

Pandemic Journal

"Facts unrecorded are quickly lost in the new interests of changing time...."

--Record of the Nuns of New York City, 1918

"No summer ever came back, and no two summers ever were alike. Times change, and people change; and if our hearts do not change as readily, so much the worst for us."

--Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Day 1: Thursday--3/12/20

Yesterday the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. So I suppose the story starts there, but doesn't it start even further before that? Do we start with China? With Italy? When the first person was infected? How to begin?

I'll begin on the last normal Thursday I think I'll have for a long time. It was supposed to be a normal day. One person that day said they thought they would close down the schools by the end of the next week. I couldn't imagine that Los Angeles would close down the schools the next day, with every school in Orange County to follow soon after.

Even now I find myself having to check the dates. Everything happened so fast.

Thursday I went to McGavin Intermediate to help plan an ALP lesson. Every teacher and administrator that was there were very somber. There were the usual jokes but there was a tension in the air. It was raining outside and it would only increase in intensity as the day progressed. We planned the lesson. I think the only time people talked about anything other than the pandemic was when we planned. One teacher mentioned her husband had a heart problem. She had two small children. I've thought about her at least once a day.

I sat away from everyone else. Recently my wife and I have been sick. Was it the virus? I doubt it, we never had run fevers and it felt like the typical stomach bug, but who knew? Aren't carriers asymptomatic? Did someone else here have it?

One teacher asked me if I thought it was as bad as the flu. I looked at him, a bit started, "Actually, I think it's going to be worse!" Where was this man getting his information?

My last day in a classroom and it was packed. We went to Mr. Kelly's room to observe the lesson. The students, who looked and acted like so many of my students, were understandably nervous to have so many adults there to observe them. They sat in neat rows, nearly shoulder to shoulder. I thought about how Mr. Kelly said their parents would send them to school every day, no matter what, to work hard. Fever? Cough? Go to school.

The lesson went well. It rained even harder in the afternoon. I left my laptop at home so I checked my phone, again and again. We were sent home. I left, relieved to be with my family.

Day 2: Friday--3/13/20

I woke up not feeling well. I had been excited to show my students how to do a Socratic Seminar. I had prepared them for the substitute yesterday and knew that today would be a good day to just sit and talk. I wondered if the discussion we had last Tuesday had helped or prepared them, but quite a few of them just looked bored. I thought that giving them a chance to talk to each other, without me intervening, would be good for them. I could gauge what their concerns were and perhaps how to help. Maybe we all just needed time to vent.

The tension from the previous day seemed to carry forward into today. I thought about my mother and my father-in-law. Both were over 80 and he in particular had many health issues, especially with his lungs. Would I go see her today? The answer was immediate and emphatic. No. There was a possibility I or Kelly was sick. I didn't think it was true, but I wouldn't risk it.

So why should I risk my students or their families?

That thought decided it. I would stay home. I felt torn, badly. Shouldn't I be there? How were my students doing? I decided to err on the side of caution. As soon as she woke up I told my wife I was staying home, and that I wanted the girls to stay home as well. She agreed.

We spent the day glued to the news, waiting and watching for what would happen with our schools. Thursday Disneyland shut down. We kept telling each other that if Disneyland shut down everyone else would start freaking out. We decided it was important to go buy some groceries. I made a quick list of items that would last like rice, beans, and frozen fruit. I didn't know what to expect at the store.

At Vons everyone was serious and tense. It was kind of hard to concentrate on the task at hand. Carts were very full and much was missing for the shelves. I'll never forget the pasta aisle. Usually it's packed, full to the front, flush with the edge, as if nobody ever buys it and there's more than enough. We found ourselves pulling random boxes off the shelf. An employee cleaning the aisle said to a woman that she had allergies and every time she sneezed everyone looked at her, frightened.

We got the stuff and left. In the parking lot I overheard two men talking, "...this thing came from China, Wuhan...." Another two men were looking at the rear end of their cars. They had backed out simultaneously and rear-ended each other. Was it an accident like any other day? Or were they so single mindedly focused they forgot to check when they backed out? Everyone seemed nervous and distracted.

Sometime during the day Los Angeles Unified shut down. Later in the day came another announcement that our GGUSD schools would shut down along with every other district in the county. My wife's school was shut for two weeks. My friend's for three. My district shut for three and then 1 week for Spring Break, so four total. It was mind boggling.

