

COVIDiary 2020—Little Things Matter

When this COVID business first started, I thought that being quarantined wouldn't be all that different from being retired. We already filled our days with our own activities, slept late and spent a lot of time at home. As long as we stayed healthy, I couldn't imagine things would change that much for us.

But then, they did. Everything got canceled—trips, dinners, birthday parties. Simple things like going to the store got weird. The school buses stopped running. Our daughter set up her office in our living room. Toilet paper, of all things, was in short supply. Everyone was suddenly ZOOMing. The government was promising to send *us* money. We were told to not wear masks, then to wear masks, then to tie bandanas around our faces like wild west desperadoes. And that wasn't even the half of it.

Life was different, all right—in some giant ways that were hard to fathom, sure, but mostly in about a million little, everyday ones. So, I started keeping track of the daily oddities dropped in my lap by this new normal and posting them on my *D. Margaret Hoffman, Author* Facebook page. I found that, when I had trouble wrapping my head around the big things, it was harnessing the little ones that helped me to cope.

Here is a sampling of the first two weeks of entries:

- Page One—Today I scrubbed a fresh pineapple with dish soap. It lathered up quite nicely.
- Page Two—Today we had a game night, online, with our kids who live a thousand miles away. Why did we wait for a pandemic to do this?
- Page Three—Today I washed my hair and let it dry. No hair dryer, no product, no hot rollers—just air. I look a little like Arlo Guthrie, but I don't mind.
- Page Four—Today I defrosted a loaf of homemade cinnamon bread. Then I ate it.
- Page Five—Today I had choir “practice” with forty-nine other choristers on ZOOM. We all looked out from our little squares on the screen. It was like the Brady Bunch if Carol and Mike each came to the marriage with twenty-three children and a housekeeper.
- Page Six—Today, despite an onslaught of dire Facebook warnings, I cut my own bangs. I feel fine and I don't look at all like Lloyd Christmas. Please, Facebook users, consider your sources before you try to scare me with insidious, false and damaging pictures of bad haircuts.
- Page Seven—Today, a mid-afternoon news report said that during quarantine it's important to keep a regular eating and sleeping schedule. I laughed so hard that that I could barely finish my breakfast.

- Page Eight—Today, something compelled me to read “The Masque of the Red Death” by Edgar Allen Poe. I do not recommend this.
- Page Nine—Today my cats made it painfully obvious that my favorite spots are their favorite spots.
- Page Ten—Instead of coloring eggs for Easter we sewed facemasks.
- Page Eleven—Today our house officially evolved from its comfy old lived-in look to its dubious new lived-in-every-minute-of-every-day-what’s-the-point-of-cleaning-until-it’s-over-look.
- Page Twelve—Today my husband went to the grocery store. A woman wearing a homemade facemask complimented him on his homemade facemask because this is our life now.
- Page Thirteen—Today I scrubbed each clementine in the bag for twenty seconds—with soap. They are now cleaner than most other things in my house.
- Page Fourteen—This week we got our grocery shopping-disinfecting-repackaging-shelving routine down to a record three hours.
- Page Fifteen—Today I needed a new project, so I picked up a book I’ve been saving for just the right time—*The Sagas of the Icelanders*. There are 724 pages of sagas. I am now on page twelve.
- And so on...

When I first started keeping *COVIDiary 2020*, I figured that it would last a couple of weeks and then the strangeness would be over and I’d be off onto the next thing. But here we are, weeks later, still in the thick of it. And every day there is at least one more small thing that gets in my face, one more subtle change that I can suddenly see clearly, one more necessary reality adjustment that I can understand and articulate, directly caused by the course of current events.

It’s oddly satisfying, harnessing the little things. Instead of crashing face-first into a giant, overwhelming wall of weird, focusing on one small, digestible observation at a time helps me to put the new normal into perspective gradually, to adjust to it and to determine how to fit it into my world view. So, since the end of this is who-knows-where, I will keep on writing *COVIDiary 2020* entries daily on Facebook for the duration. They have a job to do.

You can do this, too. Look around your world for things that are different for you now than they were a month ago. Keep it to one small, easy-to-grasp thing at a time. Write it down and then let it sink in. You’ll be amazed by how fast your observations will pile up, by how they will gradually fit together into a bigger, more significant picture, and by how therapeutic this can be.

Even during a pandemic (or, maybe, especially then), little things matter—a lot.