Notes from Our Virtual Reality:

*A Short List of Some of the Things USSB Members Have Done in Quiet Isolation*

1. Made lists
2. Made schedules
3. Ignored both
4. Learned to make cloth, non-surgical face masks
5. Made over 250 face masks and sent them to volunteers, USSB members, and more
6. Made a mental note of people not wearing masks
7. Wore face masks to shop at Smart and Final and Vons and Gelson’s and the farmers market
8. Bought groceries for those in isolation
9. Donated money to our new Covid-19 Response Fund
10. Searched Santa Barbara for toilet paper and paper towels
11. Met online and over Zoom, to worship, discuss parenting, learn about quantum physics, read poetry, make mandalas, drink tea, chat, and more.
12. Felt big feelings
13. Ignored big feelings
14. Tried to sleep each night
15. Tried not to eat too much food or drink too many cocktails
16. Drank too much and ate too much
17. Tried to remember to be kind
18. Stepped outside
19. Taught our children at home
20. Worked from home
21. Worked at hospitals or jails or grocery stores, slightly afraid
22. Lost jobs
23. Found volunteer jobs
24. Received food from the food bank or unemployment for the first time in our lives
25. Worried about our finances
26. Worried about our neighbor’s financial future
27. Failed to pay rent or a mortgage
28. Received a credit for rent from a kind landlord
29. Worked on a meaningful divorce ritual with Rev. Julia
30. Made plans for dying
31. Said goodbye
32. Noticed birds, butterflies, the voices of children
33. Counted the days and started again
34. Made more schedules
35. Made more lists

Maureen Claffey
"This is how we're going to flatten the curve."

USSB Members Share Glimpses of Their New, Socially-Distanced Lives

Clockwise from top right: A blooming rose in Kanta MacDermott's front garden; Larry Williams wearing a mask made by fellow member Dana Zurzolo; the empty Mission lawn on a cloudy day by Carol Schwyzer; Rachel Aarons at home with Harry, who keeps Rachel company after years of service as her children's companion; Judy Farris's daughter and granddaughter at Lake Carneros, while Judy (top left) scares the crows away.
Those who know Gun Dukes will not be surprised to hear that she has kept busy making jewelry and trading jigsaw puzzles with other members, and she has also sewn 20 masks.

Clockwise from right: John Altman modeling a reptile print; the USSB staff working to prevent many kinds of viruses during a weekly Zoom meeting; a surprise amaryllis blooming in Nancy Van Antwerp's Carpinteria garden; Mike Gorodezky and Eileen Bunning enjoying the sunshine responsibly; and a smiling (we believe her when she says this) Mary Grimm.
Six Degrees of Covid-19 & the Climate Crisis

Last night I had my first dream in which Covid-19 issues appeared: I am walking up Shoreline Drive near the Marina, on the way to Ledbetter. There are no cars, but plenty of walkers. We distance ourselves, I hear a noise behind me and turn to see a small, blond teenage girl approaching. I ask her to keep her distance, but she bumps into me repeatedly. Her expression is serious, but determined. She does not keep her distance. She is wearing a dusty-pink velour jacket, embroidered in the same color with designs that remind me of Swedish Christmas decorations. I realize she looks a lot like Greta Thunberg. She does not back off. I wake up.

For the metaphorically inclined, I could probably stop here! (But I will persist.) In the news coverage on Covid-19, I see two main threads:

1. The far-reaching effects of this pandemic are hitting us all, some more than others. We are at once isolated and “in this together.”
2. Everyone is wondering when we can “get back to normal” and what that will take.

I am struggling to understand how to reconcile these two threads. I don’t believe they can be reconciled. Certainly, we long for a time when we are not on alert 24/7 and in fear of the future, but the mere fact that we are all affected (if not in-fected), means we can never get back to what was “normal.” Maybe we should not even want to.

Every one of us knows, or will know, someone who gets the virus. Every one of us will be affected economically, existentially or indirectly, or both. Every one of us knows, or will know, someone who experiences a personal or family tragedy or emergency or setback or disappointment because of the pandemic. Some people, some things, have died and we cannot get them back. Daily news is replete with examples; your lives contain them. Six degrees of separation has shrunk to 1 or 2.

We know that individuals who experience a crisis often remain deeply affected the rest of their lives. They are changed. Their outlook or world view may alter; values may change; behavior may change. All of us are affected by this crisis. How can we remain unchanged? How can we expect that anything will ever return to what passed as “normal” before? The pandemic has irrevocably changed the world and all of us in it, because we are irrevocably linked. We were always linked, of course, but now we are living it and cannot escape knowing it. We are stronger than we thought and life is more fragile than we thought. We are learning none of us can do it alone all the time. Everyone needs and everyone can help and the needs and the help combine until it is hard to tell one from the other.

