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CORONAVIRUS: THE BEGINNING

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03/23/20 The Beginning

Out of Work! Both me and the volunteers! They received a letter stating that the Thayer campus of MaineGeneral Medical Center was concerned for their health and welfare; therefore the hospital didn't want any volunteers returning to their stations until further notice. As for me, my doctor says that due to my age and recent medical history, I am considered high risk for contracting the Coronavirus. Madame Concierge and her helpers are now out of work for an indeterminate period of time.

My last day on the job was today, and in addition to my regular duties, I had to interview every patient who entered the building and screen them for possible "COVID-19. I have a feeling that soon we'll have to take patients' temperatures as well. This will be difficult as we have to honor the no closer than six feet social distancing policies. I don't know for how long I'll be isolated, but good luck to all of us as we separate ourselves from the rest of the world.

I must make myself a plan. Too much idle time is not good for the soul. I found that out last year as I went through a bout of depression. Let's see. I shall do something nice for the volunteers. What would surprise them, distract them, and make them smile? I've got it! I think I shall put together some Easter baskets with my son and granddaughters; I have the use of only one hand, and the task would be daunting if I did it alone. The three of us will have a fun project. Then my son Luc will drive us, and Jolie and Jemma will deliver the baskets at the volunteers' doors. This will help the girls to develop an understanding of self, an appreciation of others, and a dedication to the task of helping their fellow man, in the true spirit of the humanities. Luc will be the driver, but he doesn't need to learn all those things. He has shown himself to be all that anyone could ask for. And when the girls get tired of their task, which I know will be sooner than later, they will make and sign Easter cards, their father will put lottery

tickets in each card, and I will write a thank- you note to each of the volunteers for the contributions they have been making to the hospital, some as long as 25 years. No, this is not a typographical error; Cliff is 95 years old, and Natalie 94 years young. What a wonderful group of people to work with!

03/26/20 Love Letters

I wrote each of my children and grandchildren a letter today---just in case! There are no guarantees in their world. I learned that last year when I found out I had cancer and needed surgery and radiation treatments. So today, I wrote thirteen letters, four to my sons, and nine to my grandchildren. To Luc, Chris, Hank, and Matt, I wrote about what wonderful sons they have always been and what endearing qualities they have which make them valuable citizens of society. To my nine grandchildren, Abbi, Alex, Jolie, Hailey, Millie, Andrew Jemma, Lily, and yes, even Little Juliette, who is only eight months old, I included what I love about each one of them, and what I perceive will become of them as adults. It ended out being a meaningful project as I doubt I will be around for all of them when they grow up and join the world of the grown-up's. I then gave the letters to Luc to share with everyone when the time is right. No one knows who will get the Coronavirus or who will survive it; what I do know is that I am considered high risk in both cases. How this turns out, only time will tell; I just hope I will be on God's earth and get to enjoy my family for a few more years. I miss them and wish we were all together here at home.

03/30/20 Social Distancing and the Media

Social Distancing! Bah! Those of us with any sense do it, most of us hate it, and there are

those who don't even follow the mandate. How disrespectful! I can tell you for sure, though, that social distancing is not for the tics, either! I got bit twice during the past week. Some things never change.

Myself I've never been one for social distancing; I'm a people person. So what have I am my counterparts been doing instead of socializing? We're watching TV, of course. And it's a poor substitute you'd better believe it! It's a harbinger of death, that's what it is. Why do I believe that? What is the source of all the news as of late? The Coronavirus, that's what. How many new cases of COVID-19 occurred today? How many deaths? And the USA is always compared with the rest of the world, and we're not looking very good due to our bold and fearless leader. Who's to blame for the virus? This is a hot topic. And don't forget the update, different every day on all those questions regarding this silent killer. We get all sorts of contradictory information on television, but we are all drawn to it like flies on paper.

