

Welcome again to the 31st incarnation of the Little Meyer family newsletter! To address the obvious, this year looks a little different. We know that we are among the lucky ones this year, with a roof over our head, good food on the table, our family safe. We miss all of those isolated by the pandemic— but are very aware that we are blessed. For those struggling this holiday season, we are thinking of you. A reminder, if anything can help in these dark times, that we are past the Winter Solstice which marks the time when the light starts to come back. In a year when so much has been placed on hold— a year that harks back to 1918, 1929 and 1968: a pandemic causing an economic disaster compounded by racial and class unrest, adjacent to an election with an anxious public led by reckless unscientific men, we have renewed hope with the vaccines and a different leader.

Whether you have been infected or not, we are all experiencing some disruptive vertigo from Covid-19. 2020 was already *extra* before the pandemic hit. Massive Australian brushfires. Trump acquitted on articles of impeachment. An Iranian missile attack on bases housing U.S. troops. Kobe Bryant's helicopter crash. And that was just the first eight weeks. It has been a season of retreat where most of us, against our instincts, have tried to watch the world from a distance. The dispatches arrive on screens that serve as windows to a world gone sideways. There is a segment of society still going to bars, restaurants, and home gatherings without donning masks or apparent concern for fellow human beings. These folks don't seem to believe in the science that says social distancing and protective gear will save lives and flatten a curve that looks like a steep stairway to hell. When we finally emerge on the other side— whatever that looks like— we'll have a lot of work to do. As we go through the mental scrapbooking in an attempt to take stock, what are the images or moments or actions that will best define what we've just survived? Here's what that catalogue might include so far: Healthcare workers in head-to-toe protective gear; long lines at the food banks; the banging of pots at 7 p.m.; face masks and ventilators and PPE; a family talking to Grandma through a closed window at the nursing home; political rallies despite calls for social distancing; a president barking at the world on Twitter; funerals where no one can get out of their car; empty subways, trains and empty stadiums; essential workers on the early bus; grocery cashiers behind plexiglass; cops in riot gear; tear gas in the streets; falling statues; protesters. Oh, so many protesters. Some carrying signs. Some carrying guns; eight+ minutes of indifferent kneeling on a man's neck and the jogger hunted by the vigilantes in a pickup truck; the gasp— "I can't breathe"— from the victims of police violence, from the victims of Covid-19, from the masses facing a stack of bills they cannot pay; Black Lives Matter in massive yellow letters, and a candidate and a party that refused to accept fair election results.

We have taught ourselves how to adapt. How to survive. How to sacrifice. How to find laughter despite almost overwhelming anxiety and some despair. How to find courage. How to remain tethered despite our collective solitude, which has been so much easier for some than for others. There are too many without food. Too many have lost jobs. Too many who will face eviction. Hopefully, that will not be another outrage ignored. This year, we grieve the loss of the Notorious RBG, who stood up for women in all facets of their lives, the LGBTQ community and for people without a voice in our society. We also mourn the loss of Alex Trebek— at its essence, Trebek's "Jeopardy!" was a nightly recognition of intelligence and competence, and there were times when the show seemed to be one of the last places where it was a wonderful thing to be a know-it-all— where broad, general knowledge is something to be celebrated rather than scorned or resented. Never outlandish or garish, the "Jeopardy!" that Trebek hosted for 36 years championed intelligence with a rare and relatively quiet hush, especially if you compare it with the rest of television's constant blare. With subdued buzzers and a soft musical interlude during its final question (the loudest thing about the show was the exclamation point in its title, and perhaps the alarm that accompanies the Daily Double question), Trebek maintained a safe space for viewers without condescension in the darkest, dumbest times. His show, and the way he hosted it, proved that respectful order can be more fascinating than brute chaos. In 2020, that seems like a downright revolutionary idea.

On a small political note, in 2004 a Rabbi in Delaware led a shiva minyan for a woman named Mrs. Greenhouse. She had not been wealthy. Her apartment was too small for the minyan, so the ten elders assembled in the laundry room in the basement of her apartment building. Toward the end of the service, a door at the back of the room opened, and in walked Senator Joe Biden alone. After the Kaddish, the Rabbi asked: "Senator Biden, what are you doing here?" And he said: "Listen, back in 1972, when I first ran for the Senate, Mrs. Greenhouse gave \$18 to my first campaign. And every six years, when I'd run for re-election, she'd give another \$18. She did it her whole life. I'm here to show my respect and gratitude." No reporters, no photographers, no dignitaries were there. Just ten elders in a basement laundry room. Joe Biden didn't come to that service for political gain. He went because he has character. He went because he's a mensch. We need a mensch as the leader of our country.

ALEX: Alex and Sam bought a house in Bryn Mawr, about 8 minutes from us. It is a lovely home in a great neighborhood filled with families. We could not be happier to take advantage of Sam's baking and cooking skills (especially for babka and challah rolls)! She passed the Pennsylvania bar and took a job fighting fraud for the Federal Government— which is kind of cool. Their honeymoon got postponed for the second time, once because of Alex's broken foot at the wedding and then Covid ended all travel, so, still pending.... Alex's work moved entirely

virtual in March and will likely continue through Spring of 2021, so even though they are two blocks from the train station, he has yet to join the commuter crowd. Their dogs, Archie and Bash, are definitely enjoying a yard more than the city streets, but it does come with the joys of homeownership— so, there is work to be done on the house and yard! They have spent much of the pandemic inside our bubble and it has been great to spend more time with them and get to know Sam so much better.