Day 3: Saturday--3/14/20

Watching the news all day. Some updates from my school and what they expected for Monday. There was a lot of passionate discussion amongst the teachers.

Day 4: Sunday--3/15/20

I text my principal, "I suggest we meet in the MRP Monday where we could spread out. Gov Newsom had reporters sit two seats away from each other at his recent news conference." He replies, "Thanks. Will do."

Day 5: Monday--3/16/20

I get up for work. Kelly is very fearful for me. I reassure her. I tell her I'll drive straight there, go to the meeting, and then stay in my classroom all day. I won't go near anyone. I reassure her again.

I drive to work. I take the surface streets. There's traffic, but it feels cut down, like many people are missing. I notice a line that's formed outside of a Stater Brothers grocery store. People are standing apart from each other in the line. At another Stater Brothers there's a line but people are not spread out. Later in the day, as I return from work, I check again and while it looks busy there's no line.

As I walk through the parking lot of the school I Mrs. Letcher calls me, asking me about my health. We stand apart. I immediately tell her that while I've been sick lately neither I nor my wife have had a fever. She says that she was worried about me since she knows I've been sick.

A few minutes before we are supposed to meet a call comes over the intercom.

"Will all people with chronic health conditions or pregnancies please meet me outside my office before our meeting?"

I'm sure our two pregnant teachers will not be in the meeting.

We met in the Multi-Purpose Room. There're many more chairs there than need to be so that people can spread out. Mr. Grudt, clad in his workout attire, as always, puts his chair far in the back and loudly calls out, grining, "Six squares distance at all times!" Our two pregnant teachers are there.

There are many smiles, many greetings. Everyone stays away from each other. Mrs. Koopowitz and Mrs. Ho keep one chair empty between themselves.

The news is grim, sparse, and practical. There's very little information. There's more questions than answers, and what answer we come up with prompt even more questions. One person asks if the office should call kids in small groups to hand out packets to lessen the exposure of the office staff. Everyone seems to realize how little of what we thought we could plan to do would actually work under the conditions we're operating under. It's like we've been asked to perform surgery on the bottom of the ocean. Mr. Clark is wonderful, forthright, open, honest, emphatic. As terrible as I feel, he makes me feel better. We are trying to build a flying aircraft with inadequate tools while it's taking flak fire from the Germans. It's impossible. Later that night the president comes on TV and says that gatherings of more than 10 people are not recommended. Tomorrow the mayor will close all the bars and restaurants in Los Angeles.

Someone tells me that we need to make things normal for the kids.

Day 6: Tuesday--3/17/20

It was strange to wake up today and realize that everything lay out before me ready to do at any time. Did things have to get done? Sure. Right now? Well, anytime, really. How much of our life is wake up and go? Like there's a clock ticking for each second and one moment not moving is wasted? Now there's plenty of time.

I checked the news as soon as I woke, even though I promised myself I'd cut back on doing that yesterday. I realized that there's now the divide in time: the time before and the time after the pandemic. It can literally be seen in the news articles. "What to Do to Get Great Hair!" versus, "Coronavirus..." add the issue here.

A comedian on YouTube mentioned that Isaac Newton's university closed as a precaution against the plague. I looked it up. An undistinguished student, he went home for two years and worked on his ideas that led to the development of Calculus and the theory of gravity. Shakespeare worked on King Lear when he was quarantined at home.

I checked a few of my student's journals. Some, as expected, were bored and played video games. A few expressed great anxiety and worry for their families, especially regarding getting food since the stores seem to be cleared out everywhere. One mentioned going to their local church for food. I worry about them.

Is this their 9/11? Will they, like me, have a moment 30 years from now when they talk to a younger person and realize that they don't remember the event? That that event is so much history and so very boring for them? I think what really gets me about something like remembering 9/11 isn't that younger people don't seem interested, it's that they remember it so badly as a joke. Did we make jokes about something like Pearl Harbor? Did the older people wince when we made fun of it? It wasn't some silly story they told to amuse themselves. They lived it. It was real and terrible for them. For many years I couldn't even really talk about 9/11. I had heard about this in the older people, that they wouldn't want to talk about the war, or something to that effect. I had thought they were silly. Why not talk about it? Wasn't it over? Will my student feel the same about this event? Will someone ask them about it in 30 years and they just say, "Yes, I remember it," and then let that conversation pass on and stumble into silence?

