

The Salem Light

Newsletter of the Congregation of Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church
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I came across these articles and thought you might find them interesting.

Pastor Betty Lou+

MAY – JUNE 2020

This Is Me at 68: Elders Reflect During Crisis



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ENKHBAYAR MUNKH-ERDENE

People over 60 share their coronavirus stories—from becoming a grandmother to dancing in the street.

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The following essays are reproduced in partnership with McSweeney's Publishing. Citizens 60 and older share their experiences and reflections related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Illustrations are YES! originals by Enkhbayar Munkh-Erdene, associate art director.



The Eyes of My Eyes
Have Been Opened

Jane Ganahl, Bay Area, California Born 1952

With news that oldsters like me are most at risk for the virus, some youngsters have shrugged their shoulders and called COVID-19 the “boomer remover.” Some politicians even suggested that if we seniors really loved our country, we’d go back to work and keep the economy from tanking, damn the dangers. Call it a patriotic suicide.

I spent most of my professional life as a journalist, covering fires, murders, earthquakes, and other calamities. I did enough “victim’s family” stories to turn my heart into the hardest obsidian. (I had to; it was the law of the newsroom to not let anything get to your emotions.) The hardening of the heart extended to my personal life, where I ended two marriages when they became too challenging, as well as every romantic relationship I’d ever been in—and there were many. I lived my life selfishly, devoid of spiritual belief of any kind.

But like many who reach this age—perhaps because we wake up to the fact that our years on the planet are numbered—I began to question all this a few years ago when I stumbled upon a colony of stray cats near my home. They were starving, neglected, sick. As a longtime cat lover, I could not turn away, and started to

help. This seemingly small development proved to be the one that would slowly drag me into a softer-hearted version of myself. To quote e.e. cummings, “the eyes of my eyes” were opened.

And when the granddaughter was born almost three years ago, the transformation was complete. Every movement of her tiny hand, every verbal utterance, seemed sacred: biblical code telling me my life’s direction, and reminding me that the iron doors to my heart could never again be closed.

So here I sit, aching from the pain of isolation and separation, tearful when I see the suffering of those in ICUs around the country, euphorically grateful that I am healthy, enchanted by the jade-green centers of the ranunculus flowers I bought myself for my birthday... feeling everything so acutely. I sometimes wish I could shut those doors, even just a little.

But I can’t, and that’s OK. This is me at 68. I rescue cats and earth worms, dote on the people I adore. Am I ready to die? Absolutely not. I love myself now. Wall Street will have to find another martyr.



Carol Davis, New York City Born 1957

I’m talking to my 94-year-old father on FaceTime. I watch as his face moves on and off the screen because he doesn’t really understand FaceTime. Sometimes he reaches out and touches the screen, covering the camera with his index finger. His devoted caretaker, conscientiously masked and gloved, takes the finger away from the camera and holds the phone for him at the correct distance. Still, his eyes wander, as the technology is simply not intuitive to him. I wonder if he believes he’s really talking to me.

We can’t sit together in the same room, he casually squeezing my hand while he tells me the same stories I’ve heard countless times. He’s an immigrant who fled Hungary with his family when he was a young boy and learned the language of tenacity and arrogance on the streets of the Bronx. He built an empire, traveled the

world, collected vintage automobiles, each of which he can still name by make and model, better than he can remember my birthday. Now he sits in his living room, isolated from his family; we are his last remaining connection to his already shrinking world.

“Where are you?” he asks me.

I live directly across the park from him.

“I’m home. Where I always am,” I say in the same reassuring tone I used with my own kids when they were young.

“How are you feeling today?” I ask.

“Not bad for an old man,” He says. He pauses, a faraway look in his eyes. “How old am I?”

“Ninety-four,” I say.

“Ninety-four,” he repeats. “I thought I was 80.” He sounds disappointed.

“How’s your mother?” he asks. “I haven’t heard from her in a while.”