This crisis has also laid bare every inconvenient reality about “normal.” These realities, like the pandemic, cross borders and constituencies and demography. They bind us together and demand we address them together. When I drafted this essay, I included explanations and examples for each item. Then, I realized those examples are redundant because they are documented in your lives and the lives around you:

• Our health care system leaves too many physically and financially vulnerable in order to prop up a private system of profit which is at odds with meeting medical needs.
• Economic business-as-usual elevates money and profit above the well-being of people, entrenching power in money and money in power, and putting democratic institutions in peril.
• Economic inequities make individuals and institutions vulnerable, especially in times of crisis, and force people into decisions which may jeopardize the community as well as their own current and future well-being.
• The political divide reduces us to competing ideologies and devalues the science, rationality, and cooperation that could lead us to greater resilience and well-being. We need all hands on deck, but to push an unfortunate metaphor, some are relegated to the hold or thrown overboard.
Selective and persistent marginalization and oppression operates as a part of all the issues above and cannot be set right without addressing them as part of all the issues above (systemic racism; misogyny and the suppression and erosion of women’s reproductive rights; xenophobia and the demonization of immigrants, especially immigrants of color; gender and sexuality equity issues; and everything I have neglected to mention).

These should not be political, but they have been and are and probably will continue to be, unless we recognize that leaving them unaddressed leaves us vulnerable to, and unprepared for, inevitable future crises. Leaving them unaddressed is the same as failing to learn from this crisis and demeans all that the courageous first responders and helpers have sacrificed. To want to, or try to, return to business as usual demeans every sacrifice of this crisis that we have made together.

As we come out of this crisis—and we will come out, though healing will take time and will—we will need to rebuild. We must not restore exactly what was there before, but instead make the structures stronger and better. We must build in stamina and resilience and sustainability, to honor what we have so painfully learned: We rise and we fall together. The past, present, and future exist simultaneously in us. We stumble on stones that could have been removed before but were not removed. If we fail to remove them now, we doom ourselves, and all those who follow, to stumble again and again.

We can never get back to what was “normal.”

*Maybe we should not even want to.*

Here is where the climate crisis comes in. Worries about climate change have understandably been set aside as people struggle just to survive—physically, economically, psychologically, spiritually. But if we have been thinking about climate change as something separate, to be addressed after we have recovered from Covid-19, we are missing an opportunity. The issues that deferred and derailed action on climate change before the pandemic are the same ones that have made us politically and economically vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic itself. The same issues have sidelined and sabotaged social action of any kind. The concentration of resources and power is not sustainable politically or environmentally. We have no reasons left to tolerate or ignore marginalization of anyone. We have no reasons left to accept the prioritization of individual power and privilege if it jeopardizes the well-being of all. And here is the last “open” secret: We don’t need every last recalcitrant denier to be on board. All we need for the tipping point, the inflection point, is a critical mass of those who care and know. We already have that. All that is left is to help them realize it! Thanks to their recent shared experiences, chances are greater they will understand what we are talking about and they will hear us loud and clear. We are all in this together, we will only solve it together, and it will take some individual sacrifices for the good of the whole.

Now is not the time to back off. Now is the time to wake up.

*Gail Fairburn*

originally posted on USSB Reflections

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**Fashion Fling Postponement Creates an Opportunity**

Girlfriends: as with almost everything else, the Fashion Fling will not be in May. We don’t know when it will be rescheduled, but you can be ready. Use this quarantine time to go through your closets and drawers and find things that you aren’t wearing. Sadly, we don’t have space at USSB to store your bags of clothing. If you can’t store them, donate them to your favorite thrift store.

If you *can* store them, congratulations! You’ve got clean closets and you’re ready for the party!

*Sally Hamilton*
We’re Going to Pretend That We Chose This

my friend says over the phone, and her words are
a heavy key in my hand, a wall of ivy that wasn’t there before,
the faint outline of a door.

Behind the door is what is: my husband and daughters, our home,
the creek behind the house, the steep hillside overhung with
oak, the road lined with newly sprung flowers, mornings of rain, time.

Slowly we are the parents we want to be here.
We go for walks at the pace of a 4 year-old, dwell in our senses.
Watch leaves fly like swallows. Leap from one shady patch to another.
Contemplate ladybugs. Here we wait out the tantrums and the refusals to
clean up, patience in abundance in the absence of anything to be late for.

We also get bored.
Spend afternoons feeling what it’s like to be the people we are,
the textures of our interiorities.
Remember this life is an empty space to be filled.

We learn, too:
that forgiveness expands the walls of the house,
that we can use words to ask for what we need,
that joy is a choice and all-powerful.

On days we hear the news of the world,
we fall apart at the seams, curse the million ways vulnerability
can be a weakness, the choices others don’t get to make.
We spend long nights beating a drum of anxiety.
In the morning, return to a monotony newly sweet,
spin love like gold and decorate one another with it.

When our time here comes to an end,
as we’re told it surely will,
we will fill our pockets with soil,
plant our next life in it.

Poem and photo by Anna Fortner
From the Director of Religious Education

Are You Happy Now?

Are you happy now? It seems like a silly question to ask during this time of fear, suffering, uncertainty, and death. We are in a serious health and financial crisis, not only here in the US but around the world. Who could be happy at a time like this? And who would want to be? The answer to this question is that we all should want to be. Happiness is closely tied to mental health and mental health is tied to physical health.