CAITE: Caite finished her residency in Psychiatry in June. We had a fully planned May wedding here in Philadelphia (her Alex went to Villanova) which was canceled due to Covid and rescheduled for June of 2021— it will likely be smaller, but we hope that wide availability of vaccine will have been achieved by then. We are a little worried about patients pronouncing Dr Caitlin Kuczarski! Alex matched at U of Miami in Orthopedics, and they are renting a lovely home in Coral Gables, but the Covid restrictions have made the challenges of relocating even tougher. Their dog, Hazel, loves to chase the geckos and frogs in the backyard. We hope she doesn't take after Daisy and bring them in as trophies. Alex is working at least 80 hours a week, leaving Caite to enjoy the sunshine (and rain) of Miami. She is embarking on a telepsychiatry career at a particularly opportune time as the pandemic has changed the way we provide lots of different kinds of care. Like many families, the separation has been tough on all of us and we look forward to a time when we can see each other in person easily again (and go eat some stone crab claws).

BEKAH: Right before the Spring lockdown, Bekah had taken a job with the Rock's production company to develop a type of Comicon for the fitness industry, but Covid broke that, so she got laid off. Turns out 2020 was a bad year for the live events business. Marty has spent the quarantine writing with his partner and has painted a few murals around LA. The extra free time has allowed Marty to finally get Bekah into Dungeons and Dragons. They have been able to get out hiking episodically and enjoying the time with their rescue dog from the Korean meat market, Stevie— who is her own character, loves to sleep and sun all day, hates moving, and generally behaves more like a very loveable cat than a dog. Despite innumerable video chats, we miss them terribly and cannot wait to be able to safely visit (although there is some consolation in that Marty's parents live in LA so they do have family).

GILLIAN: Gillian finished her two theses for cum laude graduation (she got into Phi Beta Kappa) as a double major in economics and math (*A Behavioral Game Theoretical Model for Gun Control Policy Legislation* and *The Effects of Ability Sorting in Higher Education on the Gender Wage Gap: a Semi-parametric Decomposition Approach*— so, yeah, that). When Covid closed her in-person school with 72 hours' notice in mid-March she had to emergently move home and eventually lost her college graduation ceremony. We note that Maple also received her Barkchelor's degree as a Phi Barka Kappa with a major in Barkology and a minor in cuteness studies. Gillian is planning on getting her PhD in economics and will be applying next year. She has a predoctoral job working with census data for an economics professor at the University of Chicago named Dr. Bruce Meyer (great name!) but her grand plan to live in DC was wrecked by (say it with me now) Covid. Thus, she has been with us in Villanova. That has been wonderful for Christie and I (and Maple) but, since she knows no one here, it has been less wonderful for her. Her littlest brother, Luke, drives her crazy (he has a classic case of being an annoying 4-year-old). To stay sane, she stays in tight communication with her high school friends via zoom. Having her home has given us the opportunity to hear her wisdom: rayon is the devil's fabric; any knife made for right-handed people is a bigoted instrument; five dogs are better than 1. Christie goes up to Gillian in a panic asking about the strange noise coming from her laptop— 2 seconds later, Gillian says 'it is the fan', Christie says 'what fan?' Gillian sighs and says 'technology is not your strong suit'. Gillian, we welcome you to adulthood where you are constantly tired except for when you need to go to sleep. We will miss her more than words can express when she moves out for good, but we have been blessed to get this extra time with her due to the pandemic.

NATE: Nate lost a semester and a half of college experience to Covid lockdowns... he is an art major, but realizes that has limited job prospects, so he is looking into animation, coding, design and e-sports. He is navigating college with a solid GPA and seems to generally enjoy it despite the usual frustrations with individual professors. He tried out the roommate situation in an off-campus apartment but has learned that he is best suited to a single room. We could not be prouder of what he is accomplishing. The bonus for us is that, beyond bringing his dry and entertaining sense of humor to the nightly dinner table, he is increasingly close to Zac (Legos are a constant) and Luke (who would rather hang with Nate in his room than any other place in the house— which causes Nate to lock his door). He consumes more diet Ginger Ale, Oreos, Munchies, and Maple Brown Sugar Instant Oatmeal (only the instant kind) than imaginable, so his room serially fills with empty cans and trash and can be difficult to navigate. I was looking at Nate's box of Nintendo DS games in a jumbled pile of dozens of games and when I asked him, "How do you know what's in here?" his response was, "They are carefully organized: I just dump them out and find the one I am looking for and dump them back." That is Nate's definition of "carefully organized." We treasure the extra time together that the lockdowns have provided.