I don’t know whether I should remind him that she died over 40 years ago. Before I can answer, he begins a story I’ve heard many times.

“You know we met in the Catskills,” he continues, “right after the war. I had no money. I got a job as a busboy at the Kiamesha Lodge. The pay was good. I’d just come back from Germany, assigned to work at a D.P. Camp [*Displaced Persons Camp—Ed.*], because I spoke Hungarian and German. They needed interpreters for all those people from the camps. I found my cousin and my aunt, and my mother was so happy I found them...”

He goes on for a while longer before trailing off, as if the gravity of his story suddenly tires him out.

“How are you doing?” I ask.

“Not so good,” he replies.

“What is it?”

“My blond girlfriend told me she doesn’t want to see me anymore.”



*Dancing With My Daughter
in the Middle of West 70th*

Robin Reif, New York City Born 1951

Though I would never have uttered this aloud, I always believed myself invincible. My father, a doctor, lived to 99. His motto: Genetics overcomes all. I thought I'd won that lottery until this crisis punctured my delusion. I'm told each day that my age gives the virus the edge in any potential skirmish, a threat made painfully real when my generous and amiable neighbor, a retired dentist, died of the illness last week.

My daughter puts me back on track. I can't think of a better way to spend precious days than with this child who I adopted as a single mom. She's heading to college next fall, so staying home has gifted us time for a long goodbye. We've been looking through old photographs, remembering what we've been through as a family and having difficult conversations, the kind that might have gone unspoken without this strange cocoon created by quarantine. I've had the chance to apologize for some terrible mistakes. She's had the chance to be angry out loud and we've embraced as tightly as we ever have.

We've begun marking time with new rituals: heading out around 11 p.m. each night into the vibrant, unstoppable spring. We stroll empty streets, dark and fragrant with red maples and crabapple trees in bloom; magnolias too, their stiff, upturned beaks starting to crack open. She takes my arm. We chat, or we're quiet. We improvise a dance in the middle of West 70th Street without a car in sight.

Finding freedom in confinement feels like the descending of grace.



*Becoming a Grandmother
During the Pandemic*

Susan Ito, Oakland, California Born in 1959

On day three of sheltering in place, we were getting accustomed to the new normal. My husband, me, our two adult daughters, and son-in-law were now all huddled at home. Our jobs were on hold or online. Five adults and three dogs had been thrust into a new intimacy.

On Sunday afternoon, a group text message on the "family channel" spread through the house: Our elder daughter, living downstairs, was in early labor. Before the outbreak of coronavirus, she had planned on a home birth. Now, we were doubly relieved she wouldn't be entering a hospital. A few hours later, the doula and midwife arrived and I heard my daughter's voice break through the floorboards: a single, long roar of pain and effort.

The sound of her voice shattered me. I grabbed my puffy headphones to distract the sound of her suffering, and then I heard my husband and younger daughter's voices. "Is that a baby?" "I hear a baby!"

So soon? I joined them at the top of the steps. And then I heard it: the unmistakable cry of an infant, hoarse and insistent. The doula appeared, grinned and gave us a double-fisted thumbs-up. The midwife had arrived with just seconds to spare.

We were ushered into the dark room, heated to sauna temperature so that the transition from womb to earth would not be too abrupt. We knelt by the bed. A little black-haired creature snuggled against my daughter.

"She has a butt chin," murmured the new aunt. The tiny familial dot of a cleft. We sighed in recognition, and how she mirrored both her parents: her perfect nose, her flowering lips.

We baked a cake with limited ingredients. The flour was almost gone and we had no powdered sugar for frosting, so we made a flourless, mousse-like chocolate cake that called for eight eggs. How carefree we were, not realizing that the next time we went to the store, there would be no eggs. We found a blue and

green candle shaped like the number one and stuck it into the cake topped with cocoa powder and sprinkles. We tiptoed into the darkened baby den, and softly sang "Happy first-day to you" in the room lit by the single flickering candle.



