

Corona Chronicle

Week 37

Thursday, Nov.26th

Thanksgiving Day. I *am* profoundly thankful – for the health of all the members of my immediate family, for the so-far-so-good health of our Temple Beth El community members (at least as far as the coronavirus goes), for the health of all my three brothers and their families, all of whom I have spoken to in the past two days. I do not always call my brothers on holidays: we have never been close in that way...I suppose, to most people's eyes, we have never been "close" at all as adults. But we *were* close as kids – in a certain way, that is. Not in the way of being each other's best friends, but because we were four children fairly close in age, we were always in one another's face. My family sat down together for both breakfast and supper every week day, so we were intimately knowledgeable about all the ways we could annoy one another. That was what being brothers and sisters was like back then, in the sixties and seventies. At least at our house. Lots of arguing, with not a little physical roughness – hitting, wrestling, getting pinned to the ground when no parent was around to intervene. Getting called names (and I suppose I called *them* a few names, too). But there was an unspoken way in which we were close, loyal. I don't know how to explain it, but in some way during all these years it seemed as if we did not *need* to call each other often, or otherwise stay in touch. We just *were* (and *are*) family, and that connection, devoid as it has mostly been of shows of affection, has always been and will always be.

But in this pandemic era, we realize that we can take nothing for granted. Mom has been gone for over two years now. As I talked to my older brother, Skip, we realized we had not seen one another since her funeral in 2018. I saw Rob and Jim last November when I went down to Virginia and we gathered to consecrate her memorial stone, along with her sister's as well, who died just a month before Mom. They, too, had spent most of their childhood fighting – but they became each other's closest friends in the last three decades of their lives.

So it is just the three of us – Mark, Lev and me – who will be sitting down together for our kosher-vegetarian Thanksgiving meal later today: squash soup; vegetable lasagna; cranberry-apple sauce; broccoli with almonds; and pumpkin pie. I've already made everything but the cranberry-apple sauce and the broccoli. The kitchen and dining room are cleaned and swept, the tablecloth is on the table along with my "creative" arrangement of what's left in the garden (sprigs of dill and mint) along with autumnal-tinted tea candles. Unlike the family I grew up with,

Mark, Lev and I do not sit down together for meals every day (Mark and I do for supper, but Lev has usually already eaten by then; and then we always do for Shabbat dinner and lunch). I look forward to our special meals together, and try to make a “big thing” of it, even if it just us, the three of us who have mostly had just each other to talk with, walk with, or give a hug to for the past eight or nine months. I suppose we are pretty close, even without the sit-down family meals twice a day. I wish Lev could be closer to his sister – but with their great age difference (12 and ½ years), and the fact that she is married and lives over 3 hours away, I can just hope that that will happen someday in the future, as happened with my mother and her sister, Betty.

I watched a little of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade this morning, and it was so strange! The floats and the balloons passed along in front of Macy’s on 34th Street, but there were no crowds, and when the performers sang (lip-synched, most likely, but to their own recorded voices), no one applauded. And then we saw a clip of Dolly Parton singing a holiday song from Nashville...she still sounds great, but her work in keeping herself looking like a starlet is even more amazing (not necessarily in a good way). She is seventy-four, for crying out loud. Not to knock her – she has been a bold, groundbreaking woman in so many ways, and continues to be. But it is too bad that she could not let herself age gracefully. Nevertheless, I doff my hat to her for her musicianship and her many charitable projects, among which has been a partnership she established at Dollywood with the American Eagle Foundation to help restore our national bird’s numbers in the Smoky Mountain region.

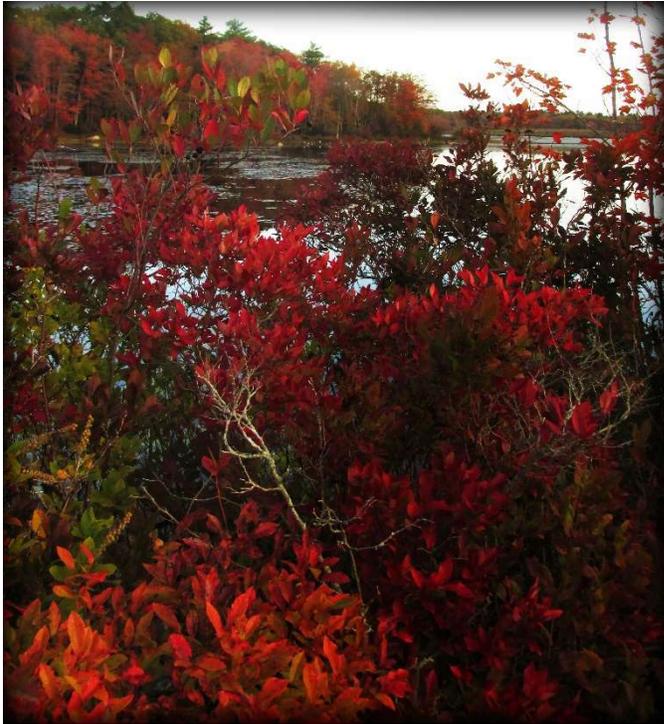
Much ado has been made on the TV news about the greatest numbers of people flocking to airports and crowding onto planes since the start of the pandemic. Despite all the warnings from Dr. Fauci (and others) and from the CDC, people want to see their friends and relatives. Despite the fact that a vaccine is just months away...they seem not to be able to hold out any longer. One report I read online cited an Axios-Ipsos poll which found that 39% of Americans say they have not changed their travel plans for this holiday weekend at all. There are dire forecasts of a huge surge in infections and hospitalizations in about two weeks from now, when all these travelers return from their gatherings – something our hospitals will not be able to handle, since many of them are already at overflow capacity.

If it were only a case of individuals deciding to take such risks for themselves that would be one thing. But the fact that those who get seriously ill will be forcing medical personnel to work long, exhausting hours on their behalf, potentially

catching the virus and dying themselves...this is hard to forgive. It's not as if they have not been informed of the risks and potential consequences to others.

At our new number of over 263,000 fatalities, I suppose many of us in this society are dazed: we just can't think straight anymore. It has been a crazy, most unusual, outrageous era that we are living through – in so many ways! But in another way, I suppose this Thanksgiving will be one when many people will feel more thankful than they have at any other celebrations of this holiday. We realize as never before how fragile and precious our lives are; how just “hanging out” together with our closest family members is a privilege – if we are lucky enough to be able to do so.

With President-Elect Biden and his VP-Elect Kamala Harris now finally certified as winners of the recent election, I am looking forward to our country moving forward in January with a nationally coordinated response to the coronavirus pandemic, to a vaccination program beginning, and to a reduction in the political vitriol that has been so extreme in this era. Though of course I cannot know for sure what the future will bring, I am truly grateful to at least have this, which I believe is a reasonable hope, to hold onto.



North Watuppa Pond, near Thanksgiving, 2018.