

Corona Chronicles
April 2020
Orono Public Library Writing Circle

Wednesday 1 April 2020 – Barbara Wicks

In “Don't Come Any Closer” (*The New Yorker*, March 20, 2020, p. 23), Jill Lepore writes,

Every story of epidemic is a story of illiteracy, language made powerless, man made brute.

But, then, the existence of books, no matter how grim the tale, is itself a sign, evidence that humanity endures, in the very contagion of reading. Reading may be an infection, the mind of the writer seeping, unstoppable, into the mind of the reader. Yet it is also—in its bidden intimacy in all other ways banned in times of plague—an antidote, proven, unfailing, and exquisite.

Writing and reading have been such for us in our writing circle during ordinary times, more so now, remembered and further shared as we navigate the present pandemic. We endure, we live--virtually, vicariously...together.

Thursday 2 April 2020 – Maria Tijan-Wieck
Eighteenth Day of Confinement

I will survive is a disco song by Gloria Gaynor from 1978. It's a good song and I'm sure you will recognize it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYkACVDFmeg>

The relentless beat gives an impression of life and optimism. Not surprisingly it has become the anthem of the Spaniards during their corona virus confinement. Only, here it's called *Resistiré*. It was introduced to the Spanish public in 1990 by a pop group called Duo Dinámico and it's been very popular ever since.

Resistiré or I will resist is a good translation. It has the same four syllables of the original song. If they would have kept the literal translation, they would have to sing *Sobreviviré*. That would add a fifth syllable and the song clearly would not survive.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpQyuMPrhog>

Regards from Madrid

Sunday 12 April 2020 – Gary Schilmoeller



April 2020

"Is that So?" (Another opportunity)

The COVID 19 Pandemic has us "Staying at home" by our governor's order. We adapted pretty well. We worked out a schedule for exercise. We worked out a schedule to get food. Things were going along smoothly, given the circumstances.

And then came a springtime "winter" storm. The storm dumped a foot or more of heavy wet snow in our area - upwards of 20 inches in other parts of the state. Winds blew at a sustained 20 - 30 mph rate with higher gusts intermixed. Trees, power poles, and loose objects flying around brought down powerlines in large sections of the state, causing massive power outages. When we went to bed last night, an estimated 200,000 Mainers were without power.

We brought out extra blankets and comforters to keep us warm in the night. This morning, we put on our winter vests and coats to warm ourselves indoors.

No power now - and warnings that it could be days before we have it back.

I was up before Kathy this morning. I bundled up, grabbed the newspaper from the front porch, and sat in my "retirement" rocker to read. Suddenly I heard a tapping on the window. I looked up to see an angel holding up a blue teapot. I opened the door to receive a pot of hot water so I could fix a cup of tea for Kathy and a cup of coffee for myself. Our neighbor has a gas stove!

As I savored the cup of coffee, I remembered that Kathy received the old Underwood Universal portable typewriter that typed her dad's papers when he was a student. No power? No internet access? Nevermind, I learned to type on one of these mechanical devides. I can write. Darn, though - I miss the correction key and the delete functions. Well, I beg forgiveness for the typeovers and mistakes. I will be 75 a week from today. And I suspect this typewriter is older than me. We both are doing our best under the circumstances.

Is that so?

Gary
4/11/2020
Webster Village on Marsh Island
Maine

Hunkered down with Kathy at the Wabisabii Inn

Monday 13 April 2020 – Jack Moose

I saw where Orono got about 9" or so of heavy wet snow. Many trees down and long power outages. Hope everyone has power now and is doing ok.

We have maybe as many fallen trees down here in the mountains of Georgia this morning. Last night I experienced my first Tornado Alert. We had a Level 4 alert (5 is the highest) As you probably know, we live in a 26' camper perched on the side of a mountain (Abercrombie Bald) in Suches, GA near the start of the Appalachian Trail.