*I Miss My
Little Problems*

Andrea Carlisle, Portland, Oregon Born in 1944

I miss my little problems.

How did my favorite winter cap get so stretched out?
Do I need to grow a larger head to wear it again?

Has the sea lion already left our river and returned to the ocean? I saw his cocoa-colored, big-as-a-basketball head bobbing up outside my riverside door only twice this winter.

Can I unclog the sink myself, or do I need a plumber?

The otters are back from wherever they go in winter, and here I am on the walkway without my camera.

Why is it impossible to lose 1 pound, 1 single, good-for-nothing (my mother's phrase) pound?

I wish popcorn didn't crack old teeth. I love popcorn. I suppose I love old teeth more.

Am I really going to try to read through all the letters I've saved from my five aunts, my parents, various friends, and old professors over the years? How long would that take? But then again, how can I throw them away?

Will the train schedule ever change so that those five blasts don't wake me from a dead sleep at 3 a.m.?

Is it too cold to go out on the upper deck and wave to the moon before I lay me down to sleep?



*A Vaccine for Pandemics
and Other Global Perils*

Mary Kay Jennings, Houston Born in 1944

On March 12, three months after the unexpected death of my husband, I was in the early stages of trying to work my way through grief when my son texted me from LA suggesting I stay in the house because of the coronavirus. I had just had lunch with a friend and stopped by my local supermarket in Houston, where I found the zombie apocalypse in full force: no meat; no canned soup, beans, or vegetables; no paper goods of any kind; checkout lines 10 deep.

I was shocked, unsettled, and feeling vulnerable—not from fear of the coronavirus so much as from the shoppers' reaction. Selfishness, the most dangerous malady of our time, was on full display.

And this was in the early days. The virus had not been declared a pandemic, and states were not on lockdown. Yet shelves were bare, shoppers eyed their neighbors furtively, and baskets overflowed.

I left the store disheartened and thinking not about my generation with our race riots, moon shots, civil rights and anti-war demonstrations, but about my parents' generation. I was thinking about the Great Depression and the Second World War, hardships Americans faced together. The Vietnam War, civil rights, the Gulf Wars, the war in Afghanistan—these were faced by a country divided. Only briefly did we come together in the aftershock of 9/11, but soon the war on terror, like the war on drugs, was someone else's problem.

Most of us, myself included, have never encountered the threat of homelessness or starvation or lost loved ones fighting for freedoms so ubiquitous we seldom give them a thought. We have become soft as a nation, our backbones bent, not straightened by adversity. Over the last half-century, our focus has turned inward, making ourselves the center of our own self-fashioned universes.

However, I think this coronavirus pandemic poses a threat that humans can handle. It presents a unique opportunity to inoculate us against self-centeredness, isolation, the loss of family ties, and camaraderie. This

pandemic could bring together communities of all sizes, alert the collective “us” to certain dangers—like pandemics and climate change—that threaten our fragile existence if not faced responsibly.

If we humans are to survive and prosper, we must rediscover the inner strength, the selflessness—the collective responsibility—exhibited by my parents’ generation, the ingredients of a permanent vaccine to assure our planet’s habitability and our species’ survival.



Ann S. Sentilles, Dallas Born in 1947

“Beware the elderly.” Or is it, “Beware, elderly”? Or “Elderly beware”?

In any case, I am increasingly distressed to find myself classified among the “elderly.”

Perhaps I am reacting to the “elderly” label self-protectively. It could be that the very idea of a deadly pandemic in my lifetime is so terrifying that I am choosing to focus instead on the term “elderly,” and the inexorable vicissitudes of aging it conjures in others and, clearly, in me.

Funny thing is, I felt just as strongly about eschewing “middle-aged” as an identity when I was 45 (which is admittedly just about as middle-aged as one can hope to be). I guess I have this thing about ageism, and the thing about it is, my own response is textbook ageism. At its worst. I make assumptions about what it means to be a certain age, and I harbor prejudices against those assumptions without looking beyond them to each person as an individual.