4,482 infected nationally. 86 deaths. 22 cases in Orange county. Today Dr. Nicole Quick, Orange County Health Officer, issued an order banning all public, private gatherings, including work, outside single households.

Day 7: Wednesday--3/18/20

I wake up at 3 AM. The brain whirls. It feels like it's on fire. There's no way I'm going back to sleep. Yesterday the Governor said school may be cancelled for the rest of the school year. The teachers are meeting on Zoom today at 10 AM to discuss our plans going forward.

I read through many of my student's journals. They're already bored, miss their friends, frightened, frustrated about cancelled plans, and worried about food. The elation over not

having school is turning to a crushing sense of what in the heck are they going to do next? Many of them rush through their assignments, some grateful to have something to do.

What I can detect under all of them is a pervasive sense of worry and inability to concentrate. I'm having trouble myself. I'll have great moments of happiness and calm and then plunge down into an almost paralyzing sense of fear.

Yesterday my daughters and I went for a walk. They wore their PE clothes from school. They ran ahead of me and we made many jokes about who was going to win the race around the complex. The sun was bright, clear and many beautiful clouds hung in the blue sky. It was beautiful and perfect. We saw many of our older neighbors out. We said hello and good morning. We carefully walked around them.

My wife felt much better. She cleaned the walls in the house and rearranged the furniture, creating a small meditation center in one room. It looks cozy and comforting. I think about Ann Frank's house in Amsterdam. We eat lunch and make plans to watch a movie that night.

I'm ridiculously giddy all day about a board game I've ordered for the family from Amazon. It's arriving Friday. For a time, I can't figure out why I'm so happy. I realize I haven't had anything to look forward to in a long time.

That afternoon the governor and the mayor of Los Angeles spoke. They are calm, confident, hopeful. I can feel myself feeling better. They are proud of their state and city. They smile and talk about many wonderful programs and decisions they've made and are creating to help people. They say how proud they are of everyone. I tell myself that I will vote for these men the rest of my life.

I read the news. The governor says the schools may be closed for the rest of the year. My wife and I talk endlessly about this. I know we are meeting on Zoom tomorrow for my school. There's so many questions. That night, my wife says Los Vegas is shut down. I ask her what she means but I already know the answer.

The staff meets on Zoom on Wednesday. The news is we keep doing what we're doing. We set up a schedule for video conferences for students if we need it. The school building is only going to be staffed by our custodial crew. I want to tell everyone I love them. We plan on meeting, "For lunch," tomorrow. The staff will check in next Wednesday.

I check my student's journals. Where are they? Are they safe? Are they in the state? Is anyone in their family sick?

Tonight I got an email from our district and posted a video to the class website. I was greatly impressed with the work being done with our food services personnel and the drivers for our district who are helping deliver medicine for our special needs students.

Good news from China. The news mentioned that there was only one more case of community transmission. This means that they are finally getting a real handle on dealing with the pandemic. I know it can be hard, but it looks like there will be an end to this. I'm already looking forward to it!

5,881 infected nationally. 107 deaths. 29 cases in Orange county.

Day 8: Thursday--3/19/20

Today has been going a little better, I even have a Zoom lunch chat set up with our staff. A lot of the teachers are coming together over email to help each other out with how to help our students remotely.

It's also settling into a more comfortable routine at home. Yesterday we got a food delivery, which is a great convenience and luxury.

The news, of course, isn't good, but I'm trying to ignore it today. I think you can overdose on bad news and I have a family to keep happy. I'm very focused on the little things that make a day worth living. I spent some time this morning reading some meditative thoughts by Tolstoy and a book of daily meditations about the Tao. The topic was, appropriately enough, "Fear," which we've got more than enough around here. My oldest made pancakes and I helped her with the blueberry syrup. My youngest and I went for a daily walk and got rained on. Kelly got a chance to Facetime her friend and I'm talking about somehow meeting up with friends to play some board games.

