

## Nine Extra Years

by Lynn Olcott, Homer, N.Y.

Nine years ago, I was in an accident that nearly ended my life. Instead, I recovered and have lived long enough to experience the pandemic of Covid-19 and I am very grateful. While this is a time of great suffering, it is also a great human adventure on the planet and I would not have wanted to miss it.

Early in the lockdown my son and my two granddaughters moved in with me. This was a startling change, as I had lived alone for decades. While my son went to work and the girls fluttered through their young days, I listened obsessively to NPR and made masks. Long ago I had fired my cable provider and had never replaced my old sewing machine. The radio was my primary source of information and hand sewing colorful cloth soothed me as each new layer of Covid-19 information was revealed. The girls finished the school year remotely as I looked on in awe.

The science of this shapeshifter virus and our human response to it continue to fascinate me. My parallel life missions became: one, to understand the virus and two, to acquire elastic for the masks I was making. There was none to be found in stores or online. I begged elastic from friends, raided the necks of summer dresses, tore out the waistbands of old pajamas and experimented with scrunchies and the laces of shoes. It was months before elastic could be found again in stores, and then it was the wrong kind and the strips had to be cut lengthwise in half to go comfortably over the ears. “Comfortably” is a relative term here, mind you.

Still, we passed the summer happily, with hilarious early morning visits to the grocery store, and lots of time outdoors. When school started in the fall, we fashioned a better table and mini-school set up for each girl. They tried their best to manage this strange change in their education and I continue to be filled with respect for all children and all teachers. By Halloween, my son and the girls moved to their own newly purchased home ten miles away, and I was alone again.

The fall election was a huge relief. Once my neighbor and I were longer defined by our opposing lawn signs, we could resume our friendly talks as we moved into the season when our driveways filled with snow. Humanity triumphed and I rejoiced. Christmas drifted by into a much-welcomed brand new year. The attack on the capital was not a surprise. Somehow, we have created a network of people enamored with rage. How to restore us to purpose? I don't know. Maybe take down our lawn signs and shovel more snow?

At last, a vaccine, though the distribution process is chaotic. Perhaps every massive human project has an initial-chaos phase. They should let women organize these things. Old women, especially. Finally, I have a first shot and await the second. Meanwhile, I look to the beauty of our central New York summer and I hold close the hopeful feeling of being outdoors, and together, again. END

Lynn Olcott