Nevertheless, for health care purposes, it is beginning to make sense to come to terms with being “elderly,” even when I wish I were not. There are, of course, healthy elderly and frail elderly, folks older than 60 who are in shape and folks who are in terrible shape, people who take good care of themselves and those who are not able to, and across all demographics, but especially ours, many who have legitimately concerning “underlying conditions,” all of which make each of us more—or less—vulnerable to disease and viral infections. The basic biological fact I am forcing

myself to come to terms with is that my immune system is probably just as flabby as my upper arms, and for the same singular reason—my age.

The shallow, vain part of me is stomping my feet and shouting, “Don’t call me old!” But my deeper concern is more philosophical, even existential. If I am, if we are, broadly labeled and officially identified as “elderly,” for public health purposes, what does that mean for our access to and our level of care? Might we be triaged, as reportedly happened in Italy, to the end of the line say, for respirators, no matter how sick we become, if someone has tacit permission to calculate that we’ve lived long enough, or that we don’t have enough years left to be worth saving?

We become a problem in search of a solution, an “other,” whose worth and value is summarily diminished because of only one identifying factor of who we are, our age. This happens with all “others” who are so classified: the poor, for example, migrants, women, children, racial minorities, gays, and people who are trans. And thus, I resist.

Don’t call me elderly. My name is Ann.



Chris Kreussling, Flatbush, New York Born in 1958

For the second time in my life, I am at the epicenter of an epidemic.

I moved to NYC, to the East Village, in 1979. Just in time for the AIDS epidemic. We endured as the numbers went from a handful, to scores, hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands.

We lived and loved in fear for ourselves, our community, our way of life. We worried about every little cough, every slight fever, every blemish, every lump or swelling, both in ourselves, and others. We lived and loved in anger at the cruelty and incompetence of a federal administration that cared nothing about us, and killed us through their indifference and inaction.

It’s all so familiar. It feels the same now, but the pace and scale have been multiplied exponentially.

The NYC Department of Health reported days ago that my Brooklyn neighborhood of Flatbush has the highest positive testing rate for COVID-19 in the city. The epicenter, of the epicenter, of the epicenter of the epidemic is here.

Endurance trauma is real. I survived a dark 15 years of AIDS as a death sentence. That trauma is reactivated, living in NYC, the middle of the worst of COVID-19. For the moment.

Those of us who have survived past epidemics have experience and knowledge we all need to get through what's coming. This is real. And it's scary. Do not deny what you feel. That's how we get through this: by feeling it. Leave room for yourself and others to feel what they need, to grieve, to rage, to despair.

That's how we keep going: together.



Robert Skollar, New York City Born in 1949

I open my eyes, and all I hear is quiet. Is it middle of the night? Early Sunday morning? Midday Tuesday? Days, dates, and hours have lost their relevancy.

I find myself asleep in the afternoon, wide awake at 3 a.m. ...But now...it's all one long day.

I live on NYC's Upper East Side. 3rd floor. It's loud.

The morning overture begins with garbage trucks, construction work, Ubers, Vias, and the vanishing yellow taxis honking.

Then the Brearly girls start screaming. And I curse them.

But now...I long to hear those shrill screams.

The world keeps on spinning. So there is another day to face.

Beginning with me unhappily acknowledging my intense pain. Chronic bad back.

In the years BC, (before coronavirus), there were shots administered by the ever-so-willing Dr. Schottenstein (aka "Dr. Shot-in-the ass").

Now there are no shots, not when I won't leave my

house so, I must acknowledge and accept the pain that cannot be addressed for months. But now...Considering all else, it's merely a "minor annoyance."

I pray. This is not new. I pray everyday. Nothing from a book. Certainly not in Hebrew. Just talking to God. First thanks for my blessed life. Then asking for "stuff." No material wish list, just health and happiness for my loved ones.