Doing schoolwork is very strange now. I notice a lot of my students post their ideas late at night. Are they up all day watching younger siblings? Do they sleep all day and then stay up to see their parents if they are working all day? One boy mentioned the school lunch program our district set up and he said it was easy to do. I wonder if our district could turn that into a food distribution center for needy families as well (if they haven't done this already)?

I waved and yelled at the UPS delivery van man to have a nice day. I think I'm going to spend the rest of my life thanking and admiring the true heroes: grocery store workers, delivery people, nurses and doctors. In fact, I'd show up to a parade of them and cheer the loudest.

I'm also wondering about how to write this journal. I suppose the best thing to do is to record, for that day, all the ideas only and not go back and add or rewrite what's come before. I spent a lot of time early on adding to the first three or four days, but that was simply because there was so much to think about and process. I think it's appropriate to just record my thoughts for this day, even if it's to go back and talk about their earlier days. That way the reader can see how I, at this moment of time, was thinking about the past.

I'm still having trouble writing about Monday, 3/16. That was the day I went into school. I have much more to write about it, but my brain just whirls. There were a lot of emotions going on that day that are hard to process.

I feel good having the kids do a journal. I feel like they are living through history, why not record it and provide a record of it? There will be a time to look again in the past. Right now, I think people just have their hands full with getting things done for their families. There's nothing "normal" about this new normal.

I scan the headlines. The New York Times says, "U.S. Plans to Tell Citizens Abroad to Come Home Soon or Stay There." I think about a teacher last Thursday who convinced his daughter the night before not to take a planned trip to Prague. His wife and he convinced her that if she left there was no telling when she'd be able to return. This same man a few minutes earlier had asked me if I thought this virus was worse than the flu.

Today the governor said the number of infected was doubling every four days. If that rate holds, half of California will be infected by May 22.

Tonight the governor ordered all Californians to stay home.

10,197 infected nationally. 149 deaths. 1,000 cases in California. 42 cases in Orange county.

Day 9: Friday--3/20/20

I'm reminded of a story I've heard Mr. Grudt tell many times. He was working with a group on team building and one of their challenges was to climb a rope obstacle course high above the ground and then have a group chat.

Once everyone was buckled in 30 feet above the ground, each member started to tell their story. When they came to one woman she said, "I'm sorry. I literally have not heard a single word any of you have said. I've been absolutely terrified of falling."

When I was a child I remember thinking that those instructions they give you on the airplane to place the oxygen mask over your face before assisting a small child were cruel. Isn't everyone supposed to help the children first? Later, as an adult, I saw the wisdom: we cannot help others unless we can first help ourselves.

I woke up again at 3 AM, unable to sleep. I tried to take a walk but a nasal drip in my inner ear is making the world unbalanced.

I think about my father. He's one of the few people I know that gets calmer, happier, and more focused when everything is swirling chaos. He felt great peace SCUBA diving, he once told me. Everything you do wrong under the water can kill you, and he appreciated how it focused his mind on only the most essential.

I'd like to get some sleep today.

12,392 infected nationally, 195 deaths. 1,039 cases in California. 53 cases in Orange county.

Day 10: Saturday--3/21/20

We watched the movie *Little Women* together last night and it was remarkably well made. It completely lifted out of my present life. I think I need to start limiting how much time I spend reading the news.

Today we set out to find bread. Someone had the idea of going not to the grocery stores but to local bakeries to avoid crowds. We found a wonderful one nearby. Hand written signs told us that no more than 4 customers were allowed in the store at one time, that we were to open the door with our body (the door swung open two ways) and not touch the handle (which was covered in paper, anyway). The staff wore plastic latex gloves. There was plenty of freshly baked bread on the shelves and we bought four loaves, intending to eat one right away and freezing the rest for later.

We drove around South Coast Plaza, completely closed, it's parking lots empty. The traffic was very light, like taking a drive on Christmas Day. Stores everywhere were closed. The few that were open had large handwritten signs, typically saying, "Curbside pickup only," or "Take-away only."

I called my Dad and he had choice words about the President. I wondered what our country was going to look like a year from now. Everything back to normal? How long was this going to be our “normal?”

17,935 infected nationally, 266 deaths. 1,315 cases in California. 78 cases in Orange county.