The warnings stated: "if you are in a trailer, leave immediately and go to the nearest shelter. There is no designated shelter here in this small town so we stayed. Really severe thunderstorms hit, with high winds, rain hitting the metal sides and roof of the camper like it was coming out of a fire hose. Loud thunder clashes and light flashes like we were in a giant pinball machine. When the camper started to sway and rock, we decided to leave. I volunteer at the recycling center in the Suches fire station so I have a key. We drove to the fire station and stayed until it was clear next morning. Driving the 1 mile drive back to our camper, I had to dodge numerous fallen trees. We found out 6 people died from the tornadoes quite close to us in NW Georgia. The camper was intact but had moved slightly on its footings. I'll take a bad snowstorm any day.

Wednesday 15 April 2020 – Maria Tijan-Wieck

Trip

On December 31st, 2019, my husband, daughter and I boarded the 7 am Concord bus heading to Boston Logan Airport. It snowed so hard that we feared the buses would not operate, but they did. The driver drove us skillfully and cautiously through the storm that stopped once we reached Portland, to validate the notion that there are two Maines. And after we crossed into Massachusetts the sun started shining to demonstrate that the imaginary line that separates the states is not imaginary, but a real line.

I always look for little signs the universe sends my way to tell me whether the project I'm involved in will be successful or not. I was fully convinced the universe was on my side since the young man who checked my passport before proceeding on to security noticed that my birthday had been a few days earlier and since I had turned a respectable age, he told me I did not have to take off my shoes. I was elated by this bit of good luck. Yay! No need to take off my shoes which this time were boots. Maybe the elderly will be respected from now on! There's something to look forward in old age! These optimistic thoughts were passing through my head while filling the gray plastic trays with my hand luggage, purse, laptop, coat, jacket, sweater, hat, scarf, gloves, money belt etc. When all the trays disappeared in the mini tunnel to be x-rayed, I advanced proudly to the metal detector structure with my boots on. The alarm went off loudly and I was asked to remove my boots that had a cute little metal buckle. So much for the elder benefit and the sign from the universe. And what hurts more, old people are not to wear cute clothing and footwear.

We arrived in Spain with considerable delay having missed the connecting flight in London. The computer was warning the pilots that one of the doors of the aircraft was open, which upon checking all the doors proved to be untrue. Meanwhile, we had lost our spot in the takeoff line and the wings needed to be de-iced again and again. British Airways was decent enough to provide us with new boarding passes as soon as we landed and gave us each a 5£ voucher to buy coffee until our flight to Madrid. This was not enough because we needed more than coffee to keep us alive, but we appreciated

the thought and it was a nice respite for the six hours we spent wandering through Heathrow with its temptations of overpriced fashions, cosmetics and untold luxury goods.

Since I intend to spend longer periods of time in Spain, I had to obtain the so called Documento Nacional de Identidad, an ID card, a necessity for everyone living in Spain. The card needs to be renewed every five years. Mine had expired in 1973. I was living in the States and my visits to my parents never allowed enough time to gather all the documents needed for such an undertaking and an undertaking it was.

At first glance it didn't seem so bad, only two documents are needed, the birth certificate and the registration form proving that I reside in Madrid. Add to that two recent photos and 12 euros. For a native Spaniard getting a birth certificate is a cinch, but since I was not born in Spain, I had to apply for mine from the Vital Statistics Office, not the one in every neighborhood, but the central one downtown. It takes 40 days to obtain such a certificate and the certificate expires after six months. To make it even more ridiculous it is free, so the government does not benefit from issuing these certificates frequently. It only aggravates those needing them as we are born again after six months. And one cannot just show up at the Vital Statistics Office and request the birth certificate. It has to be done by appointment that specifies the day and time one should appear at the office. The appointment is usually given several weeks after you request it and by that time I am usually no longer in Spain.

So, I decided to go to a *gestoría* and ask them to handle this problem. A *gestoría* is an office/agency that will help you navigate the complexities of Spanish bureaucracy. These offices are everywhere and work for individuals and companies acting as accountants for taxes, payroll, social security, obtention of various licenses, registering cars, buying insurance, sales taxes, immigration papers, validation of foreign university titles, traffic fines, etc. My *gestoría* was called Gejuval and the man who helped me was Ángel, not a very angelic fellow, but rather down to earth and matter of fact.