This is certainly not like my first experience with television. I was 10-years-old at the time, and on my very first yearly trip to New York City to visit our cousins who lived in the Bronx. The skyscrapers, the United Nations, the Empire State Building, Times Square, Macy's. We went to the automats, saw the doo-wop groups singing on every street corner, sat on the rooftops at night overlooking the Big Apple. My mother even was on the Irene Beasley Show, *Name that Tune* and won numerous prizes that year. Of course, the Romeo Cote family lived a few blocks from the Yankee Stadium. Need I say more? But best of all those wonderful things to see and do, there was television. It was like living in another world. Who would have known that a short two years later, we would own our own television.

We had a wonderful winter that year of the best acquisition of our life. Every night, our doorbell would ring constantly, with everyone asking the same question, "You don't know me,

but could I come in and watch your new television?" Of course, we never refused one request. I loved that winter almost as much for the company as for the TV. For an only child, that socialization was a gift. No class boundaries then, and no locked doors at night. My Mom, Juliette Marguerite Lacombe, always said, "You only lock your doors to keep your friends away." But that's a story for another time. It would have been impossible to imagine then that years later the United States would be attacked by terrorists and that one of the three targets would be New York City. And this year, In New York State, especially in New York City, at least one-half of all the cases and one-half of all the deaths from the Coronavirus in America are from New York. Those poor people! And that poor governor! He does such a wonderful job with his daily updates: clear, concise, and to the-point. And compassionate as well as not afraid to tell it like it is. (If truth be told, I would like to see that governor as president of the United States). I myself wouldn't be able to run the State of New York or any other state for that matter. What a grave responsibility since the federal government refuses to help each state; they are forced to fend for themselves. Governor Cuomo has so many people to make decision for. God Bless Governor Andrew Cuomo! God bless the USA!

04/05/20 **"Number, Please"**

My granddaughter, Jemma, celebrated her seventh birthday today, albeit in a very different manner than usual, due to the Coronavirus. Since there are eighteen of us, we all like to gather together for the holidays. Instead of only calling on the telephone, we were lucky enough to use zoom, something about two months in existence. That way, we were not only able to talk with one another, we could see one another, as well. This was a special treat for me, since I haven't seen some of the family since the Christmas holidays.

Thinking of phones, I myself have always had a love-hate relationship with the telephone. If you've ever felt this way, the following story should make perfect sense to you. I was born on the cusp of World War II. At that time, my father was an ambulance driver, the equivalent of today's, paramedic. Therefore, the telephone was an integral part of Luke M. Lacombe's work duties. World War II ended when I was four years old, and Mom and Dad decided to honor my natural curiosity for this mysterious talking box. At my mother's insistence, Cousin Tess must have called me twenty times that day. All I could do was to laugh non-stop, especially since Theresa would come over, all up-tight, give me a talking to, threaten never to call me again, and run back home next door. I finally got it right, much to her relief and my pleasure. And this began my love relationship with the telephone. The years flew by.

During my teen years, the party line was a fun way to play pranks, to make new friends, and yes, perhaps acquire a boyfriend or two. This was no doubt the equivalent of today's blind date, only we had more control over the situation.

In my young adult years, I began to loathe the telephone. Face-to-face interactions were so much more meaningful. Also, in college, once a month we had to run the switchboard in the women's dorms. I can't tell you how many calls got disconnected by Yours Truly. Still the telephone had some advantages. The only one that comes to mind right now is that college was sixty miles away, so an only child was able to keep up with her parents. Later, those long-distance calls to a fiance in France could wreck your weekly budget. "Hello. How are you? I love you." Those few sentences cost around \$17.00, quite an amount during the early sixties.

The years progressed, and after some emergency calls, and my father's death, I began to hate answering the telephone. The reason? The fear of what news it would bring. Well, the phones are still around, and now that we have the Coronavirus, I once again love talking on the

telephone. They are a great way to keep in touch with loved ones, and re-connect with friends, and, yes, deal with those many business calls: telephone appointments with the doctor, unemployment, you name it. The telephones are still an integral part of our lives. “Number , please.” Maybe we no longer hear the operator’s voice, perhaps we have to do most of the work in our attempt to communicate but, after all, we also get to see everyone on face time. Whoever would have thought?

04/08.20 Busted---again!

I just ran out of earned time. I now have no income and will have to sign up for COBRA benefits once again. No job guarantee yet, either. “We must go through the process.” Good Grief! Where will this all end?

