick your finger into that frosting. I'm telling the dessert Gods on you. You stole a cookie and we haven't started the event yet. Naughty, naughty, naughty.

Now get yourself into the gathering space and act civilized, will you. Geesh, do we still have to feed you before we take you to a potluck, like your mother did when you were a growing teenager?

Oh, now look at what the decorating committee has done for us. See all those pretty little potted plants on the tables, with cute little doilies under them. Please take a moment to admire those colorful tablecloths in soothing pastel colors. Easter egg colors to be exact. The tablecloths will actually be cheap, thin plastic from the dollar store, but hey, what else were you expecting; white linen? This isn't the country club you've accidentally walked into; you know. This whole scene is as pretty as a picture. Speaking of pictures, which of you is on the picture taking committee? Don't forget to take some cool shots to send to the newsletter editor. Rumor has it she's always looking for pictures.

Someone makes you all stop talking, sit down, and listen to a few announcements. We have several events coming up that I know you will definitely not want to miss. There's the All-Iowa picnic you'll want to attend in July. Our theme is *It's a Small World/Getting to Know You*. And in September, there's the Super Regional Conference, which I know at least **twenty** of you are going to attend. You will be encouraged to take a few FFGDM business cards to share with your friends, cohorts, and neighbors. We will introduce guests. Someone will remind you to sign up for all those other *virtual* monthly events we will be having for the foreseeable future. If you're lucky, your lovely vice president will write about the next one. I'd put an emoji here, but I'm such a technodolt I don't know how.

Finally, someone invites us to go to the food table and make fools of ourselves, with those paper dinner plates piled so high and heavy you'll need a wagon to carry it to your table. Enjoy every bite of it. I'm going to, despite the plastic cutlery. We'll pay for eating all that food tomorrow with the five mile walk we'll need to take. And that's just to keep the bathroom scale from screaming loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear. Getting rid of those extra four pounds might take a bit longer; maybe right up until our next *virtual* event. Oh, but what an enjoyable time we are having, with all this good food, good conversation, a carefree atmosphere, and quality time spent among good friends.

Once we are thoroughly satiated, we will hear a presentation by someone from Kemin Industries, our speaker this month. She will tell us about all the wonderful products the company makes, and how they have a presence all over the world. It really is a small world isn't it?

After everything is said and done, we all pitch in to restore the place to its original character. The decorations are removed, tables are emptied and wiped off, and the kitchen is left spotless. The leftovers (if there are any) are whisked away, we put our coats on, and leave the premises enlightened about a local industry. We go home with full bellies, with a full to bursting heart, and with so much yet to be grateful for.

What a nice event we just had. Let's do it again sometime soon.

Your loyal president,

Pat

#

COVID-19 Purses Treasures

Submitted by Kathleen

Covid-19 Purses Treasures

While rummaging through boxes of forgotten clutter and valuable items tucked away in various safe places, I found a box of purses. Some purses were well worn with stories to tell, while a few looked new with .price tag attached.

The purses I found were these:

- Almost new and slightly used -

It's a rectangular light tan purse covered with colorful flowers, a shoulder strap, and the interior cloth is a slightly darker tan. The colorful flowers would have been why I bought it, however, the bag is very stiff and awkward to carry. I may as well be carrying a bucket. Out it goes.

- New with the price tag attached -

It's a light olive green purse outlined in white, with two long white straps. There are light green cloth pockets inside and out. The price tag is still attached. Out it goes.

- I like this purse.

It's a light tan cloth purse, with a sky blue shoulder straps and trim. The inside cloth is tan and filled with pockets galore. A small sky blue coin purse is connected to a shoulder strap and has been more trouble than useful. I decided on a definite maybe keep for now, but out it goes later.

- Where did this purse come from?

It's black, feels like vinyl, has a shoulder strap, and butterfly figures on the front. I don't remember how it came into my hands, but it was probably the shoulder strap and butterflies. I gave it two minutes of thought and concluded it is too heavy to carry around containing a sample of my valuable possessions. The black lining strains my eyes when struggling to find anything within the bag without a flashlight. Out of my house it goes.

One of Mom's left over purses.

It's a yellowish tannish color inside and out with two zipper pockets on the inside and one on the outside. Of course there is a shoulder strap, made to order just for me, but something is off and it's still waiting to be used. Out it goes. I can remember Mom for others things rather than one of her old discarded purses.

- Paisley purse by Vera Bradley.

The bright pinks, whites, and grays have faded from being washed over and over. Saying good-bye to this Vera Bradley purse is nearly impossible. Expressing my gratitude to this purse I would say, "You were light weight with an over the shoulder body strap to keeping my hands free, thank you for your pockets galore inside and out that have worn out. The lining is filled with holes, and I am still looking for things I have lost. I am looking for an excuse not to give you a toss." *Hmmmm? Perhaps it does have a little more usefulness left. I will hold onto it a while longer.*

I painted my beloved purse.



Used now and hard to toss out.



Rummaging through all of my purses before pushing them out the door I found a variety of things; little to do notes, an uncashed co-payment check from 2006, old receipts, expired coupons, two mints, a rosary, and a walnut with an unbroken shell. Rummaging has been a long painful experience, and not to mention the memory challenge it became.

Surfing the internet, a link to a sale from a nearby Vera Bradley Outlet Store appeared. I decided to take look, but not buy. Then, just like magic, a light weight, paisley, brightly purple colored purse appeared, with an over the shoulder body strap, and pockets galore. My resistance is weak. My resistance is non-existent.

I invite you to welcome the newest member to my family of purses.



Yes that is a price tag you see attached. I am making plans to remove the forty percent discounted price tag and show off my new purchase in public soon.

I am still running across purses safely tucked away in boxes or on shelves around the house. Purses I may have inherited, were gifted to me, or I purchased, *on sale of course*.

I am beginning to suspect that I have a need to confess I may be or may have always been a purse hoarder. The pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020 has brought that into full view and on display for me to see.

#