

Well, what a year it is that we are thankfully saying goodbye to! What Queen Elizabeth, at the time of the great fire at Windsor Castle two decades ago, memorably called an *annus horribilis*. For all of us, it has been the terrible year of COVID, but for us in the US, it has also meant suffering through the endgame of a despicable Presidency which has threatened not only our well-being and our livelihoods but also our bedrock values of democracy, belief in science and respect for truth.

On the bright side, the experience has perhaps deepened our appreciation of what it is that we value. We find ourselves re-thinking virtually everything we do -- how we spend our time, how we work, how we play. We notice opportunities for reflection and change. Silver linings abound. We are grateful that our family has been safe and well. (And, of course, we have Netflix and Zoom to keep us company!)

Sheila and Robin -- --no longer having offices to go to, and blessed with reliable pensions -- -- are spared some of the challenges that afflict so many others. For the essentials of life, our local shops, by and large, remain open. And where they are not, Amazon always comes to the rescue. Our smart TV -- coupled with Sheila's prowess at technology -- has enabled us to "stream" excellent shows, and -- less happily -- to marinate in the endless wall-to-wall "Trump Show." Joe Biden's victory in the recent election has helped us breathe more easily. And the imminent prospect of vaccinations against COVID gives hope that by summer, we will be out and about -- and actually able to see people in person.

Robin continues to be busy and impressively disciplined. One project has been cataloguing (for an imagined posterity) archival items from his family tranche. He continues to read and write about John Stuart Mill, the 19th-century English philosopher, remains active on the vestry of his church, which is on the cusp of a daring (and costly) renovation, and continues volunteer service with the American Brain Coalition, which links the people who live with brain disease with the scientists who search for its cures. He has recently organized (on *Zoom*) a bi-weekly older-men's conversation group, which ruminates about various worldly and personal issues, and continues his regimen of torturing the family Steinway with brazen attempts on the masters (currently, the piano works of Frederic Chopin).

In just a few weeks, he will reach the awesome age of 80, which he views with deep suspicion and mistrust. One activity related to his stage of life and his proclivity for stroke is participating in a prospective study of stroke designed to measure the relative value of medical vs. surgical interventions. (He drew the "medical" option which plies him with blood thinners and frequent check-ups.) He also diligently toddles off to the gym for an hour's work-out virtually every day and monitors his intake of food and (less agreeably) wine. *Mirabile dictu*, his energy and clarity seem to be up, while his weight is down.

Sheila -- always a pushover for community-building opportunities -- remains unapologetically busy. She is still involved in the slow and arduous work of disentangling herself from the nonprofit Interfaith Community that she founded, and has been leading, for more than three decades. Closer to home, she serves as a very active vice-president of our local block association, which provides her (and the rest of the neighborhood) with a wonderfully vibrant sense of community. She also continues her involvement with alumni of the Ford Foundation, where she worked for two separate stints in the 1960s and 1990s. An increasingly busy and gratifying area for her is her service as co-president of her Barnard College alumnae class, where she has been thrilled to engage her classmates in building afresh a sense of connectedness. She relishes the opportunities that Zoom offers to build a rich program of conversation and learning (film discussions, book discussions, stage-of-life conversations, museum tours led by classmates -- and more). Her exercise routine is not quite up to Robin's, but she does see a wonderful trainer twice a week on Facetime (so much easier than going to the gym!). Always a year younger than

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Robin, she has her own growing list of health challenges, which she manages with patience and Stoicism. Not fun!

Our daughters have been plucky and resilient throughout this dreadful year. Professor Janna was recently recruited for a very different assignment at work (Weill Cornell/New York-Presbyterian Hospital), in which she now works half-time as Assistant Dean of Student Affairs. The other half is divided between serving as the psychiatry liaison for the heart transplant program, and seeing individual patients in her psychiatry faculty practice. (This all seems to add up to about 150 percent of time!) Last Spring, she was working almost exclusively from home, but increasingly, she is stationed at the hospital and medical school. During the peak of the pandemic in New York City in the spring, when our hospitals were almost entirely given over to intensive care units, she was very involved in the hospital's efforts to support all the front-line departments and services through support groups and treatment outreach. She and a colleague created a series of videos for activities to help with managing stress during a crisis ("Mindfulness on Call"), and she developed a related course that was implemented via Zoom -- open to all workers across the hospital enterprise. Her shifting work efforts and environments have been hard, and have been compounded by the relentlessly high stress levels which infuse medical work in the context of a pandemic. Needless to say, the pleasure she would normally have got from running marathons has gone out of the window; she was signed up for the Boston, London and New York City Marathons... but you can guess what happened to those.

Meanwhile, 19 miles up the Hudson River, Caroline and Nathaniel and their three girls find themselves facing new juggling acts. Caroline, the actor and writer, has expanded her role as educator. Thanks to Zoom, the true silver lining of our miserable times, she has expanded her small company, The Writers and Actors Group, into an international one, where she coaches screenwriters and actors one-on-one, and teaches group classes to students around the world. She also has a busy side-business tutoring individual students for academic classes. Nathaniel, whose work as an event photographer was decimated by the pandemic, has refocused on building up aspects of his profession that are less dependent on large group gatherings. Meanwhile, in his role as one of the world's best Dads, he has become much more the stay-at-home parent as Caroline grows her business. (He logically has become the resident expert and overseer of the girls' at-home remote learning.) He keeps himself sane and busy with two intriguing new interests – one of them, serious kayaking on the Hudson River, and the other, training to become a member of the Dobbs Ferry volunteer fire department. (Who knew?).

With great credit to Caroline and Nathaniel's parenting skills, the three girls continue to thrive, despite the pandemic. Anika, almost 11 and in fifth grade, plays the viola, anchors her soccer team and creates terrific artwork (the enclosed card is hers!) Phoebe, 8 ½, is in third grade, plays the violin, loves reading and mastering all things screen-related, and has a wicked sense of humor. (She has her own YouTube channel, with the pseudonym Chicken Nugget.) And Iris, 5, is in kindergarten. She is quite the little artist and is astonishingly composed and independent (a handy defense when in the company of two domineering sisters).

All three are enrolled in the same sweet local school. The older girls can walk there by themselves (that is, when they attend in person, which is only about half time; the rest of the time they study at home). They have a great collection of COVID masks and seem unperturbed by having their normal world turned upside down by the virus.

So, in short, we can't complain. We are all safe and well. We soldier on, trying to make lemons out of lemonade and always on the lookout for silver linings. And we look forward to hearing *your* news!

*Warmest wishes from Sheila, Robin, Janna, Caroline, Nathaniel, Anika, Phoebe and Iris*