

Corona Chronicle

Week 49

Friday, Feb. 19th

I will not try to hide it: this is the *second* version of this week's Corona Chronicle that I am writing now. I began the earlier one on Tuesday, and it stretched into Wednesday, but when I sat down to read it over for typos, etc., this morning, I realized that it was too focused on the aftermath of the recent Impeachment Trial in the Senate, and on the politics of its verdict (the president acquitted – for the second time). I feel the need to record the history of our era for the sake of “posterity” (which I hope doesn't sound too highfalutin), so I am glad that I wrote it. But since this project began with the purpose of reaching out to our Jewish community during this difficult socially-distant period of time, it struck me that these things are probably *not* what you need to hear from me this week.

This week has been a school vacation for Lev (“Presidents’ Week”), and although Mark and I have been enjoying having Lev around the house for *a long time* now (almost a year!), with his doing his schoolwork remotely, we spend more time actually doing things together when he does not have remote classes to attend online.

On Tuesday we began watching the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of films (we finished part II last night), and, although, as I wrote above, I do not want to get into the thick of politics, I could not help but be reminded of what happened in Washington on Jan. 6th when I watched the scenes in this movie of Saruman's hordes storming the fortress where the last gathering of the race of humans (with some good elves and one dwarf mixed in) were taking shelter – especially the scene where the “bad guys” were trying to ram through the fortress gates with a huge battering rod. The most important takeaway from this story, however, is that the lust for *power* is a highly corrupting force. Of course one needs power to do *good*, to help make the world a better place, too. The trick is to keep one's eye on the *cause* one serves, and not on staying in power for one's own sake.

I suppose I can count myself lucky that this desire for power is not one I have ever felt in any significant way – except insofar as I desire, like anyone, to have enough agency over my own life and the life of my family that I can ensure our health and safety, our livelihood, etc. But I have never *sought* to be “president” or “chairperson” of any groups or on any committees, although sometimes I have

accepted having this kind of role when the group made clear that they *needed* someone to take the reins. But it never held any allure for me. I much prefer something like what I am doing now – *writing*. A solitary activity that does not involve managing other people, something I have never been particularly good at.

But, however corrupting power may be, the world needs leaders in order to function. I've never understood the philosophy of "anarchy." How is that supposed to work? Who or what would keep the forces of "might makes right" at bay?

On Wednesday we took advantage of Lev's being on vacation to take a day trip to Central Massachusetts, driving about 100 miles northwest and stopping at the Wachusett Meadow Audubon Sanctuary to take a walk across their snowy meadows. It was nice to get out of town for the day, see some different scenery (there start to be small mountains in this part of the state, the most notable one being Mt. Wachusett). Along the first part of the trip, while Mark was driving, I read out loud from a book I recently ordered, *The Dummies' Guide to American History*. We learned about the early handful of European explorers and exploiters who made it to the New World starting in the late 1400's (Lev and I had read the earlier chapter about the Vikings on Monday).

I ordered this book because I recently realized how little our son, a senior in high school, is really acquainted with basic American history. Now I'm not laying the blame on our school system – they have so many things to learn these days – but I thought that we could learn some of this material on our own. (There is much that Mark and I do not know about our country's history as well!) What struck me after these early chapters in the book, hearing of so much brutality and death in the encounters between the pre-European inhabitants of the New World and the European explorers and colonists is how late in history what we call "human rights" took root. And even today, I can only say that the *idea* is somewhat understood around the world – not, alas, the *carrying out* of the idea.

Over the past few days we have been bombarded in the news with the awful sights and statistics of the population of Texas, facing down the worst winter storm they have experienced in a decade. With sub-zero temperatures in places that usually at this time of year enjoy shirt-sleeve weather, and with an infrastructure that has never been insulated or prepared in any way to endure these kinds of conditions, the suffering is awful. Most of the state's homes lost power either completely or for some of the time (with "rolling blackouts"); people are freezing in their homes; with broken pipes, many families have suffered flooding and other major water-

and ice-damage; there is hardly any food or water to be had in the supermarkets; the gas stations cannot pump gas; people have no water to wash with or even to drink; families are having to take shelter at large “warming shelters” – and this in the middle of a pandemic!

I keep thinking of what it would be like to be a young woman, having just delivered a baby in one of Texas’ hospitals, facing the prospect of a quick discharge (as is the norm for deliveries in our era) – to go home to a house with no heat, no electricity, no running water...and perhaps, if her family has been unable to gas up their car, with no transportation! One would want to just stay at the hospital – but that would of course not be allowed, since they are always admitting new patients. It is almost unthinkable that such should be the case in this country, but in fact it is happening. Today, apparently, the power grid is coming back online, and the state is getting a good chunk of federal emergency assistance. But what a catastrophe!

And today, under the guidance of the new presidential administration, our nation re-entered the Paris Climate Accord. Well, that’s some good news.

And a little more good news, close to home: yesterday Lev received a letter of acceptance to his number-one college choice, Champlain College, in Burlington, Vermont! He is ecstatic, and Mark and I are thrilled for him. We keep our hopes up that the coming academic year, beginning in September, will be a “post-pandemic” year, that this current plague that continues to oppress us will at that point be a thing of the past. I so look forward to hearing of Lev’s happiness in being surrounded at this college (which has a focus on technology and the arts) by his “fellow wizards.” He has loved his week-long computer technology camps over the past 5 or so years (last summer he could not go, due to the virus), and I am hoping that Champlain will give him a similar experience: challenging him, enriching him, preparing him for a career in this field, and allowing him to make friends with like-minded souls.

Of course, there is this small matter of *getting* to a “post-pandemic” place. This week the eligibility to get one of the coronavirus vaccines has opened up to Mark’s age group (Lev and I will have to wait quite a while longer) – but now there is a problem with the state’s getting the vaccines. This is partly to do with the freezing weather in the South-Central part of the country, which has upset the supply chain.

There are also snafus with the websites that people use to go on and book appointments (Mark has not tried yet, but we have heard from others how

maddeningly difficult this is.) I looked this morning, and after the 65+ age group, next come groups of people with at least one co-morbidity, supermarket workers, teachers, and other groups that have to deal face-to-face with the public. I did not even see my category, not to mention Lev's, listed.

As they say, "it is what it is." Lev and I will have to wait patiently. We hope to be able to take a family vacation in late July. It seemed so realistic when I was planning it last month. Now – who knows? But all in all (especially compared with all those freezing people in Texas!), we have so much to be grateful for.

This coming Thursday night will be Purim, and we will read the Megillah on Zoom. We sorely miss our third Megillah-reader, Daniel Schafler. Yes, his memory is a blessing, and yet we are so sad – he left us too soon! May his spirit be with us on Thursday night. One cannot always make oneself feel "celebratory"- but we will honor the tradition, and whatever it is that we are feeling, come together and do it as a community, even though it be across a computer or smart phone screen. Surely, there *will* be better times again.



Ice, snow and leaves at Wachusett Meadow Audubon Sanctuary, Princeton, MA.