I have been sick my entire life, from the time I was born—two-and-a-half months prematurely in Ravenna, Ohio, 52 years ago—to the present. My issues have mainly been with my lungs, but other issues led (finally) to a diagnosis of lupus about eight years ago. But through all of this, I have been happy. This is because throughout my life I have discovered six keys of happiness that work for me.

"When you forgive others, it does nothing for them, but everything for you."

Forgive

Martin Luther King said, “There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.” When you forgive others, it does nothing for them, but everything for you.

Practice Gratitude

In the book The Untethered Soul, Michael Singer writes, “Everything will be okay as soon as you are okay with everything.” What in your life would you change? How can you know which events made you who you are today? Remember to constantly breathe a mantra of thanks for all of the things in your life that come along to make you who you are. This means the bad and the good.

Find Meaning in Work

About one-third, or 30 percent, of human life is spent working. Try to find work that allows you to be your best self, to give to others, make them happy, ease their suffering. This can be done in almost any job if you practice our seven Unitarian Universalist principles.

Know the Value of Compassion & Doing for Others

Buddhism teaches that when we have compassion for others we stop thinking of only ourselves and turn our attention to freeing others from suffering. “The purpose of life is not to be happy,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson, “it is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”

Don’t Worry

“In every life we have some trouble, when you worry you make it double,” sings Bobby McFerrin in his famous song, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” There are those things in life that we can change and direct. The things you can change, of course, you should work on with all of your might. However, you cannot change such things as the trajectory of a meteor, the weather, or the political climate. Pray about the things you can’t change and then let go of them.

Find Your Happy Place

It may be found in music, lying on a beach, in a field of wild daffodils. It will be different for each of us. Your happy place is not an escape, but rather a break from life’s challenges. It allows us to put things into perspective, find hope, and see our lives as the gifts they truly are.

I recently started a new class through Yale University called “The Science of Well Being.” I am learning even more strategies for being happy. I hope to be able to share them with you soon, either virtually or in person. Until then I leave you with these words by Barbara Cheatham: “May each of us bring happiness into another’s life; may we each be surprised by the gifts that surround us; may each of us be enlivened by constant curiosity—and may we remain together in spirit til the hour we meet again.”

Kathleen Hogue
Director of Lifespan Religious Education
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Library Corner

"The Books Miss You!"

That was the headline of “Library Mojo,” a column in a recent Montecito Journal. Our USSB library will stay closed until our church reopens, so the books really do miss you. We do not have a book review this month, but would like to pass on some information from the Santa Barbara Public Library.

Our public library system has a new pilot program called SBPL Delivers, which will send you books in the mail. Shipping is being sponsored by the Santa Barbara Public Library Foundation. Call (805) 962-7653 to request books and have them mailed to your Santa Barbara, Montecito, or Carpinteria address. Or you can fill out a form online by going to https://tinyurl.com/ybx23sc8.

Any other requests or account questions can be directed to the central library. Their current hours for virtual services are Monday through Thursday, 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, and Friday from 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM, and their number is (805) 962-7653.

Please stay well and enjoy your books.

Ellie Tuazon, Library Committee Chair

May Outreach Offering

Food Bank of Santa Barbara County

In May, our Outreach Offering will support Foodbank of Santa Barbara County, another local organization that is effectively mobilizing to support the most vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Foodbank of Santa Barbara County’s mission is to end hunger and transform the health of Santa Barbara County through good nutrition and increased food security. With nutrition education, disaster preparedness, environmental sustainability, and community resilience at the forefront of its mission, Foodbank is working to solve the underlying causes of hunger in Santa Barbara County.

In ordinary times, one in four people in Santa Barbara County receive food support through Foodbank’s 300 programs and partners annually. Since Covid-19 safety measures took effect, a visible and staggering increase in need for food is evolving throughout the county. Foodbank has tripled the amount of food it normally provides to community members facing food hunger and food insecurity. In the last week of April, to meet growing need, the Foodbank purchased $100,000 in food that is difficult to source by donation.

Financial donations and volunteers are urgently needed. For more information about the Foodbank of Santa Barbara County, including how to volunteer, please visit their website: www.foodbanksbc.org.
Sundays in May

Rev. Julia and our Worship Arts Team lead services every Sunday at 10:00 AM

Pre-service greetings begin at 9:55 AM

Our Online Sanctuary is Open

Join us on Zoom or Facebook

Service links are sent out in the Friday email, in a special Sunday morning email, and are always available on the front page of our website, www.ussb.org.

Can't be with us when we're live Sunday morning? You can watch a video of the service anytime on our USSB Facebook page, and we archive every service video on www.ussb.org/audio.

Virtual Coffee Hour: It's a Thing!

After the Sunday service, we stay on Zoom and break into small conversation groups for coffee hour so you can see old friends, meet new friends, and catch up with each other. Feel free to join us on Zoom anytime during the hour after the service ends. Hosted by Maureen Claffey, our Director of Congregational Life. BYO coffee and snacks!