Day 11: Sunday--3/22/20

I woke at 2 AM and could hear Kelly was up. I got up and we sat in the dark for an hour, talking about the world and our place in it.

In the morning the sky was sunny and the weather was fair, but there was a storm coming later that day so we went for a walk early.

I checked my class site and saw 19 of the 32 students I have in 1st period had signed up and checked in.

The orange tabby cat curls up at my feet while I type this journal.

Tonight my friends and I are going to try to play a game over Zoom.

29,664 infected nationally, 377 deaths. 1,536 cases in California. 78 cases in Orange county.

Day 12: Monday--3/23/20

I “met up” with my friends on-line to play a game last night and we spent several hours playing. I found it hard not to break away from the game to go do the little things I do around the house. I tried to remind myself that I was “gone” from the house and needed time to spend with others...to get away from being here day after day.

As we were wrapping things up I clicked on a CNN news article about a 12 year old girl on the East coast named Emma who caught the virus and seven days after was put on a ventilator.

This morning I cleaned the kitchen, put some coffee on for Kelly, and took attendance. Two of my students from Period 1 have not checked in, and I asked our attendance clerk to call them.

Los Angeles Unified School District announced today that they would be closed until May 1st.

The President said yesterday that the government would reassess the recommended period for keeping businesses shut and millions of workers at home after this week. The Vice President said the CDC would allow some people who have been exposed to the virus to resume working outside their homes if they wear masks.

33,018 infected nationally, 428 deaths. 1,828 cases in California. 95 cases in Orange county.

Day 13:--3/24/20

Woke up at 5 AM, made and drank some tea, and fell back asleep for several hours. Reading through my student's journals later I could see people were having trouble adjusting to all this unscheduled time.

I found myself needing to bring my rational brain back on-line after many days of feeling very emotional about the stream of bad news. I had a friend tell me to stop sharing bad news with them and I realized I was working my issue out on them.

So I sat down with some philosophy books, read, and started to journal. I asked myself: is a human being an animal? Having closely observed my cats for a full week the answer is definitely "no." Animals are completely and totally unaware of what's going on. We, of course, are, and that just might be the problem. In a situation like this, of course, it's good to know what's going on: you need to keep yourself safe.

43,499 infected nationally, 537 deaths. 2,266 cases in California. 125 cases in Orange county.

Day 14:--3/25/20

Found a couple of resources online that helped a lot: 10 percent better and mynoise.com, both sites help with meditative practices, something I definitely need right now. I tried a practice with Kelly last night and it seemed to help.

I'm trying to limit my news intake to twice a day; once in the morning and once in the evening. In-between I clear out space to do my schoolwork and take care of myself and the family. Yesterday I spent a lot of time in the morning reading student journals and thinking about ways to engage kids. Mrs. Ho and I had a conversation through text about grades. Mr. Clark scheduled a staff meeting through Zoom for today.

I organized my books yesterday. I took all the dark, heavy reading and put it in the garage. I simply don't have patience or mental space to read about tragedy right now. I kept biographies, books on philosophy and meditation, and big, general histories of the world. I'm going to use them to "get out" of my headspace and into another life/event.

Last night I read an account of one woman who was taking care of her sick husband. It made me think hard about what to do around here in case one of us, most likely myself since I'm the one designated to go out for shopping, got sick. I placed all our medical supplies in the kitchen and we are calling our bedroom, which has its own bathroom and shower, the isolation sickroom, just in case.

Ellie got so bored she started scrubbing the grout on her bathroom floor with a toothbrush, and I joined her. We got the hallway and kitchen done a couple hours later.

In the course of helping her I looked in the cabinet in the garage and, inadvertently, discovered a couple of masks, still in their packaging, that I had bought last summer for some sanding work. I asked Kelly about them and confirmed that they were the N95 masks in such great demand.

I felt fortunate and kind of stupid to have inadvertently secured such valuable equipment. My first thought was to possibly wear one when I went out, but I had a gnawing bad feeling in

the back of my mind. A quick reading of the opinion section of the newspaper confirmed it: these masks were invaluable for our nurses and doctors--they could save people's lives. I looked up hospitals in our area that needed them and talked with Kelly about donating them.

