

Nature Is Essential

The mornings were noticeably quieter as we sheltered in place this March. A cardinal's staccato "get up, get, up" drilled into the silence and I felt like he was tapping my shoulder. How many more mornings will I count on him to abruptly encourage me to get out of bed to cope with the unknown?

What will this be like? Living alone and isolated? I observed a lesson in natural perseverance right out my kitchen window. With a large white oak on the property line, it is no surprise that I have a lot of squirrels. Each morning *my* squirrel climbs into the Japanese maple. He purposely heads for the green capped finch feeder hanging there. He must hope that something mysteriously happened overnight that will allow him to get at those seeds. Nope, no change today. Humans are living like my squirrel; each day we are hoping for positive outcomes.

While Dr. Acton cautions us about not spreading human droplets, Mother Nature freely allows her's to fall. Some raindrops are so fat that they look like snow. Oh, they are snow. As the temperatures warm the result is a small pond in the middle of my lawn. With so much uncertainty, we long for signs of our routine. In addition to my squirrel buddy, oh, here they come. Four does confidently stride up my driveway. No observance of six feet distancing for them, not even from me when I happen to be outside when they slosh through the water which must seem like Euclid Creek. Nothing is more normal in the Heights than to have deer in your backyard.

Health professionals encourage us to get outside. Strolling through my own neighborhood, I nod to neighbors and not all of them are walking a dog. I am praying for those in hospitals to be able to take a deep breath of fresh air. Don't you love how the fragrance of hyacinths is like an expensive perfume? Pink and white cones from potted plants bloom under my front window. They were brought home and transplanted after the Easter service last year. Sadly, churches are now closed. Appreciating hyacinths daily gives me hope that next year open sanctuaries will be filled with people and flowers. I

left my ninety-five year old dad a purple hyacinth at his nursing home. It has been weeks since I have seen him, but I can look forward to planting his flower in my yard when I can.

Unlike the hyacinths, my daffodils appear to be stunted, a feeling shared by many. Initially the shoots survived the snow, grew seven inch stems, and yellow buds were promising, Then nothing more happened. Finally, I cut the four stems, brought them inside and placed them into a vase of warm water. Turns out they just needed a little help to thrive and survive, just like a lot of humans right now. Surprise, the centers were smiling sunburst orange.

Not all daffodils needed a boost this April. One hundred thousand bloomed at Lakeview Cemetery. Wow, a positive number in contrast with the data we dread hourly on CNN. With our “no place like home” daily reminder, the daffodil carpet reminded me of Dorothy’s yellow brick road. The trumpet-shaped flowers are Individuals like we are in our homes. But the beauty of them collectively emphasized that something positive will come of our being in this together.

When I return home, I gently touch the fresh red buds on my maple. Surprisingly, this gesture takes me back to a longing to caress my grandson’s head. It has been over a month since I have touched a human, or been touched by one. Without experiencing hugs from others, I have appreciated Mother Nature’s embrace. While reflecting on this time of distancing, some homely mourning doves make me smile. These ground feeders are cooing and courting each other. Did you know they mate for life? Many human partners are separated right now. I know of a couple married for sixty-six years who have Covid 19. I can imagine their longing to express their lifelong love with a hug.

April is almost over. The pandemic is not. We continue to shelter in place. We have witnessed good will come in spite of it: flowering forsythia, weeping cherries and big-petal pink magnolias. Spring is at her peak. We wait for the virus to do the same. Essentially, Nature has inspired, comforted and embraced us. Thank goodness our weeks of stoppage happened now while we have nature to move us

forward. Day lilies are sprouting by my garage. I hope the deer leave me a few. Orange and yellow flowers in June will remind us that like them, we can live one day at a time.