Who gets the "lead ask" is dependent upon the magnitude of the issue they're currently facing.

But now...I pray for the world. Then, to bring some order to a world of chaos... a daily schedule.

Listing anything and everything from "take shower" to "write scene for screenplay" to "watch *Better Call Saul*." Hardly my usual schedule. But now...there is no "usual."

Next with equal amounts of trepidation, I check the *Times*' Morning Briefing, my email, my horoscope, and the stock market. I skim internet articles...

"Ten great lockdown books," "Netflix binges," "Best on-line classes," "How to throw a social-distanced Luau." I applaud those who partake.

But now...I'm too worried about never seeing my grandchildren again. Through strange circumstances, and, I believe, God's "master plan," my grown kids are living with us during this surreal time. They are stepping up big-time. Cautiously optimistic. Projecting a rational calm.

Believing I am overreacting, but remaining respectful of my beliefs. My wife fulfills her mom-caretaker role without interruption.

We gather for nightly *Jeopardy*. Me? I should be the leader of the family. But now...I am the weakest link. I've lost my usual "half-full" attitude.

I seriously consider the end of the world. I need to step up my game. The other day I assessed my life of 70 years...Pretty damned good! If I died today, I'd have to say, "I won life."

But now...I think about Charlie, almost 4, and Wes, just turned 2. They must have their lives. Full of all the good, happy days that make life what it is.

And I want to be part of it. But now...I just have to wait.



A Force
Outside Myself

Linda Jackson, Cody, Wyoming Born in 1941

I am having two specific and strong feelings in response to the pandemic, but more specifically to the changes that have happened so rapidly in the past one to two weeks.

One of the feelings has to do with the realization of the life of privilege that I have led. This is, of course, not the first time I've thought about it, but is the first time I have had to consider, as well as implement, a change of lifestyle dictated by a force outside myself. In just the past two weeks I have had to cancel a major surgery because it was elective, had medical appointments canceled, been unable to buy groceries that heretofore have been so abundant that I am sometimes overwhelmed by the choices, and had to make conscious decisions to not greet friends and acquaintances with a hug!

All those things are insignificant in the grander scheme, which makes me all the more embarrassed that I take it all for granted.

February 26, 2020 - Ecumenical Service for Ash Wednesday, at Norrisville United Methodist Church

Little did we know that this was the last time we would share soup and bread, and sing together for a while!



The other thought that keeps coming back to me concerns my wondering how my parents dealt with the major events in their life that were comparable, if not more frightening, to this pandemic. I know my mother lost a sibling to the Spanish flu of 1918. I know that both parents' families struggled in different ways during the Great Depression. I was born one week after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and my father was in the Navy. Because my parents were not the kind of people who shared feelings easily, I never knew if they were scared or lost hope, or if they just kept going one day at a time.

Editor's Notes: from Darla

This story moved me, as it reflected some things in my own life. I shared similar life events mentioned by this writer – I got here **Before** Pearl Harbor, and in time to see my father and all of my uncles go overseas to war. I had my own ration book, and my grandparents, who came to live with us had a “victory garden.”

My Mom started her wartime career as a “Rosie Riveter” at Glenn L. Martin aircraft Company in Middle River.

My Mom also lost two sisters during that 1917-1918 pandemic “The great Influenza.” Gladys was 8 years old and Grace was a toddler.

March 5, 2020 State of Health Emergency declared, renewed March 17th.

March 10th Council Meeting, held at Salem

March 12th Governor Hogan issued an order prohibiting gatherings.

March 15th Pastor Betty Lou began Salem Sunday Services via YouTube videos, emailed bulletins, and Daily Devotions.



SPRING IS STILL COMING AS SCHEDULED!



The tomb is empty, Christ is still Risen, Alleluia!