When I was in junior high school, we experienced what was known as the Hong Kong Flu. My comparison of the two epidemics was short-lived, however, especially since the latter gave us a mere two weeks off from school and this one has given us a hiatus of at least six months; elementary and secondary education now consists of a new kind of learning, on-line learning. No comparison at all with the present system.

Last year, when I had some time to ponder on the meaning of life, I wondered where I was going to be at this time this year. Never in my wildest dreams would I ever have imagined going through a pandemic of this proportion. All of my medical issues pale in comparison. God forbid that I should spend today worrying about my future as well as the future of this country. I don’t even want to go there, so consider this my excuse for a super short entry.

04/12/20 Easter Egg Hunts and Old Glory

Today was the first time in forty-some-odd years that I didn't hold my traditional Easter Egg Hunt, which everyone partakes in, from ages one to eighty. I missed a lot of things about this day, from the religious events of my childhood to the modern-day Peter Cottontail.

When I was young, we all went to church, donning our new coats, dresses, and Easter bonnets. The girls would wear long white stockings and black patent leather shoes. And who could forget the pinafores, and ribbons in our hair? Those Shirley Temples curls would be bobbing along in the breeze. If we were lucky, Grandfather Paul LeBlanc, affectionately called Pepere, would take us to the brook before dawn. At the moment the sun rose, we would fill our vial with water. And that would serve as holy water for the rest of the year. This holy water was very special, as it was used for the most religious encounters, the anointing of the sick, one of the sacraments which was formerly called the Last Rights being one of those. I think this is an Acadian tradition as both parents on my mother's side were Acadians. We actually relived that tradition three years ago at the brook on our property, As an aside, I still marvel at the fact that most Acadians never defended themselves against the British in that great expulsion. Being pacifists doesn't seem to justify that story.

Years passed, and Peter Rabbit became a colorful addition to our religious experiences. For many seasons, when the family would go on its infamous egg hunts, two mourning doves who had taken residence in the Douglas fir out front would make their presence known as they added to their own family. I love mourning doves; they mate for life, and always return to the same place year after year to build their nests. We considered Benjamin and Beatrice as part of our family. Anyway, I missed a lot of things this year because of COVID-19. But I did go to Luc's for a traditional ham dinner. And we talked with the other brothers and their families over the telephone, which made our dinner even more festive.

On the way home, in the car, I look out the window. Oh, look! There's Old Glory! My son put up my new flag! I have been flying the symbol of this country on my fence post since 9/11. I love this country and what the flag represents. It makes me feel proud, and at the same time bonded with all of my fellow countrymen. America, the home of the free and the land of the brave. I am an American. I am never alone.

04/12/20 **Stimulus Checks and Acceptance**

Good for me! I just got my stimulus check, a whopping \$1200.00! This is the manner of distribution of the wonderful gift to each American: \$1200 for each adult, and \$500 to each child. The federal government is bailing us and others out with the sum total of two trillion dollars, to be repeated at a later date. Some people say we shouldn't accept this money, or perhaps that sum of money shouldn't go to the rich people, only to the needy. For myself, I'm almost out of earned time at work, so I'll gladly accept whatever the government has to offer.

Thinking of religion, pandemics, and charity remind me that I am turning into my grandmother in some ways. How did I get so old? Her birthday is tomorrow. How would she have felt about this tragic set of circumstances? She would have accepted this challenge as a test from God. Born in 1873, Grandmaman Angelina Mathieu Lacombe was a very religious person; she believed, like the many people of her generation, that God would help her to overcome anything if she put herself into His hands. And, no, she wouldn't have accepted any charity, or what she considered charity. I myself believe the Coronavirus is a challenge. From whom? I do not know. But I do know that there is order in the universe. And I also know that I am glad to accept the stimulus check and plan to file for unemployment, too.

My year last year was no better than this in some ways. I was on a medical leave of

absence and on disability for six months. My anxiety and worry levels were high for part of the time. The big difference is that last year I knew the reasons for my fears. This year, the Coronavirus is, as they call it, the unknown enemy. What causes it? How do you treat it? How long will it last? Once you are over it, how long does your immunity last? We know so little, we worry so much! And should we get COVID-19, will we die from it? God forbid, I should get the Coronavirus!