ZAC: Luke and Zac are two very different types of kids: Zac wants you to do everything for him no matter how

easily he could do it on his own (occasional exceptions for Lego sets). Luke wants to do everything on his own and will undo whatever you just did so he can redo it himself. One reason why Christie has wine delivered to the house. This year we had a traumatic event when he slipped and fell on a Lego piece that took a small chunk out of his ear and required multiple stitches— boys! During the pandemic: Me: wanna hear a joke? Zac: yes. Me: knock knock; Zac: (silence); Me: knock knock? Zac: (silence); Me: you're supposed to say, 'who's there'. Zac: I don't care who's there I'm not opening the door during the virus! In April, Zac asked me if "the F word is the boss of all the swear words"? We are on zoom school and they are showing the statue of liberty and the teacher asks if anyone knows what this is and Zac raises his hand (virtually) and says: "the statue of puberty". YES! After I could breathe again from laughing so hard, I realize the rewards of being a parent. Zac: Will you make me some pasta? Me: I'm on a zoom meeting Zac: Pause it... You could make dinner for Zac, or you could just cut out the middleman & get pizza – Zac consumes so much pizza that he knows which Dominos store the pizza came from based on how much sauce it has and how dark the crust is cooked. Apparently, we pack an apple in Zac's lunch so it can get out of the house for a few hours, since it simply gets returned intact every single day. When Zac asks me how much more dinner he needs to eat to be finished, I would love to answer in abstract quantities like 'seven sunsets' to teach him that life often cannot be quantified, but I usually just say two more large bites, but please just eat the dang thing. Also, why is every piece of his clothing turned inside out when he takes it off? If you don't think kids can possibly tell the difference between cookie sizes down to the millimeter, and that they wouldn't fight to the death over which sibling got the smaller cookie by a single millimeter, you are just not ready for a second child. Zac says that Luke gives him 'migrating headaches' and it is so true. Me: where's your brother? Zac: I told him to go hide. Me: are you playing hide and seek? Zac: he is... (without looking up from his iPad). Zac is notorious for putting pennies or small Legos in his mouth. How do we know? When I ask Zac what is in his mouth, and he runs away from me as fast as his long little legs would carry him. Nothing suspicious there. Me: Did you brush your teeth? Zac: Yes. Me: All of them? Zac: *stomps back into the bathroom* We realized in late July that Zac had not been further out of the house in 3 months than the yard when Zac asked Christie if he could wear a mask and go with her to drop the dogs at the groomer just so he could take a ride in the car! Here is a *real* zoom school math problem: when you have 4 kids with >2 electronic devices each, how many charging cables do you need to buy each month to keep the devices working all day??? Zac is a genuinely kind-hearted good soul, but zoom school just exacerbate his frustrations with word recall. After not growing for two years, we finally got approval for HGH (a bit of an ordeal) and he has been fantastic at taking the daily shots required (and likely for the next 5+ years). He is a champ. **LUKE:** Pre-pandemic, Luke changed preschools because they threatened to "restrain him" because he would not take a nap at the designated time! He is definitely a rambunctious boy – lots of running and jumping off of various heights of furniture and countertops. How many times did we yell "this is not the time to have to go to the ER" to our children? We have conversations: What I say: "don't do that, it's dangerous" What Luke hears: "prove to me you're not a coward..." Luke: "Gill, the pool is filled up!" Gillian: "I know, but we can't go swimming yet because it's too cold" Luke: "Damn it"; Gillian told him that he wasn't allowed to say that word and he proceeded to ride around on his bike singing "damn it, damn it, damn it" at the top of his lungs— when she heard, Bekah said: Don't feel bad, remember the time I told Zac that Phoebe was dead and he ran around the house happily telling everyone she was dead. It was so funny, but so dark. Bruce: you need to go wash your hands; Luke: because of the virus? Bruce: no, because your hands are literally wedged down your pants... later, Bruce: Did you wash your hands? Luke: No. Bruce: Why are your hands wet? Luke: I licked them, that should kill the virus. Bruce: sigh.

Luke loves "chawkwaat" (chocolate). Pistachios are 'Picasso nuts'. McDonald's is 'the french fry store'. The fly swatter is a 'bug slapper.' Luke says Gill-un (Gillian) and Jo-Ween (Jolene); But his best is 'dead coke' for Diet Coke.... which is kind of correct. Luke calls the bathroom fan the 'poop wind'; Corn on the cob is 'porn on the cop' and we laugh so hard that we cannot correct him. Luke calls our microwave "the pizza heater," and there's nothing to correct— because he's right. Luke said that when he grows up, he wants to be a doctor like Dad, so he can put on shorts and go into the study and play on the computer all day... (ummm, hard one to explain). When he finishes doing something he says 'easy, peasy, lemon squeezy'(!?) and it is adorable. He has the usual 4-year-old curious eating habits: Luke's every day, regular lunch: one piece of cheese, three chips ahoy cookies and three ritz crackers... who can explain it. There are only two meats: hamburger and chicken, so everything that is not a hamburger is 'chicken'. Parent Mealtime Hack for Luke: "It's chicken!" Seriously. No matter what it is. Just call it chicken – sausage, pork, fish, bar-b-que, whatever. However, Hell hath no fury like a 4-year-old whose hamburger has been removed from the bun or when anyone touches the automatic door opener or elevator button before he does. When Luke asks Zac to play a game of tag, he is basically asking if Zac wants to run around until that ends in a fight. What I said: "Don't kick Zac in the back" What I meant: "Don't kick Zac, period", What Luke heard: "Kick Zac someplace else". Luke thinks it's fun to bring up errors from the past completely out of the blue. So, all of a sudden, we'll hear "mommy, remember when you forgot to water the plant and it died?" or "remember when you dropped the burgers on the floor?" Feels like we're living with a tiny heckler... Luke asked me if he could "shave