Her fear, of course, was me going to a hospital at all, even to drop something off. I told her that at a place like Hoag I could just walk in through a sliding door, not touch anything, and walk out. I could see that my previous task of organizing the supplies in case someone was sick and talking about going out was wearing on her, so I told her that we didn't have to make a decision that night, that I wouldn't do anything that she didn't feel comfortable with. We resolved to donate the masks.

All day yesterday Kelly and I dreamed of ordering out or having me go pick up some hamburgers. After our conversation last night, we realized we were good with what we had at home. At some point, though, we'd have to send me out to the store.

We gave Ellie some money for doing such a good job scrubbing the floor and she said I deserved a new game as well. I told her I'd love to buy one, but I was happy with what I already had, since the idea of putting someone at risk to deliver a game to my house just troubled me greatly. Perhaps I'd buy something digitally instead?

Yesterday a person younger than 18 died of the virus in Lancaster and the first death from the virus was recorded in Orange County. More school districts in our area are extending their closures until late April and some into May. Governors are warning that states will not have enough ventilators. Supermarkets are installing plexiglass barriers between their cashiers and customers. Today the Archdiocese of Los Angeles ordered all Catholic churches in the region to be closed to the public amid the pandemic through April 19th or until further notice. Churches equipped with bells are asked to ring them at noon as a sign of solidarity and hope.

The President said he wanted churches "packed" by Easter.

53,934 infected nationally, 728 deaths. 2,617 cases in California. 152 cases in Orange county.

Day 15--3/26/20

Everyone is struggling. Reading through my student's journals today they are, universally, bored, off-schedule, struggling with what to do, and feeling isolated and hemmed in by the bad news. Thankfully I haven't read any stories of people who caught the virus although any cold is enough to send people into a panic of worry. Going out is difficult if not forbidden. Families are stressed out. Some are fighting, some parents are crying all night, and everyone is trying to figure out the new rules and how to navigate them.

I read something yesterday that helped me quite a bit. It said, which is easier: wanting everything or wanting everything you already have? Wanting total freedom or focusing on the small freedoms you already have.

On one hand, it's depressing. It makes you completely aware of the limits of your world. It seems to go against everything America likes to say is possible: everything and anything, the

sky's the limit, the only boundary is you, your unhappiness is your fault. I think this pandemic exposes the lies of those ridiculous beliefs.

Because the sky's NOT the limit. We are all limited in our lives, some of us far more than others. Sometimes your unhappiness is NOT your fault. We all struggle.

But the people I'm reading would say, "Know thyself, take an honest stock of who, what you are and the world you live in." So, to be honest: we are living in an unprecedented time. Let's be honest with ourselves. Let me be honest with myself.

Yes, this is difficult, but others are dealing with far worse.

No, this is not fair, but this is a normal and nature part of the world. Maybe I need to remember my place in it.

No, this will not last forever. This is temporary, like all things. There will be many things about this experience that will probably never come again in my lifetime, so best to make use of what is right in front of me.

And, of course, the wise old saying: "True happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle: some things are within our control, and some things are not."

I think if I take a little time each day to apply that idea to my life, I might feel a bit better.

I had a good conversation with my friend Nathan, last night. He reminded me of one of my favorite and inscrutable sayings, "Someday it might be pleasant to remember even this." While I certainly wouldn't apply that to what's happening in the world today, I can apply that to about every bad day I've ever had in the past now.

Today the United States has more cases than China or Italy.

The White House's coronavirus response coordinator said talk of shortages of ventilators and hospital beds is overwrought. Doctors say the shortages are killing fellow doctors and patients.

68,534 infected nationally, 990 deaths. 3,243 cases in California. 187 cases in Orange county.

Day 16--3/27/20

Today I'm going to post what I wrote to my students after reading all their journals:

Some thoughts after reading and commenting on every journal that was submitted.

Yes, we are all bored. Boredom is often a sign that you can't do what you want, and I know what we all want: to return to our lives. What's going on is very, very challenging. Many of us are scared, the news isn't helping, and suddenly we have lots of restrictions on our lives. Some of us are being forced to deal with situations at home that are easier to deal with when we have a way to escape to school or go over to a friend's house, things that are not possible now. I don't want to minimize that. Many families are concerned about food and finding what they need. There are a lot of people worried about their jobs.

