

## INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, with the first “stay at home” orders because of COVID-19 in California, the San Diego Independent Scholars (SDIS) asked a question: “What could we, as a group, do to support each other during extended periods of lockdown, so that we would have the strength to follow physical isolation guidelines, help limit the spread of virus, and minimize deaths?”

Strengthening communication among ourselves and with others seemed a key to this goal. Although implementing virtual meetings helped, we rapidly realized that certain meaningful experiences and thoughts cannot be adequately conveyed over the internet, even with newfangled programs.

We therefore have also turned to the more traditional method of exchanging written descriptions of our impressions, problems, and solutions during the pandemic. The resulting booklet refers to events between mid-March and the first day of October 2020. We hope that it can serve as: (a) a historical record of individual experiences during the unusual year of 2020 and (b) a means of focusing and sharpening our own understanding of both our and others’ reactions to this crisis.

This anthology contains 31 sections that are organized in alphabetical order by the primary author’s last name. Assigning a topic to a piece is difficult because many authors consider several issues, sometimes in one essay and sometimes in multiple ones. It is possible, nonetheless, to find themes that appear in several works, as attempted below.

Let us begin with the broad perspective. Linda Holt discusses the origin of the word “pandemic” and ponders what that etymology means for the current situation. In *Pandemics and the Longue Durée*, Oliver Pollak describes a series of major “Natural and Manmade Population Catastrophes,” starting with the Antonine Plague of 165 (perhaps smallpox) and continuing through more than a dozen instances of bubonic plague, cholera, influenza, or HIV before ending with Coronavirus. Michael Sage (*Plagues of Ancient Greece and Rome*) discusses how stories in the *Iliad* illustrate ancient beliefs regarding plagues and how additional insights can be obtained from detailed records of the war between Athens and Sparta during 431-404 BC. Pertinent thinking of ancient philosophers is emphasized by Ashwini Mokashi in *Ancient Wisdom Leads to Happiness in the Time of Covid-19*.

Jill Swaim recounts how the death of her great grandmother in 1918 from Spanish Flu affected her family. Regarding polio in the 1940’s, Kenneth Krauss composed *Primo Lazaretto*, which he dedicated to his older sister, who cared for him in their quarantined home when his polio-stricken brother, accompanied by his mother, went to the hospital.

Another poem by Krauss -- the sonnet *On Endings and Beginnings* -- contemplates historical cycles and the changes that follow major calamities. This topic also interests Jack Cumming, who proposes that the increased prevalence of virtual communication, including telecommuting, and decreased automobile usage forced by the pandemic will persist into the future and trigger positive societal adaptations (*Benefits of Change*).

Not everyone is equally optimistic about the advantages of increased technological, as opposed to in-person, interaction – or at least finds humor in it. These tongue-in-cheek

misgivings are expounded in *Coronavirus-induced Computer Dependency Disorder* by Dorothy Parker and *Ten Things I Have Learned from the Pandemic* by Arlene Gilbert.

Although most essays in this compendium pertain to California, Yvonne Groseil vividly portrays the *Dark Days* of the first Coronavirus surge in New York. Barbara Beaumont, who lived in France for 16 years and only recently moved here, contrasts American attitudes with those in Europe and Asia. Jill Swaim gives the example of her husband, who was trapped in Cambodia at the beginning of the pandemic, still remains there, and enjoys a life much less threatened by Coronavirus than ours. Faye Girsh recounts her eventual success in obtaining a flight out of Morocco after it shut down from the pandemic, as well as events in Morocco and during air travel, when masks were still rarely used.

A common underpinning of many pieces is fear -- of infection, of its lingering after-effects, of dying alone, of seeing others die *en masse*, of encountering persons without masks, of overcrowded hospitals, of societal collapse.

Nonetheless, like many Californians and especially privileged ones, most authors had not contracted COVID-19 themselves at the time of writing. A notable exception was Vidur Mahadeva, MD, whose medical practice serves largely uninsured or underinsured low-income workers in Reno, Nevada. Despite suffering two months of illness, Dr. Mahadeva devised a simple “go bag” and telemedicine strategy that constantly monitored patients at home and brought severe cases to the hospital as needed.

Loss of livelihood was most prevalent for the younger authors here. For example, Nina Gilbert suffered a greatly reduced schedule as a gig-working musician and explains the problems faced by community choirs or stage productions. Jill Swaim lost her beloved job as a tour guide. She fears for the survival of non-profit travel programs like Road Scholar.

Christopher Parker describes how he stepped up to help with the activities of his Special Needs brother, whose adult daycare school was closed because of COVID-19, a situation similar to that of parents whose children are enrolled in online education but who must still work while supervising family members. Parker, who had already telecommuted for 8 years, also provided reactions and advice for others who have begun doing so only recently.

In *During Covid, We Need to Grieve, Find Perspective, and Seek Safe Connection and Fulfillment*, Lara Freidenfelds applies her experience in handling chronic illness to the management of stress during COVID-19. Similarly, Randall Nicolas weaves the themes of progressive illness and COVID-19 into the set of 28 poems comprising *Plague Journal*. Teresa Norris, knowing that she would be home-bound anyway, utilized the isolation time to recuperate from knee surgery.