the window” and it took me a couple minutes to figure out that he wanted to use the squeegee on the shower door. He gets out and announces that ‘cute’ is for babies - and he says that he is: boothyful (beautiful) and texty (sexy)... Uh Oh... What I say: ‘we are leaving in five minutes’. What Christie hears: no worries, I have at least 20 minutes. What Luke hears: Get undressed; Lose at least one shoe; Start building a fort. On Saturday night, Luke hops from foot to foot while chanting, "I love bread, I love bread, I love bread" as he rips a huge hunk of challah off the top. Christie: Listen. I just want to enjoy my tea and sit here for some alone time... Luke: laying his head in her lap: Good. I'll have alone time with you. I will say that parenting in the pandemic is realizing that taking the iPad away for any period of time is actually punishing parents rather than the child... When we got dog #5, Luke could not say “Babka” and so he called her ‘Bye-Bye’ but as time evolved, she has become ‘Vodka’. Hysterical. We do know this: a large cardboard box is one of the best ways to keep Luke entertained for an hour. Meanwhile, why can Christie NEVER find a pen or pencil when she wants to write something down, but Luke ALWAYS has a pen or pencil to draw on the table or the wall. Sometimes parenting Luke seems like a never-ending series of moving things to higher and higher shelves... Savage commentary by Luke: ‘Dad, I don’t like you, I don’t love you, you need to grow hair so I can love you’ (while sporting his luxurious mop of hair that has not been touched in 9 months—... Zac enjoys singing to himself— usually when he is playing a video game. But Luke loves to sing. And mean really loves to sing. He makes up songs, sings new words to tunes he hears and just sometimes sings what he hears. What’s wrong with that? Because he sings at the absolute top of his lungs – you can hear him everywhere in the house, and he is absolutely, completely tone-deaf, just like his mother. It is painful. We regularly ask how can Luke look like an angel when he is sleeping, and then wake up and ransack the whole house like a raccoon? In closing this section, a note on how parenting has changed: When I check on my kids at night, I always make sure their devices are charging and if that is not the ultimate modern-day expression of love, I don’t know what is....

CHRISTIE: Finally decided to get the Tesla of her dreams and is coming to love it despite driving a lot less due to... Covid. We learned that Christie’s brand-specific buying makes a huge difference in our quality of life. Charmin ultrasoft is amazing and all other brands are uncomfortable by comparison -- and one ply toilet paper is an atrocity (rich people problems). In July she had to go to the dentist because of a broken crown, and the dental hygienist noticed a lump in her thyroid. Long story short she had a mild form of thyroid cancer and had to have a partial thyroidectomy. In the middle of the pandemic! Just another obstacle that she has successfully overcome. Christie is very thankful that I am not in charge of home zoom school because my curriculum would be as follows: Sarcasm 101; How to Get Dad’s favorite snack; Let’s All Shut the F*** Up for Ten Minutes; How to Annoy Mom (AP level); Why Star Trek is better than Star Wars; and Debate: Who is the Best Avenger? While Christie’s curriculum: What wine pairs well with taking 4th grade math for the 7th time? Christie at dinner: what do you think about that patio furniture I showed you three weeks ago? Me: can we really afford them? Next day, Me: what are all those large boxes in the garage? Christie (smiling): what do you think? Here’s the thing: Christie is beyond amazing— our sons are kids with a bunch of medications and a team of doctors, and they have to work harder than you or I do to go about the daily business of the life. We also have other children: bright, strong, brave, talented, and beautiful who struggle with their fraught role as the caregiving neurotypical sibling (looking at you, Gillian). This, too, is challenging even on the best of days. It is an otherworldly marathon, this life. What I am so astonished by is that Christie acts with a fierce meticulousness, determination, and with supreme tenacity. Because of her very type A personality, she does many things incredibly well. One of them is advocate. She knows every detail about all of us and how they manifest so that she can ensure the best life possible. She is the great optimizer of our lives (but we are fully aware that without Jolene, our lives are very messy).

BRUCE: Has really enjoyed the Mandalorian and will admit that the last few Star Trek movies have restored some faith in the narrative that got lost after the original movie (knowing that Star Trek > Star Wars). However, the *most* unrealistic part of the Mandalorian is that he finds babysitters for baby Yoda literally *everywhere* he goes...! During lockdown, looking out the window, it is a beautiful day, the water comes out of the faucet when turned on, and the toilet works, so the infrastructure of the world is seemingly intact, but there is this feeling of dread and grief – just the knowledge that a virus could randomly kill you casts a pall over so many things. Plus, it still feels like March, March the 312th... When you don’t know what day it is, it’s Blursday—when Monday feels like Friday that feels like Wednesday, and there is no concept of weekend, it is just another 10-14 hour day.