Some of you feel challenged by school and enjoy the interactions you get. Some of you are really, really grumpy about doing schoolwork: I get it. All of us are trying to adjust to this new unscheduled schedule.

So, let me say: You are not alone. All of us are having to cope with something extraordinary.

What I've noticed is that boredom, however, can spur people on to new and greater things. I honestly think most of the art and inventions in history were created by creative people who were bored. I'm afraid we have permanently distracted ourselves with our electronics. So, some advice:

Hey, if playing video games and watching movies is how you cope, then do it. We all need an escape. But I'd like to suggest that when that gets super boring there are probably some things you can do. I've read about students who are learning to cook, draw, exercise, paint. Maybe there's some reading you've always meant to get around to. Maybe there's a family member you're going to get some quality time with. I'd like you all to ask yourselves two questions:

What do you already have that you want to do that you can do now?

What small freedoms do you have now that you could enjoy?

By all means, if you need help, ask for it. Reach out to our district, our principal, or me. If you feel like you're in a crisis and you need help, believe me, we are here for you. But if you've got it, things seem pretty stable and you find yourself, in a word, bored every day, I think that's life's way of saying you are about to do something extraordinary. I've seen many journals that reflect that.

My best to all of you and your families. I'll post more info about next week and make journals due next week. Stay safe.

~Mr. Atherton

93,568 infected nationally, 1,433 deaths. 4,459 cases in California. 256 cases in Orange county.

Day 19--3/30 /20

Dear _____,

Good to hear from you. I'm sorry this is happening to all of us. This is a very difficult time.

I want you to know that whatever you are feeling is OK. It's perfectly normal to feel whatever we feel. We are all cycling through many emotions and they are all perfectly natural, normal, and OK to feel them.

I think a healthy amount of fear in a situation like this is good. It's what keeps us doing the things that keep ourselves and our families safe. Who could imagine staying inside for many weeks or not being able to freely go to a place like Disneyland? Only knowing that there is a

pandemic could make us act in this way. That fear keeps us aware of and making good decisions.

But I understand that there's a bigger fear, and a great deal of anxiety in this event. It can look very, very scary. So I want you to remind yourself of many important things:

1. There are many, many doctors, nurses, firefighters, police, healthcare experts that are working hard every day to keep us safe. They are working heroically.
2. This will end. Every disease will end. It may take a while, and we are probably only at the beginning of it, but there will be an end.
3. We need to do what we need to do to take care of ourselves. It's OK to turn off and ignore the news if it's too much. It's OK to say "no" to things that make use feel uncomfortable.
4. If we're feeling safe and able to do so, it's time for us to do what we can to help others. My daughter has scrubbed the grout on the floor, cooked pancakes for us in the morning, and is painting her bathroom cabinet because she is, in her words, "so bored." It's been wonderful to spend time with her and see all her talents. Every thing she'd done, and they might seem like minor things, has helped the family and made everyone feel better. Sometimes it's something as simple as playing with a young child and giving their parents a small break. I'm constantly amazed at how loving and helpful everyone has been: my family, my staff at school, and my neighbors. I hope you have people that you can turn to near you.

So I hope you can find some small thing that will help you deal with this. I've found writing in my Pandemic Journal is sometimes hard but it helps me get my ideas out of my head (where they seem cooped up all day). Watching a movie with my family also gets me out of this situation for a bit. I've also found reading helps me.

Keep in touch and let me know how you're doing.
Stay safe,

Mr. Atherton

144,732 infected nationally, 2,527 deaths. 3,720 cases in California. 431 cases in Orange county.

Day 20-- 3/31/20, near midnight.

It's getting harder and harder to check the news. I do it, of course, but I feel like I'm looking at it with one eye peeking out from behind my hands. It's the majority of what we talk about. I'm not sure that checking it will make me feel any better or change anything I'm doing. Last week they said don't wear masks out if you're not infected. This week they're rethinking that idea. I'm simply acting like I have it when I go out and so is everyone else that I run into.

Getting groceries yesterday was nerve-wracking. But we're good for the week. So there's that.

I guess I need to know what's happening. But it's not really helping my sanity. I knew this whole thing would be bad. I was banging a drum about it for weeks before it even got bad. But you do what you can. That's what we're all doing now.