I also needed my proof of residence. For that they required the contract with a utility, not just a receipt. My apartment had been rented for many years and now was my adulting time. I had to put my name on the contract for natural gas and electricity, something that used to be in my parents' domain. After obtaining the contracts, I went to Ángel again and asked him to get me the proof of residence. This had to be done at a municipal office in my district. Thankfully, I did not have to be present to obtain these two vital documents. After a few months Ángel notified me that both the birth certificate and the proof of residence had been issued and I had to pay him 118.58 euros which I did gladly. Gracias, Ángel.

Now came the next step, the Holy Grail, the longed for Documento Nacional de Identidad. And I had to be present for this one. Of course, I needed an appointment that I could not get because I did not have the data they needed, so I went to the police station in my district with my daughter who does have the DNI. After explaining the situation, they told me that it was OK for my daughter to show her information and that it would serve to make my appointment. We did that and I had an appointment for the following week. I thought, this will be it.

The day came, I showed up on time, received a number, sat down and watched the screen displaying numbers and windows as in the Department of Motor Vehicles. When my number was called, I went to the window, gave everything to the functionary, he examined the papers and said "Le comento" something akin to "We have to talk." Not a good sign.

It turned out that my proof of residence had expired. It is only good for three months. Ángel had neglected to warn me about this. I immediately asked where to go for another proof of residence and a nice police employee gave me the address of a municipal office not too far away. I ran there and they gave me the updated proof of residence after some 40-minute wait. I still had to get another

appointment to return to the police to continue my quest. The following week bright and early I was back at the police station and this time the functionary informed me that the birth certificate was illegible.

Yes, in spite of the high degree of digitalization within the Spanish administration, documents dealing with births, deaths, marriages and inheritances are written by hand in huge ledger-type books that Ebenezer Scrooge would welcome in his counting house. And the pages of these ledgers are often photocopied due to their frequent expirations so no wonder that in time these annotations become less crisp. The functionary asked me to return to the waiting room and he will call the Vital Statistics Office to confirm that my birth certificate was not a forgery.

I sat next to a woman who also waited and complained that they would not accept her photograph. The photo had been taken four months earlier, but the functionary would not accept it stating that she now looked much older.

My unease grew. My photo had been taken three years earlier. What shall I do? Should I go across the street and get another photo? If I do that my functionary may call me with the answer from the Vital Statistics Office and I will lose my spot. I decided to stay and cross that bridge when I came to it. After another hour I was called to say that my birth certificate was valid, and the functionary accepted my photo no questions asked. He also fingerprinted me.

I was going to have the same DNI number that had expired, but to do that, another Central Office had to establish that the reason I was remiss in my renewing obligations was that I was indeed out of the country and was also dutifully registered at the Spanish consular offices. I was totally legit in that area. The functionary told me to come back three days later. This time I did not need an appointment. I just had to give my name and they will give me a number and I will be again waiting and checking the giant screen with numbers and windows, and everything will go swimmingly.

Not so fast. I ended up at another window with another functionary. Legibility was again the issue, but this time my fingerprints were not clear enough. Gone are the days when your fingertips were smeared with ink and rolled over a piece of paper. Now they don't use ink or paper. They press your index finger and roll it onto something. The print doesn't make it to the DNI card but is stored in some central office. As we age our fingertip ridges lose definition as we're slowly disintegrating and disappearing. No wonder after a lifetime of washing hands, dishes, babies' bottoms, and everything else life serves us. It's almost as if a mafia thug scraped them to avoid identification. The functionaries really had to press hard to obtain an image.

I also had to put up with mild scolding from the functionaries for letting my DNI expire for so long, and, finally, they handed me my new DNI. This one does not have to be renewed. I am too old for that, thankfully. It is a cute pink card with a chip. I still keep my the old expired one issued during the Franco regime and was showing it to the functionaries as a curiosity.

Did the universe send me accurate signs regarding the outcome of my trip? I can't complain. We spent two weeks together as a family enjoying sunny Spain. I received my DNI and the issues about the silly card served as material for this story. I don't know how will it end as the Corona Virus rose its spiky head and I have a cold. TO BE CONTINUED