I will say that Zoom helps keep me (more) on time because there is no travel time between meetings and the clock is displayed at all times, but my step count has become pathetic and I care way too much about comfortable chairs. Recently, I have come to suspect that Covid-‘19’ stood for the 19 lbs. I have gained through pandemic stress eating. In the late Spring, in an effort to get exercise, I signed up for a zoom workout class that was “intermediate,” so when the instructor said: “do a plank for 90 seconds and then and bring your knee to the opposite elbow for 60 seconds,” I did a modified version where I turned off my computer and ate Cheetos and some peeps. I am thinking seriously about making a home exercise video for parents where all the lunges are just going around the house picking up Legos and matchbox cars. Prolonged quarantine finally forced us to invest in

workout equipment and convert our one-car garage into the “the gym”. Like most people, I am prone to self-delusion— my kids joke that, no matter what I weigh, I am always 10lbs from where I want to be. That ideal self always wants to exercise more. I know that it takes real mental effort to stay committed to a routine even when you see results and that it is really easy to lose interest when you do not— then guilt sets in and that’s definitely not motivating. Since our new gym is 100 steps away in the house, I am more hopeful that it will become a true habit rather than the ‘new year’s resolution’.

Seriously, I have not worked this hard since when I was an intern and ‘on’ for 36 hours and ‘off’ for 12. Just so many crucial conversations and even more critical decisions. Covid did get me the chance to ‘appear’ on NPR’s Morning Edition to discuss Covid testing (even though I got up at 4:00 AM to be on air for about 4 minutes) but also had over 30,000 Covid cases and more than 1100 deaths at Jefferson as well as massive shortfalls in revenue creating budget imperatives. I also was fortunate to be picked to do a guest column published by Peter King in NBC’s Football Morning in America— which is really pretty cool— just google FMIA front line workers (plus, Peter is just as down-to-earth and nice a guy as you can imagine) but that same week, I had to fire two senior executives related to Covid finances, Christie had a thyroid mass discovered AND our 13 year-old Newfoundland, Lucy, finally lost the ability to walk and had to be put to sleep. It has been a year of wild swings in emotion.

Thoughts on Covid: Nature, “red in tooth and claw”, can be brutally destructive, as it was with the Black Death or the 1918 Spanish flu and now, the novel coronavirus. Humanity is given to optimism and amnesia (the latter contributing to the former), while Nature thinks otherwise. In 1900, about when medicine (at last) began to do more good than harm, almost 40% of American deaths were from infectious diseases. Today, the figure is 2%. No achievement has done as much to lessen human suffering. In the early 1950’s, the combination of Penicillin, which stopped smallpox and syphilis, along with the Salk vaccine banishing childhood polio, seemed to predict the conquest of infections. This led to the misconception that pharmacology and vaccination are silver bullets for large improvements in public health. That has distracted attention from the staggering costs of lung cancer, coronary artery disease, AIDS, violence, substance abuse, Type 2 diabetes brought on by smoking, food deserts, obesity, and other risky behaviors. Three decades after Jonas Salk’s advance, AIDS shattered complacency about infectious disease epidemics. AIDS, however, was largely a behaviorally caused epidemic based in urban neighborhoods. Changes in sexual behavior, and less sharing of needles by IV drug users, tamed the epidemic along with anti-viral pharmacology. But it took decades. Remarkably, 2011 was the first year in which more people died from non-communicable diseases (e.g., heart failure, stroke, diabetes) than from all infectious diseases combined!

Because epidemics are invisible during their incubation, and are swift and unpredictable in their trajectories, they can be devastating— as the coronavirus is vividly demonstrating. What we now know is that the coronavirus silently spread for several weeks in January and February. Containment and mitigation efforts could have significantly slowed its spread at that critical point, but we frittered away the opportunity. So what is it about this coronavirus— named SARS-CoV-2— that made it spark a global pandemic? It is a super-fast spreader and unlike Ebola, where direct contact with blood and other bodily fluids is the main route of infection, you don’t have to touch someone to be infected with SARS-CoV-2— all it takes is getting close enough to an infected person and breathing in the respiratory droplets they exhale.... it is transmissible even without symptoms, much more deadly than the flu, and the severity of symptoms puts a strain on health systems. Plus, this coronavirus has required researchers to figure out everything from scratch — how it spreads, who’s more likely to get sick and how to combat it with drugs and eventually, vaccines. The coronavirus found and exploited every inequity that the United States had to offer: elderly people in nursing homes who are more likely to contract the virus; women who are more likely to lose jobs than men (and also shoulder extra burdens of childcare and domestic work while facing rising rates of domestic violence); and African Americans who are 2-3 times more likely to be infected as white people. There is nothing about being Black or Brown that makes you more prone to Covid; instead, existing inequities stack the odds in favor of the virus: they make up a disproportionate share of essential workers who are expected to staff grocery stores and warehouses, clean buildings, and deliver mail while the pandemic rages around them. They face risky commutes on public transportation while white-collar workers can telework from the home. Native Americans are even more vulnerable due to economics and isolation from even running water. In response, we have seen the best of America in the health-care workers, first responders and environmental services people risking (and sometimes losing) their lives to help others. We don’t hear as much about how the Chief Human Resource officers are scrambling to keep the workforce intact or the Chief Financial Officers who are managing debt obligations and budgets. Or the Communication teams who have been operating in crisis mode for 10 months straight and the Facilities people and Central Sterile teams that are doubling down on infection control guidelines and patient safety. They are not in the media, but their roles are equally vital in hospitals’ response to the surge. We also see the pathologies that have surfaced (or recurred in new mutations) during Trump’s presidency: the scapegoating of religious minorities, attacks on science and scientists, and promotion of globalist conspiracy theories. Covid-19 is also teaching us that human connection is like oxygen. We now understand the