NOTES FROM SALEM MEMBERS “UNDER SIEGE” 2020

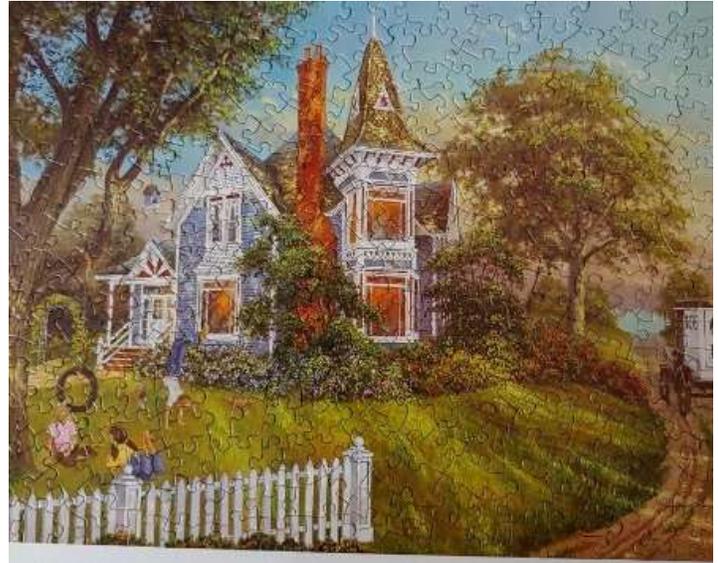
Ruth Phoebus wrote.....

How do I spend my time during this Corona Pandemic? Well, let's see....

I have been making face masks, along with the help of **Sue Pardo** and **Shirley Bortmes** who supply me with the cloth, elastic and pelon. They cut the material and pelon so that all I have to do is sew them together. Sue picks up the finished ones and distributes them. As of today, I have made 168. I also am knitting, baking, crocheting projects for our Craft Fair in October, and working jigsaw puzzles. When the weather gets nicer, I will work out in my yard.

I can't wait until we can worship together again. I miss everyone so much.

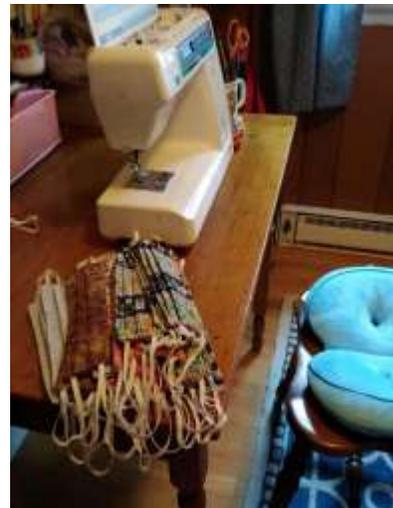
Missing you all, **Ruth Phoebus**.



Could colorful, washable masks be a good household item to continue using going forward?

We can protect the family when we have a cold – when dusting and cleaning – when peeling onions?

.....Just wondering!



The Lynches and Everetts went back to school with **Emily**.

Granddaddy Bill had to wrestle with fifth grade “word problems” on line – frustrating even to a retired elementary school teacher – who taught Math, Science, and reading too.

Emily thinks meeting with her teacher and classmates on line is actually fun! (Especially when some class mates appear on screen sideways.) This week she is having Music, Homeroom and Math on line.

Mom Mom Darla thought she would get by, just enjoying fixing meals and snacks, - but was recruited to help with music lessons (held in another room - can't forget how to change classrooms while having school at home!) Having a grandchild a few days each week has made our staying at home fun.

Ordering groceries on line or phone (even Chewy.com delivers) has made what is a hardship for many a blessing for us – and we're lucky to have family who “shop and deliver” too.

EASTER was even celebrated at home. Thanks to **Pastor Betty Lou**, who made it possible to attend church in our robes and slippers, right in our living room. We also attended services with the Pope, Bishop Gohl, and Donnie Swaggert!

