

Corona Chronicle

Week 32

Thursday, October 22

I was scheduled to give blood in Westport on Monday – there is apparently a dire need of it during the pandemic – but for some reason having to do with safety (not defined any further than this), that blood drive was cancelled. So I thought “Okay, I’ll vote, instead!” It was a beautiful morning to walk down to Fall River’s Government Center. I noticed a long, shimmering blue cloth streaming down the side of a building along the way, and I remembered that just the previous Saturday my friend Corey Nuffer had taken part in Fall River’s “Fabric Festival.” Her job was to lead a walk for those who had signed up on a tour of Fall River’s “waterfalls.” She had taken me for a dry run of this walk earlier in the week, and I have to say that Corey was incredibly creative and resourceful. How do you take people to see a waterfall that no longer exist? Her walk began on the plaza between Government Center and the Main Post Office – a spot she had chosen because I had passed along to her what the Fall River Public Library’s children’s librarian had once told me: that his partner, who worked at the post office had told him that you could hear the sound of the submerged Quequechan River from the basement of the post office.

It is amazing to one who has only come to Fall River in the past two decades or so to find out there was once a full, sometimes raging, waterfall right where the Fall River Chamber of Commerce is now. I try to imagine it now, spilling onto the traffic on I-195... the highway and the new government center plaza having necessitated its being diverted and exiled underground – only to emerge in a much-attenuated form from a cement pipe behind the old mill on Pocasset Street now housing Workout World. Thus Corey’s walk was really more about the *idea* of waterfalls and rivers – or perhaps one could say the *ghosts* of waterfalls. These are not, alas, as famous as the ghosts of Lizzie Borden’s parents, but after all they are actually more *real*. That is to say, the water is still there, underground, however diverted it might be. And of course it is in our town’s name. which is in some measure a translation of the Wampanoag “quequechan,” which meant Leaping/Falling Waters.” I would have preferred the town name to be “Falling River” rather than Fall River – but I did not get to vote on *that*!

In her preliminary research for planning this walk, Corey had come over to meet me during Sukkot, and we walked to the Quequechan River Rail Trail from Walnut

Street. But before we took off, she peeked into our sukkah, and snapped a picture, which she later sent to the festival's creative director (somewhere in Portugal!). The director, according to Corey, loved the color of blue on the canvas-walls of our sukkah, and decided that *that* was exactly the color of fabric that should hang off of that building on the corner of North Main and Bedford Streets – it was a nod to her waterfall-walk. I am happy to report that although on the day of our research-walk the one remaining piece of waterfall (behind Workout World) was just a pathetic trickle (due to the recent drought), the night before the festival we had a really good rain all night and into the morning, with the sun coming out just in time for the start of the festival. So Corey could show her participants, yes, we *do* still have evidence of our “falling river.”

As I think back on that day she snapped a photo in our sukkah, I think it was on or just around the holiday of *Shemini Atzeret*, which was in the times of the ancient Temple a festival of *water*, of praying for rain for the new crop year, and involved the *kohanim* (the priests) pouring water over the altar on the Temple Mount, which was thought to run down from there all the way to the Mediterranean. It was a kind of ritual sympathetic magic, to get the region's “juices flowing” for the rainy season. (Along these lines, you could see our waving of the Four Species – our bouquet of lulav, etrog, myrtle and willow – as a kind of water “divining.”)

And yes, thankfully, it has been raining. The trees' foliage which had been somewhat lackluster up until about ten days ago, due to a lack of enthusiasm (the trees were just too parched to celebrate), are now a virtual fiesta of colors. It always amazes me how forgiving Nature can be, how able to “bounce back” from the unceasing abuse we humans inflict on her. That is, I am assuming that the drought is somehow a result of human-caused climate change, though of course there were plenty of droughts throughout history long before the industrial/fossil fuel age, so it might not *always* be our fault. In any case, Nature *is* very resilient, as long as we don't push her too far. While walking along the causeway at the top of North Watuppa Pond the other day, I saw a *loon*, and then later that week I saw a *coyote* crossing one of the roads in the Fall River Industrial Park!