2020 Little Meyer Newsletter

difference between solitude (aka one blissful week of Netflix) and loneliness (aka one month of nothing but Netflix). This year has truly tested our collective spirit. Resilience does not come from mindless optimism, or from people telling one another to be calm amid the turmoil. Resilience is built when people confront a threat realistically and discover that they have the resources to cope with it together. But this pandemic deprives us of the thing social resilience needs most—social connection with one another. In America, the pandemic finds a country that has seen a tripling of the number of people suffering from depression, a sharp increase in mental-health issues of all varieties, a major rise in suicides, and record levels of tribal hostility and polarization. The dread and isolation that COVID-19 demands threatens to drive people even farther apart.

You can roughly group American cities into three different eras. One would be the colonial cities that began when the country was first being founded, like New York and Boston and Philadelphia. Then the second group would come in the industrializing age – I am thinking of Rust Belt cities like Chicago, Buffalo, Cleveland (or Worcester). The third group would be your sprawling Southwest and Western cities, like Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, Los Angeles. They feel very different because of the way the roads were laid out and the transportation policies of the age in which they were being built. The first group has a very robust public transit system because they were rich at the time when public transit was being built, in the late 19th century e.g. New York and Boston, two of the first cities in the world with subways plus Philadelphia with its expansive public transit rail system. The second group, like Chicago or Cleveland were built at the time when street cars were the main way people got around so they became very walkable, and many of them actually had plans to build their own subway or metro systems until World War I and the Great Depression hit. But then they didn't have the money to do it. The last group were never really built around a transit system that carried people. They were either small or medium sized cities until the automobile really took off, and then they just built around cars and trucks. As Congress plans more economic rescue, it needs to take a step that lawmakers from both parties have found distasteful for four decades: federal aid for operating mass transit. The pandemic is an existential crisis for transit. Even as ridership has plummeted, economic reopening requires full service. Otherwise, they risk overcrowded trains and buses that do not allow for even minimal social distancing. Transit agencies have never before faced a situation where they must run full services with a fraction of revenue. Congress should save transit not for transit's sake, but to save cities. Subways, buses and commuter rail make up the physical infrastructure that enables urban life. In Washington, NYC, Boston, and San Francisco, more than a third of commuters take public transit to work. In Chicago, Newark, and Philadelphia, it's more than 25%. Transit riders, by staying off the streets, enable others to drive to work without creating impassible traffic jams. For Congress to give up on cities would be catastrophic for America's creativity and productivity.

Tales from shelter in place at our home: Our homeschool curriculum includes my lecture series entitled “Yes, You Still Have to Brush Your Teeth Even Though We Aren't Going Anywhere”. For parents, distance learning means we get to fail at teaching, parenting, hall monitor AND tech support all at the same time! Here are some blunt truths that we learned: Anonymous grocery workers puts themselves in harm's way every day so we can buy groceries and they get tired and scared and are deeply underappreciated. So, the next time you are in a grocery store, please think about how you are treating the people you encounter— they are the reason we are able to buy toilet paper, sanitizer, milk, eggs, and meat. We owe our grocery store workers and the truck drivers who get stuff everywhere a huge debt of gratitude and genuine respect. If this pandemic is teaching us anything, it's that we rely far more on people in these positions than we've probably ever thought about, so we should absolutely be treating them with dignity— at the very least.

If you were among the many people working from home and increasingly wary of joining yet another Zoom meeting, you are not alone. The psychology behind video conference fatigue, includes the stressfulness of awkward silence and small talk while waiting for everyone to log in, being confronted with your own image (yuck) looking back at you among the images of other participants, and worrying about what your surrounding environment may say about you. It is somehow more exhausting than being in the office... Luke zoombombs me regularly – once to inform everyone: “I am pooping” (so we are in serious need of boundaries). Typically, he wanders in and asks one or all of the following: are you on a call?— is it a video call?— are you on mute?— do you have to pay attention? Can I say hello to everyone? Ah, the joys of working from home.... As Zoom or GoToMeeting, etc. became a continuous part of our professional lives, there emerged several archetypes – can you spot yourself: Are you The one on low camera angle iPad? The one who Just Woke Up? The one in front of a bookcase? The one in front of a fancy piece of art? The one outside? Or perhaps the one who is constantly drinking or the one who walks while talking? The Busy One using multiple devices? The one in Front of a Window or the one with the ever-changing virtual background? The one set up in a corner? The one with the bottom third of their face cut off by the screen? The one with a pet(s) – aka the distractor? The one with family member cameos walking by in the background? The one who is clearly watching tv? Or maybe... The one Who Always Forgets to Mute; The one Who Keeps Talking Without Unmuting; The one who clearly just got up; The one who is always eating in front

of the rest of us? The one wearing Gaming Headphones; The one with the bad Internet connection, or the one who is growing a massive shelter-in-place beard? Or the one with the all-white background, or the one who forgets that they are standing up revealing too much, or worse, the dreaded: one who carries the device to the bathroom.

