

Corona Chronicle

Week 19

Tuesday, July 21

On Friday, we returned from a twelve-day family getaway to Cape Cod (South Wellfleet). I did keep up with my “chronicling” while there, but decided that while I was on vacation, I would write strictly for myself, which was a good experience, taking me back to earlier times in my life when I kept a journal assiduously, and reminding me what a good companion and solace a journal can be.

Well, do you remember how I opened my chronicle about a month ago detailing how the rabbis of ancient times warned us about the bad things that can happen during the month of Tammuz, extending on into the first nine days of the month of Av? On the second evening of our vacation (it was then the 16th of Tammuz), I missed a step outside our vacation cottage, fell against the frame of the cottage, getting a slight gash on my forehead, a bit of a shiner beneath my left eye, and...I would find out the next day at the urgent care clinic in South Dennis, a fracture in the radial bone of my right wrist. This certainly put a damper on some of my vacation plans (no bike-riding, no kayaking, no swimming), but I could still walk, and I discovered that even with my arm in a splint I could still take pictures, and use a keyboard (although after too much typing I would have to rest, since it appeared to cause my wrist, arm and hand to swell a bit).

But I am thankful that my mishap was not worse. No surgery needed! (I had surgery on my left wrist about 10 years ago, and the recovery period was excruciating.) The mishaps of our nation (and all around the globe at this point) are so much worse, it puts my small ordeal into perspective: mine is small potatoes. Where to start? The virus is spreading like wildfire across many of the so-called “red” states now (and also in the mostly “blue” California), hitting more rural or suburban sprawl areas that thought that they had escaped its decree. And so they did not take it seriously, and many did not heed warnings or advice on precautions, and now some of these places (Florida, Georgia and Texas, especially) have run out of beds in their ICU units, and are bringing in the refrigerated morgue tractor-trailers.

They say we are doing worse in our fight against the virus than even Brazil – where they are dumping the dead unceremoniously into mass graves. This is grim news indeed. Yesterday I saw an article that I could not bring myself to read past the headline, detailing how three siblings (aged 20, 18, and 13) lost both of their parents to the virus. And last night as I lay in bed with my wrist swelling, the rest of me sweating in the heat, I thought of what it must be like for other children, those being held in detention centers at the southern border separated from their parents, of their terror, their loneliness, their sense of abandonment and not knowing if they would ever see their parents again...and once again I realized how lucky I am, that this slight inconvenience I am experiencing is so minor.

A great man, Congressman John Lewis, died on Friday. He was 80, and he worked right up to his last day, despite the pancreatic cancer he was battling. No surprise when you learn about his history of suffering grave violence and bodily harm during the Civil Rights movement of the sixties, of how he took blows to the head but did not return them, fighting violence with only the power of love, bravery, and commitment to a cause he knew to be true, and larger than his own life. On the same day another civil rights hero, the Rev. C.T. Vivian, who served the cause alongside Martin Luther King, also committed to non-violence, died at the age of 95. Both men had been recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the hands of President Obama. As George Floyd's funerals (yes, he had two!) were rallying moments for this country in the throes of a great reckoning with racism and injustice, I am sure that the funerals of these men (especially that of Rep. Lewis) will be stirring occasions.

Meanwhile, up in Portland, Oregon, very strange and outrageous things are happening. Protesters, who are refusing to give up their freedom of expression on the streets of that city, are being accosted by unidentified "police" in military-type camouflage fatigues (with no identifying badges or other markers, except the word "police" emblazoned in yellow across their chests). They are pulling protesters into unmarked vans, who are not read rights, not told why they are being taken, sometimes having a bag put over their heads, and then questioned and eventually let go without ever being formally arrested or charged. According to today's *New York Times* these men (so far, it seems they are all *men*) are border patrol officers, redirected by the federal government to quell this mostly-peaceful (there has been some

rock-and-bottle-throwing) protesting *within* the nation's borders. The mayor of Portland does not want them there, nor does Oregon's governor. But the Department of Justice says they have no say in the matter. Who among us ever expected to see in our country?!

My friend Greg Stone the Westport photographer has been posting marvelous photos of Comet "Neowise" on Facebook – a comet that won't make its way near the earth again for 6,800 years! Despite the fact that our area is far from being a "dark-sky" wilderness, Greg has managed to capture this celestial visitor on camera several nights in Westport. Comets, of course, were seen by the ancient (and not-so-ancient) world as "signs" or "heralds." Is Neowise a sign of good, or of bad?

Perhaps the "sign" is simply the comet's *name*, which is really a nickname, coming from NASA's Near-Earth Object Wide-field Infrared Survey Explorer (thus, NEOWISE), a space-based infrared telescope dedicated to looking out for potentially hazardous asteroids and comets. As a prefix, "neo" means "new" or "fresh" (as in *neonatal*, meaning "newly born"), so although I do not believe in reading our near-future in the heavens (though scientist *can* read in it the *past* of our Universe), I *do* pray that with all the shocking goings-on and turmoil in our country and in the world, we homo sapiens might be ready to manifest some *new wisdom* in the ways we treat both each other and Earth, our only possible home in the Cosmos.

A comet, a pandemic, "secret police" in our streets...these are, alas, "interesting" times. And we here in Fall River still do not know if our students (and, more at-risk, their *teachers*) will be returning to our public school buildings in the fall; nor do we Jews know if we will be convening in person for Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur. All is truly "up in the air" (or in the heavens)!

But I have a nice new dark-purple cast on my right forearm today (my favorite color), and it is not nearly as hot today as it was yesterday. Also, we returned to our home on Walnut Street Friday to find our hydrangea blooming with the fullest blue blooms that we have seen since our first summer here (2013), and my dill plants are growing tall and flowering profusely, so I will be able to harvest plenty of dill seeds soon (one of my favorite savory condiments, and quite pricey to purchase). One takes comfort in small things.

It seems that Oxford scientists have made an important breakthrough on the way to discovering a vaccine against this virus...may we please return to less interesting times soon!



*Comet Neowise, from the Rt.88 Bridge over the East branch of the Westport River,
Westport - photo courtesy of Greg Stone*