Special helpers, **Nick and Lynn Cox**, delivered magnificent lilies, and **Cathy and Mark Hoefler** keep us tuned in to inspirational music by sending links.

The Easter Bunny even delivered Candy - all safely individually wrapped!





The Salem Church Council

met on "Zoom!" We may be on to something. No need to brave bad weather – and we only have to look presentable above our waist – and comb our hair!

Old and New members were installed in February. We meet the second Tuesday of each month.

Pastor and Elfriede Kiesling sent us photos of What they are doing while homebound. Very crafty!

One is of **Dick Kiesling** working on a doll house project for daughter Anne. He is also working on the other two daughters' doll houses.



The next picture is the **Christmas cards** for the year 2025, yes 2025! that **Elfriede Kiesling** is working on. Have two more years to go.



Glenn Deuchler showed his crafty side, making some beautiful turned objects.

He also cut and stacked wood – plenty of raw material for future fires and crafts.



We will remember all this talent, when we plan our next Craft Fair at Salem!

The **Deuchler** family used their “Stay at Home” time wisely, by building a new firepit to enjoy!



Pastor Betty Lou has been with us every day, with Daily Devotions, Sunday Worship on YouTube and phone calls with members and friends.



Our church is restored while “Sheltering at Home”

The roof replacement/repairs for the parsonage and the Church are completed and just in time before the rain began today.

Many thanks to **Ned Cockey**, and everyone who provided oversight for the project.

And thank you congregation for supporting the decision for the immediate repairs.

We will continue church services online Into May, while we await further guidance From the government and medical experts





of time.” (Looks like **Captain Jim** can drive across now.)



Spring is still springing, and making yard work for us to do - so get out and enjoy it – Pretend we're on vacation 'til we meet again!

Psalm 23

Verse 1

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

Today is May Day. Do you remember celebrating May Day at school? I attended a Harford County Elementary School and we celebrated the day in fine fashion. There was the crowning of a May Queen, the dance around the flagpole which, for this one special day, became the May pole, daffodils and the penny carnival. I can almost taste the lemonade and peppermint sticks. For that one day the world was filled with shouts and joy and laughter as we welcomed Spring into our neck of the woods. Everything seemed perfect even the woven ribbons covering the May Pole and flowers tucked into the folds of the ribbons. It was like the pole budded and sprouted bouquets of flowers.

The psalmist, David, reminisces about God in his life. As a shepherd boy he saw the ways God took care of him and satisfied his every need:

“I lack nothing.”

“He refreshes my soul.”

“You are with me”

“You comfort me”

“You go before me”

“Your goodness and love follow me”

“My cup overflows”

“I will dwell with you forever”

With Jesus we find contentment is in each day. As the month of May welcomes Spring along with the blessings of rain and breezes, sowing and planting, wild flowers and vegetable plants, may we reflect on God's loving celebration of life. May will see God weaving his ribbons of grace into each day, and may we deeply feel like David, *“I lack nothing.”*

Good Shepherd may we recognize your goodness and leap like joyful children following after you. Amen

Stay at home usually means play at home, for me all I saw was cobwebs here and there - never looked that hard for them before. Soooooo, I started to clean - off came the pictures - off came the drapes. Only thing I can say is I did sleep good! Sparkle and shine - the longer we're home, the more that time was extended, and dust began again!

Oh well, on to more fun things, like church, mail, making banners for Easter celebration at church (well that didn't happen.) Nick and I did get a chance to drop off some of the Easter lilies to some folks that wanted them.