The Part with Random Musings on Life: Came across this - according to DC Universe, readership of their comics was up 35 percent between February and April, as fans turned to decades of back issues to provide their comic book fix. The most-read issues over the period were *Batman* titles. And, no, I do not have *any* idea why people are turning to a story about a guy who went through a really isolating period of loss and channeled those feelings of helpless fury to a secret workout program so that he could put on a mask and help others who had otherwise been unprotected by their city's traditional leadership. No clue why that might resonate at all.... ;)

Someone once said: If it ain't broke, don't fix it. That person does not work for Oreo. Oreo makes a lot of cookies— 40 billion of them in 18 countries each year— that makes it the world's best-selling cookie. The vast majority of them are the familiar sandwich that's over 100 years old: white cream nestled between two chocolate wafers. But the company has increasingly been experimenting with limited-edition flavors that seemed designed as much for an Instagram feed as they are to be eaten. This year, they released limited-edition flavors like Jelly Donut, Mississippi Mud Pie, and Fireworks. They joined flavors like Mint, Peanut Butter, Lemon, Dark Chocolate (can anyone really tell the difference?), Cookie Dough, Carrot Cake, Blueberry Pie, Birthday Cake, S'Mores, Pistachio, and Red Velvet. None of that counts 'Golden', Double Stuf, Mega Stuf, The Most Stuf! (gloriously dangerous festivals of empty calories) and Thins— or defeating the seeming purpose, fudge-covered Thins! Some new contenders get weird, including English Breakfast Tea (really?), Peach Melba (we really need an Oreo flavored like an alcoholic drink?), and at least three doughnut-adjacent flavors to complement the Jelly Donut: Raspberry Danish, Coffee & Doughnut, and Beignet. My question: when are they going to make maple flavored?

In a year with weird and limited baseball, where the Red Sox were terrible and traded away my favorite player, Mookie, I saw baseball's future... on a tennis court. The Cincinnati Masters was played this year in New York (which was weird) and it was played with no fans, which was strange, but such are the times. The point here is that the tournament had no linespeople. The calls were made by a system called Hawk-Eye Live, which sounds like a one-man show that Alan Alda would do in dinner theaters around the country. Hawk-Eye is the system tennis has used for years as part of their challenge system— you've undoubtedly seen it in action. A ball is called out. One of the players challenges the call. Everybody then looks up at the scoreboard (with the fans clapping rhythmically) as an animated tennis ball heads for the line and leaves behind a mark that determines if it really was in or out. I'm not sure how Hawk-Eye works— it has something to do with multiple cameras and computers creating 3D renderings of the tennis ball's path. The point is that there is a wide consensus that Hawk-Eye is the most accurate line-calling system available in 2020, and so the calls are accepted without argument. So yes, you know where this is going for baseball. Robo-umps are coming to call balls and strikes. I don't know when, but they are coming soon. How can umpires behind home plate compete with cameras pointing in from every angle? Answer: They can't. The future is written. And what will umpires do? I think they should focus on speeding up the pace of the game. But that is a discussion for another day.

Bread, as the Old Testament and countless scribes have told us, is the staff of life. In its many forms, whether flat or leavened, corn- or wheat-based, bread has been a fundamental source of sustenance for cultures across the globe for thousands of years. But bread is also about memory and history— because bread is personal. Our relationship to bread goes back to the moment we first sunk our teeth into a hunk of crusty baguette slathered with salted butter or a warm corn tortilla wrapped around braised pork, onions and cilantro. Every time we go back to a favorite bread, we look to recapture the rush of the first time we tasted something truly magnificent. So, I have whittled a lifetime of eating breads into these favorites (carbs are my weakness): The Bagel: No bread has suffered more from its own popularity than the bagel (though pizza crust is a contender). In the latter half of the 20th century, eager to satisfy America's growing appetite for bagels, bakeries, supermarkets, manufacturers and corporate chains alike cheapened the bread to the point where a generation (maybe two) has likely never tasted the real thing. A genuine New York bagel, with its roots in the Jewish bakeries of Eastern Europe, doesn't take shortcuts. It relies on high-gluten flour, a short period of fermentation and a brief hot-water bath to provide the shine and outer shell. Once you taste an honest bagel fresh from the oven— warm, crackly, malty, chewy— you'll never reach into the freezer case again. Then, the Biscuit: the American South is ground zero of the biscuit revolution, driven largely by the soft winter wheat grown in southern states. The low-protein flour gave rise to tall, flaky, buttery biscuits, whose layers easily separate with the tines of a fork and accommodate a whole world of flavor between their fluffy halves; the Country Loaf: crackly crisp on the outside and chewy soft on the inside, it holds pretty much any spread and ingredient and makes them all better. And the shabbat Challah: great Challah with its soft, smoochy egg dough with its glistening egg-wash crust melts in your mouth and produces happiness.