04/16/20 **Birthday Surprise**

Today is my oldest son's birthday. I am so proud of him. He is everything a son should be. He is gentle, generous, and gives of his time selflessly to others. And he is both loyal and noble. His three brothers are very special, too. I have been blessed with four wonderful sons. Today my thoughts are on Luc, however.

As I think back to those troubled times during his infancy, I am reminded that America is always at war either with other countries or with itself. The year was 1968. We were living six miles from downtown D.C., embroiled in the midst of the race riots. Those times were somewhat similar to these. The situation was different but the emotions were the same. Anxiety levels were high, and fear dominated our lives. In the past fifty years, we have come full circle. Go figure!

Enough of this reminiscing, though, and on to the rest of this memorable day, April 16, 2020, It is time to give full attention to the afternoon's fiasco. And believe me, I don't relish the thought of having to be negative for the first time in my journal, and especially on this day. But after all, the journal entry's title includes the word, "Surprise." And this certainly was a surprise.

Jolie and Jemma are visiting me. I hurry outside, search in the mailbox, and find the package I've been waiting for, a small black bag from the Fabric Warehouse in Auburn, Maine;

it contains a kit for making 25 Coronavirus masks. I am examining my gift for family and friends, and you know what happens when you don't pay attention to the task at hand. I fall and land hard on the wrought iron railing. I get a big goose egg on my head, bruises on my eye, cheek, neck, and throat, am bleeding on the face, and am initially unable to either sit up or stand up. After all, I am also wearing a sling. On February 26, I fell and broke my upper arm; this led to two frozen shoulders. Neither sitting up or getting up is easy to do. With great difficulty and trepidation, my granddaughters help me, and we finally begin our ascent to the kitchen door. "Nana. Why didn't the lady from across the road help us?" With my state of affairs, I never even saw the woman. Not the same for her! She stopped her raking, watched up intently, then turned back to her raking project. Now, I am usually a patient person, but right now, I am livid! What kind of person would let two frightened children struggle to help a 79-year old woman with a broken arm? She couldn't have asked if we needed help, if we wanted her to call 911 for us? She is a poor example of the many people who believe that we will get through this pandemic together. I am sorely tempted to go to her house with a big proper THANK YOU! if you know what I mean. I leave my saga at this point, and let you imagine what is still on my mind as I retire from the day's activities.

04/25/20 **What's Next?**

What's next? It's been five weeks, yet it feels like five months, or maybe five years since we began this social distancing. I can't see that we have made any progress at all. The President, the news media, their stories change with each passing day. When I think of all the questions, whose many answers have eluded us for all this time, I feel discouraged. My anxiety level is getting high, and sometimes I get disoriented. One day runs into the next; I have to keep

checking the calendars. There have been 964,182 cases of the Coronavirus and 64,000 deaths in this country to date. The number of deceased people is equivalent to the entire population of Australia. More than 20 million Americans have filed for unemployment in the past five weeks. That number is the same as it was during the Great Depression. It's mind-boggling. A beautiful four-year-old child whose parents are both first responders died recently. Also did a baby under one year of age. It's no longer the old people who are at risk for COVID-19. It's all ages. It's so sad.

Even with all my daily activities, time passes so slowly. I'm doing research for both my Civil War story and my geneology, taking on-line classes, establishing close bonds with my grandchildren, downsizing, reading, sewing face masks, and playing the piano a little. And of course I am doing this project for the University of Maine. I am pleased because I am able to put things into perspective with the assignment. Still, life can be overwhelming. Oh, wait! I just heard that at 9:00 am tomorrow, Sesame Street and CNN are hosting a town hall for children and their parents. The subject, of course, is the Coronavirus. I guess there is still hope for the future. Hope lies with the children. We'll keep things together for them. No matter what happens, we'll find a way. I really don't know how things will turn out, but I have a good feeling about it. We'll just have to wait and see. Until that time, dear reader, "Au revoir et a bientot."