

Sheltering And Hearing Blessings

By Linda Bilodeau

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When we saw the number of coronavirus cases increase in our town, my husband and I locked down our lives. Our reasons for doing so were many; we are over sixty-five and in that vulnerable age group. I have an underlying medical condition. We wanted to be part of the solution of not overwhelming our local hospital with a case of virus that could be prevented by staying home. So we began our journey into the unexplored territory of sheltering with no idea of how our lives would change.

We sat down to figure out our practical needs; how to buy groceries, medication, and other necessities. We had a number of social events scheduled in March and had invited some of our friends to dinner at our house. We had to deal with upcoming doctor and dentist appointments. Rearranging busy lives can overwhelm when dangerous microbes lurk. But we took in a big deep breath, vowing to make the most of our situation.

The next day and with a sad heart, we notified friends and family of our decision to curtail all social activities. How do you tell someone you cancelled an invitation, I asked my husband. They will understand, he said. My husband was right. Most of our friends were relieved when we pulled back our invites, they were worried, too.

We fell into the strangeness of keeping in touch with friends and family without meeting up. We contacted loved ones and asked how we could communicate with them. We honored their preferences of either phone calls, emails, or Facetime visits. I learned the nuances of Zoom to keep up with a woman's discussion group and my Tai Chi class. I use the GoToMeeting app to attend the meetings of the organizations where I volunteer. We found our doctors were using telemedicine, appointments could be done on the computer.

Grocery shopping went from cruising up and down well-lit aisles to a stay-at-home screen visit using Instacart. How does one decide on a tomato or a zucchini without first looking it over? How do you determine what detergent to buy when the store is out of your usual brand? I pressed through it, allowing my Instacart shopper access to my cell phone so we could stay in communication. The yellow peppers don't look good, she texted to me during a recent shopping excursion. Mind if I substitute red? Mind? There's a virus out there killing people, I feel happy that my biggest worry is yellow vs. red peppers.

Before our sheltering began, I had purchased a new hearing aid with A.I. (artificial intelligence) technology. When Florida locked down, I had had two fittings and was in need of another but felt it was too risky to sit in my audiologist's waiting room. I sent him an email with my concerns. My audiologist wrote back saying he could adjust my aids remotely. We met, Facetime style, through a free app put out by the manufacturer of my aids. Within fifteen minutes, my audiologist downloaded my needed changes. He encouraged me to create some artificial background noise so I could test features on my new aids. I consider him among the many American medical heroes who have pressed on, helping their patients in these days when the world seems to have fallen apart.

Last week, my husband and I celebrated our twenty-first wedding anniversary. Pre virus, we had planned a long weekend away. It won't be the same, I said. We'll make it special at home, my husband countered.

We found a local restaurant with curbside touchless takeout service. My husband and I reviewed the menu together, ordered then took out the linen tablecloth, our china, wine glasses, and silverware. We lit candles, turned on jazzy background music. And as we sat and ate, in our makeshift romantic spot, my husband told me how close he's grown to me over these past few weeks. I've always loved you, he said to me. And now, seeing how you've adjusted, how hard you've worked to make our lives as normal as possible, I love you even more.

Yes, our meanderings through this upside-down hearing world has changed the way we work and play and eat. But in spite of our woes, there's much to be grateful for as we shelter with those who love and care for us dearly.