Racism: The range of emotions that I have on race in America: embarrassed, frustrated, scared and confused, sad and sympathetic, offended, hopeless, hopeful, encouraged and empowered. I am profoundly struck

by the MLK quote: “the slow bigotry of low expectations” when it comes to our children of color. I have dreams for all of my children; that their potential will be realized and that they’ll have bright fulfilling lives. But these dreams are tinted by my experience as a white man. For all of the challenges I have faced, Race has never been one of them. I can’t ever really walk in his shoes, but by becoming part of our family, Zac changed racism from something I loathed to something I despise but also fear. I still think about Race in terms of right and wrong, but now I also think about it in terms of survival. I worry that my Black son might one day encounter a police officer with a less-than-disciplined trigger finger. So why did it take parenting children of color for this societal cancer to become so urgent for me? Because until now it wasn’t close enough to home. Yes, while they were living under my roof, it was the job of my wife and I to take care of our foster children of color in the same way we take care of our biological children. But the experience has driven home to me that my job is also to take care of them by trying to make the world they live in a more tolerant and just place. What I’ve learned, and believe more white people must learn, is that because I didn’t know the extent to which racism was a part of all of our lives, I was too passive in combating the racial injustice around me. Now, I’m better prepared to confront bigotry and bias— including my own— because racism is no longer just in the news. It’s in my life. And I believe that what’s happening to BIPOC in this country— right now, in 2020— is wrong. How can it not be safe to go jogging while black; to listen to loud music while black; to drive while black; to birdwatch while black; to shop at Barneys while black; to be a 13-year-old boy while black. It’s not safe to be on the ground, not resisting arrest, while black. We should ALL be enraged by this. The fact that black Americans are more than twice as likely to die from Covid, five times as likely to be incarcerated, twice as likely to live in poverty or be unemployed as white Americans *is wrong*. The fact that inequality is built so deeply into so many of our most trusted institutions *is wrong*. And I believe it’s the responsibility of anyone on the privileged end of those inequalities to help make things right. Period. Black Lives Matter every day, so we need to make a consistent effort to educate ourselves and undo these racist structures. As Jews we practice Tikkun Olam: “to heal the world” - it is an idea echoed throughout several cultures: leave the place better than you found it, make the effort.

This year has been kind of lost for students, families, weddings, holidays, and direct human interaction. And so many lives lost unnecessarily to disease. All of our challenges have been seemingly drawn-out, slow-motion car wrecks. From Covid, to the election, to Trump in general, to police shootings and racial injustice, to unemployment and potential evictions, to sensationalized media/misinformation and outright hypocrisy, to no sports and no fans, it has dragged on. It has been a ‘year of missing’— missing friends and family and life events, missing traditions, missing feelings of well-being, joy, safety. All of these are so necessary to living a happy and healthy life. So, let me introduce a new thought: **hope**. For starters, we have effective vaccines, developed in record time, even if it is going to take 5-6 more months to get enough access to them. And yes, our nation is a mess, but overlapping catastrophes have also created conditions that may finally let us extricate ourselves from the mire. The awareness of national failures— on the coronavirus, racism, health care, and jobs— may provide an opportunity to fix our country. The last time our economy was this troubled, Herbert Hoover’s failures led to FDR’s election with a mandate to revitalize the nation. The result was the New Deal, Social Security, rural electrification, government job programs, and a 35-year burst of growth that built the modern middle class and made the United States the richest and most powerful country in the world. What we are seeing today is a sort of national convulsion over the recognition that racism in America is real and not in the imagination of Black people in this country. So perhaps today’s national pain, fear and loss can be galvanizing: we may be so unhappy, our failures so clear, our grief so raw, that the United States can, as during the Great Depression, embrace long-needed changes that would have been impossible in cheerier times.

As we end the year, I will say Thanksgiving or Hannukah or Christmas has never been about the feast. Maybe as a lover of my wife’s cooking, I shouldn’t admit this, but her regular nightly meals are always way better than turkey. The traditional parade of foods has never held much appeal to me— except for the stuffing— my wife’s stuffing is a meal I could eat regularly. The food was always secondary to the experience of sitting around the table laughing and listening to stories from the people I love, fueled by a shared history of joy and sorrow. This year, so many of us did not have that experience, but the sacrifice was an act of love, as if to say: I can endure one empty Thanksgiving to make sure the family table will be full of life for years to come. This life, and the people with whom we choose to share it, are all that we have. So, once we are on the other side of this pandemic, I plan to spend as much time as possible occupying the same airspace as the people we love and who helped us through this ordeal. We will laugh together, eat together and breathe freely together. I am hopeful that we can remember that, in the big picture, we are all on the same side.

Be safe and be well.

Bruce, Christie, Alex, Sam, Caite, Alex, Bekah, Marty, Gillian, Nate, Zac, Luke, Jolene, et al.
Bruce.Meyer@Jefferson.edu