On Tuesday I drove out to Northampton, MA, to meet up with my dear friend Amy Attias, whom I had not seen since last January. (Amy used to live in Westchester, but has recently moved to a small Berkshire-area town, Beckett, about an hour's drive west of Northampton.) We met in a parking lot and walked into town (yes, with our masks on!) for a little window-shopping and an outdoor lunch at a wonderful Mediterranean-Moroccan café called “Mosaic.” We sat out back

beneath an orange-and-yellow maple tree drinking sweet green mint tea to the accompaniment of wonderful Moroccan music while we waited for our food, which was totally delicious. The temperature stayed around 65 degrees or so, and there was a softness to the atmosphere, filled as it was with moisture, although we were never rained on. The drive along Routes 24, 495, and the Mass Pike to get there had been spectacular – it must have been the climactic color day of the season. And then I was sitting in a café enjoying lunch, music, and conversation with one of my best friends in perhaps my favorite town in the world...it was not a feeling of things being “back to normal,” but of this afternoon being – despite the restrictions of this pandemic era – shining, sparkling, a “gem” moment that I will always remember, set in the midst of this strange, difficult year.

After lunch I led Amy along my favorite paths in Northampton – down Green Street to the waterfall near Sage Hall (Smith’s Music building), and over the bright red Japanese-style bridge where you can look up at the waterfall and across Paradise Pond to the boat houses and up the hill at the college president’s house (occupied during my Smith years by the eminent Jill Kerr Conway), then along by Smith’s greenhouses (alas, closed due to the pandemic), and down to the path along the Mill River – one of my personally most-loved places in the world. The beauty was almost too intense, too fine to take in. Of course I had my camera with me, so I have made a stab at recording it (something I never did as a college student, though I spent countless hours writing in my journal in various picturesque spots along that path, and even painted a landscape there once, which I have hanging over my desk here in my home study on Walnut Street).

It was a day of replenishment; I felt I was soaking up beauty and happiness just as those parched trees had been soaking up the recent moisture from rain, dew and fog. Of course there is always a background hum of trouble and sadness in my consciousness these days – not just about the pandemic (we have hit 222,000 in the U.S. fatality count this week), but about so many other things that have gone wrong and wacky (and worse) in our nation.

This week’s news included the announcement by ACLU lawyers that they still have been unable to find the parents of 545 children who had been forcibly separated from their parents under the current administration’s “zero-tolerance” immigration policy, their parents having been deported back to Central America. This policy was begun secretly in 2017, and eventually announced in 2018, with an eventual total of 1,030 children, some of them infants, torn from their parents – conceived by the then attorney general Jeff Sessions, and assistant AG, Rod

Rosenstein, as a “deterrent,” to dissuade Central American families with children from coming to the U.S. So far the ACLU lawyers have been able to reunite 485 children with their parents back in their countries of origin, but their efforts have been hampered by the pandemic. As outrageous as this fact is, one can take inspiration, and feel some hope, thanks to a person like Lee Gelernt, deputy director of the ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project (whom I just read about on the website of the Jewish Council of Public Affairs). Mr. Gelernt spoke on NBC News on Tuesday, saying:

“We will not stop looking until we have found every one of the families, no matter how long it takes. The tragic reality is that hundreds of parents were deported to Central America without their children, who remain here with foster families or distant relatives.”

And just now as I was writing this week’s “chronicle,” a story popped up on my screen from AccuWeather (which seems to be a result of my having checked on the weather before my trip to Northampton). It tells the grim tale of the force of *too much* water in the Louisiana coastal region, which has been hit by *two* hurricanes back to back over the past few months – first Laura, and then Hurricane Delta. The site’s October 20th article, headlined *2,000 graves damaged in wake of back-to-back hurricanes*, by John Murphy (AccuWeather staff writer) reports that although, miraculously, no one had died in the Lake Charles region (Cameron Parish), some families have recently lost their deceased family member’s bodies from their supposed “final” resting places:

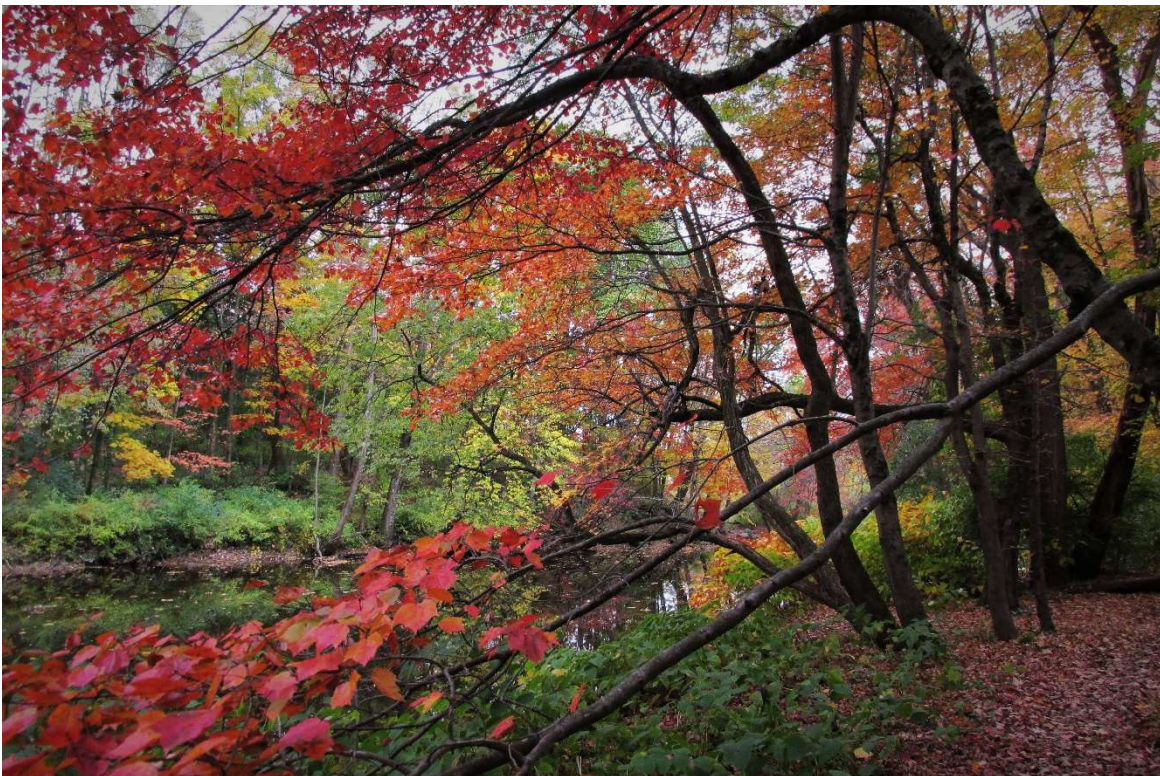
“The powerful storm surge associated with Laura and Delta was strong enough to cause the water to move massive granite and marble slabs in cemeteries in the hard-hit state. Vaults that held caskets in place ended up popping up ‘like corks,’ according to AccuWeather National Reporter Jonathan Petramala, who recently visited Cameron Parish and reported on the grim problem.

Scott Trahan knows of at least two of his family members missing from their resting places. ‘Now they found Uncle DD, but I don’t think they found Aunt Rose’s casket yet,’ he told Petramala.”

As I paused my writing to watch the AccuWeather videos accompanying this article, I found myself getting teary-eyed from hearing how grateful the residents of this storm-tossed area are for the way that everyone there is helping one another, and for the efforts of volunteers who have come down there from all over the country to nail blue plastic tarps on roofs, to cook food for those who have lost everything, to help people survive and recover from all this watery devastation. With all the obsessive focus on the upcoming election, I don’t see this kind of

news on TV in the evening (perhaps I am watching the wrong stations!). It is easy to fall into depression and a kind of numbness to these increasingly frequent catastrophes – fires, floods, plague (and even early snowstorms in the Upper Midwest, and one predicted this week for Amarillo Texas!) – but, as with the lawyers for the children separated from their parents, there *are* heroic, good-hearted people out there in the world, giving of themselves selflessly to help address wrongs, to help rebuild lives and heal the brokenhearted.

Believe it or not, I just remembered now that this week's Torah portion is *Noach* (the story of Noah and the planet-devastating flood). And so these themes of rain, waterfalls, trees, friendship, favorite places and devastated places, of the resiliency of Nature, and of *tzaddikim* (righteous ones, as Noah was seen to be in his generation) all end up flowing together here as I sense that this entry is coming to a good stopping-place. Make sure to get out and take in some of the free fall foliage-show while it lasts!



Path along the Mill River near the Smith College Campus, Northampton, MA