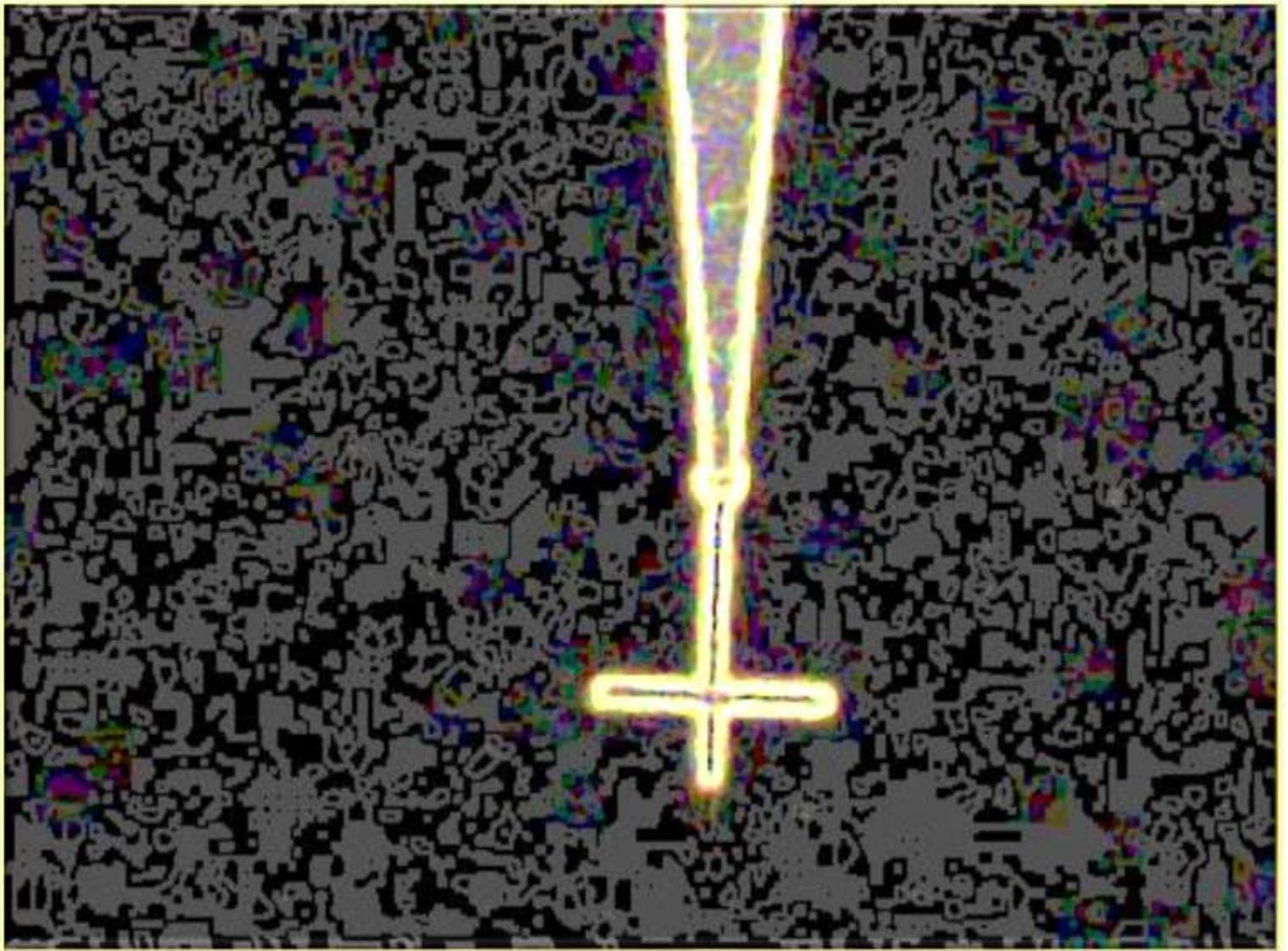
Sat down - looked around - more dust, dust everywhere - too much to care! Sooooo we did more fun things. Me working on crafts for craft fair and Nick working on tractors and golf cart engine. Sat down, looked around dust everywhere.

This dust just won't go away - like the virus - so we will go on and hope. Like dust, go away and don't come back another day!

Miss everyone, see U all real soon, I hope.

Lynn Cox





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