Beatrice Rose, a wise 105 years old, unflinchingly meets the issues of pandemic- and age-related isolation in *Lockdown Thoughts*. She describes how being alone since early February 2020 has given her time to be present with her thoughts, allowing her to explore and understand them. In *Hello Virus*, Gerry Horwitz, another long-time SDIS member, also looks inward. She compares the situation of America in 2020 to being on a “Bridge Over Troubled (Roiling) Waters” [apologies to Simon & Garfunkel] for which the end is uncertain, partly because of infection-related anxieties and partly because of social disparity and unrest. On the other end of the age spectrum, Tiffany Vakilian expresses both the personal and public concerns of a pregnant woman and new mother, in her poem *Nine Months of 2020*.

Social instability and differing cultural attitudes are the focus of poems by Judith Offer, especially: *All Gone Batty* and *You Can Be Whatever You Want in the U.S. of A.* Those issues also dominate in some of Kenneth Krauss' poems, such as *Unheroic Couplets in Plague Time*, as well as *Notes by a Shut-In on the Final Night of the Publicans' Irrational Contention*.

Especially noteworthy is the variety of often ingenious adaptations used to find emotional nourishment during this sad time. These endeavors often involved being absorbed in the creation of art, as with Robert Glick's painting *Harmony*, accompanied by the poem *Microcosm*. While playing with her computer during quiet days of the pandemic, Nanette Oselett discovered a way to convert her underwater photographs into striking pieces of abstract art, shown in *Underwater Photography Meets Weak Generative AI*.

In several cases, the restorative power of ongoing natural cycles was an important component of writings that also contained arresting photographs. For example, Nigella Hillgarth took charming head shot portraits, in-flight closeups and other views of migrating or resident birds that frequented her garden (*Yard Birding*). Liz and Christopher Wills, who planted milkweeds in their yard to provide habitat for Monarch butterflies, produced a detailed video of all stages of that butterfly's development and include an accompanying description of Monarch migration patterns (*Monarch Butterflies as Therapy for Covid-19*). Rigdon Currie organized an extensive collection of travel and nature videos, placing them on the web with a public link listed in his *Reaction to the Covid-19 Pandemic*.

However, the "return to nature" strategy did not always end as expected. When David Parker and his wife Dorothy sought virus-free solitude on a wilderness camping trip, David lost his way on a challenging trail and had to spend a chilly night alone without shelter in harsh wilderness (*When Social Distancing Almost Caused Tragedy*). In another incident, Kevin Knauss became disoriented after smoke obscured a mountain trail; he endured some hair-raising moments before finding his way back to the trailhead (*Covid Hiking Break*).

Others chose strolls in their own neighborhoods, where they observed previously unnoticed flowers and sights, as in *Flower Walks* by Arlene Gilbert. Inga Liden noted many striking features of nearby streets but was particularly taken by how considerate passersby were in early phases of the pandemic, when they wore masks and shared greetings while stepping out of the way of others, but how some had become more slipshod by September.

Members of a cellphone photography group led by Kim Signoret-Paar captured snapshots of items inside their homes or along nearby streets, met by Zoom to view each other's creations, and eventually combined several photos into a collage that accompanies *Cellphone Photography as Solace in a Pandemic*. Contributors to that collage are Barbara Bank, Liz Bonkowsky, Martha Dennis, Janet Goff, Nancy Groves, Nigella Hillgarth, Thespine Kavoulakis, Ursula Moede and Kim Signoret-Paar. The cooperative spirit of that collage represents the group feeling that we have tried to engender in assembling this anthology. Its description therefore brings this introductory summary to full circle and a close.

The successful completion of this project required the imagination and sustained effort of many people. I especially wish to thank all participating authors for their patience with my frequent emails and for providing such artfully written, interesting copy. Gail Bamber generously contributed her professional artistic skill in designing the book cover and suggesting how best to translate the title's meaning into visual symbolism. Jill Hansen and David Parker suffered many hours of careful proofreading, attending to details and

bloopers that most of us would have missed. The booklet's advisory committee (John Alexander, Arlene Gilbert, Gerry Horwitz, and Kenneth Krauss) and the SDIS Board (Donald Bamber, Joan Casale, Edwina Curtis, Alvin Halpern, Jill Hansen, Barbara Heckler, Kenneth Krauss, David Parker, and Thomas Samaras), as well as NCV liaison Inga Liden, endured endless discussions and phone calls, especially in the beginning when this initiative might have taken several different directions. Later on, Jack Cumming stepped in with stimulating procedural and technical advice. Kim Signoret-Paar and Nigella Hillgarth helped with questions regarding photographic resolution and other issues. Thank you. Without any one of you, this project would have foundered!

The National Coalition of Independent Scholars (NCIS), and each of its constituent partner groups boosted this project by mentioning it in their newsletters, inviting their members to contribute pieces, and generally offering encouragement. Special thanks to Amanda Haste (President of NCIS), Barbara Williams Ellertson (NCIS Partner Group Liaison), Yvonne Groseil (NCIS Membership Officer), Linda Holt (President of the Princeton Research Forum, PRF), Karen Reeds (Newsletter Editor of PRF), Margaret DeLacy (President of the Northwest Independent Scholars Association, Oregon and Washington), Ann Harlow (President of the Institute for Historical Study, Berkeley, CA), Shirley Randell (President of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia), Lucy Brusic (President of the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum), and Linda Baines (President of the Forum for Independent Research Endeavours, United Kingdom). It is indeed a pleasure to interact with such vibrant Independent Scholar communities worldwide.

We send our appreciation to the UC San Diego Oceanids, as well as North County Village. We are fortunate to have these organizations as friends who have cooperated with us in many endeavors, including this booklet.

We hope that you will enjoy this small attempt to document the 2020 pandemic.

Keep learning. Act wisely. Stay safe and well.

Dorothy L. Parker, San Diego, December 2020