**Corona Blessings**

**Airborne pollution over China and Europe has plunged as industry and traffic slow amid the coronavirus pandemic, satellite imagery shows. In northern Italy, levels of nitrogen dioxide, which is produced by car engines, power plants, and other industries, have fallen by 40 percent since the country locked down on March 9. In Venice, the once opaque canals have become clear enough to see fish swimming. (*TheGuardian.com, as it appeared in The Week magazine, April 3, 2020)***

**When Covid-19 was declared a pandemic five years ago, it “triggered a brief moment of radical unity,” said Janelle Nanos in The Boston Globe. “Huddled in our homes, we rallied” as the virus swept our communities and gasping victims flooded emergency rooms. We sewed masks, looked out for neighbors, and “celebrated first responders and frontline workers.” As the grim toll mounted – at one point, more than 4,000 Americans were dying every day from Covid – our political leaders “made enormous investments in those in need,” bailing out entire industries and “sending $1,200 checks to nearly everyone, no questions asked.” Meanwhile, scientists developed a vaccine at record speed, “and some of us wept with joy as the first shot went into our arms.” Political polarization dropped as a common foe brought us together. *(The Week magazine, March 28, 2025)***

**My siblings and my oldest friends call more often now, and I know it’s because they’re worried. Every online gathering, every phone call, every just-saying-hey email carries an undercurrent of mortality. Even if we don’t say it out loud, we recognize that our time for checking in may run out. We have always been mortal beings, but until life serves up a memento mori like the new coronavirus, people tend to spend each day as though they had an endless supply of days. As though they had all the time in the world to say, “I love you.” *(Margaret Renkl, in The New York Times)***

**The pandemic has turned an increasing number of Americans into citizen scientists. Programs such as NestWatch and SciStarter let amateurs share data on wildlife in areas where universities don't have funding to send naturalists. With people stuck at home and able to devote more attention to nature, and professionals less able to travel, submissions to these programs have been as much as 41 percent this year. "More people are seeing the citizen-science approaches and collective effort toward discovery as our best hope toward figuring out how we live together on this planet," said ecologist Caren Cooper. (*The Week magazine, November 20, 2020)***

**From mid-March to mid-September, Americans spent 60 million fewer hours commuting to and from work each day. Primary jobs absorbed the largest chunk of the extra time -- 35.3 percent, or more than 22 million hours each workday. Another 15.5 percent (more than 9 million hours) was spent on home improvement and chores; nearly 7 million hours were devoted to child care*. (The Wall Street Journal as it appeared in The Week magazine, November 13, 2020)***

**I’ve gotten a paycheck every week for 40 years, and I am a firm believer in “the dignity of work.” But for work to provide dignity, people doing it need to be treated with decency and respect, not as cheap, replaceable cogs in a vast, soulless machine. Technology, globalization, and mammoth corporations have created an economy that depends on millions of worker bees doing tedious labor with lousy pay and benefits, long hours, and little or no autonomy or security. With so many burned-out Americans just saying, “no,” even after enhanced employment benefits came to an end, there is palpable pains in businesses large and small. Get back to work, you shiftless moochers! Um, please? People do need money, of course, so those who’ve quit dehumanizing gigs will need to figure out a Plan B. If they succeed, and if employers are forced to treat workers like human beings, the Covid plague will leave at least one positive legacy. *(William Falk, in The Week magazine, October 29, 2021)***

**Good week for: Deer, with new State Farm data showing 70,000 fewer insurance claims this year -- a 20 percent reduction -- for damage caused by animal collisions. (*The Week magazine, October 23, 2020)***

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**Global greenhouse gas emissions are expected to fall by 8 percent this year -- the largest decrease on record. But the U.N. says that emissions will need to fall by that amount each year for the next decade to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and avoid the worst effects of climate change. *(NPR.org, as it appeared in The Week magazine, May 15, 2020)***

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**Thanks to the coronavirus, an Iowa hog farmer finally received a postcard that his sister sent him 32 years ago. Paul Willis said he was shocked when he saw the postmark from December 1987 on the card mailed by his sister Annie Lovell from the Grand Canyon. He says a postal official told him. "Well, the post office are all going through deep cleaning because of Covid-19," so the lost card was probably found behind or underneath a desk or table. "It's like the Twilight Zone or something," said Paul. *(The Week magazine, May 29, 2020)***

**A surprise boom in startups: One of the least expected features of the pandemic recession is that Americans are starting businesses "at the fastest rate in over a decade," said Gwynn Guilford and Charity Scott in The Wall Street Journal. The Census Bureau has recorded 3.2 million applications to start a business so far this year, "compared with 2.7 million at the same point a year ago." *(The Week magazine, October 30, 2020)***

**Good week for: Stillness, after seismologists reported a sharp reduction in the "ambient seismic noise" of the earth's crust, because of a major drop to car, truck, and train traffic and other human activity. *(The Washington Post, as it appeared in The Week magazine, April 17, 2020)***

**A pandemic upside for women: One silver lining of the pandemic is that it has reduced the career price that working woms are expected to pay, saiud Claudia Goldin. “It’s no secret that women have always spent more time caring for their children and parents than men,” and this has damaged their careers and earnings. Before the pandemic, mothers were more likely to select “flexible” positions than fathers. Careers that paid more tended to require workers to be on call all the time. But the shift toward remote work during the past two years has ushered in “a massive new coordinated equilibrium.” We have learned that many tasks that once demanded travel and accessibility don’t actually need to be done in person. It’s enabled the on-call parent to accomplish jobs while still being at home. In that sense, “the flexible job has become more productive” and the demanding job has become more flexible. Redefining “going to work” has made splitting home responsibilities fairer, and will eventually cut the gender pay gap too. The “dire stories about mothers leaving the labor force in droves” turned out to be untrue. Women have kept working and persisted as “resilient, if beleaguered, employees,” and I am cautiously optimistic that ultimately they will be rewarded by this new normal. *(The Week magazine, January 21, 2022)***

**In a normal year, Alaska's bays would be filled with 65 whale-watching each summer day. This year, instead of boat motors, the ocean is filled with whale songs. In the absence of human activity, humpback whales are calling more, resting more, and socializing more. With tourism at near-zero during the pandemic, "it's the first time in human history that we've had the technological ability to listen to these whales" without human interference, said researcher Michelle Fournet. (*The Week magazine, October 23, 2020***

**The pandemic is sparing millions of wild animals from dying as roadkill as the number of vehicles on the road has plunged by as much as 70 percent. A report by the University of California projected that as many as 200 million of the 1 billion animals killed annually on roads could survive because f the coronavirus. *(The Week magazine, July 24, 2020)***

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