One student asked me, "What do you think?" on the last Tuesday we were together. I had decided to set aside the entire lesson to answer any question they had. I was a little shocked at how little they knew. I'd be shocked a few days later at how little my fellow teachers knew. I said, "It reminds me of how I felt during September 11th." There was an unreality then, a sense of floating, like all the rules had been suspended. I remember not laughing for three weeks. I remember the blue sky, and not a single airplane in it for three days. I remember thinking that this would probably never happen again like this in the entire history of the modern world. I felt that in the bones. I felt it again that last week.

I wanted to tell my students, "This is what history is like, real history. Everyone just seems to throw their hands up and say, 'What in the heck do we do now?'" And then we muddle through it. We make some good choices. We made bad choices. We live with the result, forever. We look back and second guess ourselves and say, "Hindsight is 20/20," and oh how stupid they were, why did they...?

I think my students often wonder why I had them keep a journal. Every time I update the number of infections and deaths at the end of each entry I remember why I asked them to do this assignment. I scroll back to the first entry I recorded, March 17th, and I marvel at how low those numbers look to me. I remember how I felt then.

Today the Center for Disease Control predicted 100,000 to 250,000 Americans would lose their lives.

188,049 infected nationally, 3,909 deaths. 8,384 cases in California. 502 cases in Orange county.

Day 21--4/1/20

T.S. Elliot's poem has been in my mind the last week: "April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/Memory and desire, stirring/Dull roots with spring rain. "

Yesterday our district extended suspension of in-person classes until May 11th.

Today the United Nations call the pandemic the world's greatest challenge since World War II.

The New York times said even under the best case scenario, more Americans will die in the weeks and months to come than died in the Korean and Vietnam wars. It wrote that this crisis will impoverish millions.

infected nationally, deaths. cases in California. cases in Orange county.

Day 22--4/2/20

I noticed that I didn't record the numbers of infections and deaths yesterday. Honestly, it's depressing. I almost don't sit down to write for the day because I don't want to have to record those numbers. I know why I'm recording them. I know it's important. I dread it.

I'm going to leave yesterday's blank. There are days I just can't deal with it. In some way it's starting to become like a distant war you see printed about in a newspaper: far away and someone else's problem. Maybe that's just me trying not to feel, trying to put some space between myself and the pain of loss. Maybe it's just getting harder and harder to comprehend. A few days ago I followed a link for a police detective in Santa Rosa who died and my heart broke. She looked clearly in her mid-40s, brave, competent, alive. The furthest thing from a casualty of this virus that you could imagine. But there she was. She was alive last week.

I'm getting that same sense of unreality the more obituaries I look at. I think we look for meaning, even in death. It's insidious because we like to assign some meaning, but it often comes off as blame. Oh, you were too old, too sick, too stupid. Of course you caught it. It's stupid and petty and childish of us to do this, but we do it. Because we're scared ourselves. We're scared at how random this thing is. We are meaning making creatures. We want stories. We want to be told that Woodrow Wilson did something to deserve getting stricken with the Spanish Flu in the last pandemic. He deserved to spend the remaining months of his life paralyzed and enfeebled. Because we believe in divine justice. Because we have to assign meaning.

But we are cowards. We are cowards because we don't want to feel the loss. We don't want to sit with the pain. I don't want to sit with the pain. I want to move on. I don't want to see these people die. They are young and old, healthy and sick, strong and weak, and they each one, all of them, don't deserve to die. This thing is vicious and random and cruel.

I graded my student's papers today and assigned them some questions and more work. I'm sure they are looking forward to not getting work over Spring Break. Yesterday the governor pretty much confirmed that we are not going back to school this school year. There's no official announcement, but things are just sliding that way like a slow moving avalanche. It's sad. There was an initial joy at being out of school, at getting away from those crowds of people and being able to be home safe with my family. I think all that joy has been replaced with a crushing sense of the abnormality of all this. Years from now I'll have students that say, "Oh, I talked with my older brother about the coronavirus and he said it was a joke, he just sat at home and played

video games every day, *I wish we could have a coronavirus!*" I guarantee they will say that. And I'll look at them, and maybe I'll go along with the joke. Maybe I'll just smile. Maybe I'll go home that day and think about the students I had at the time. How angry they were. How scared. How they worried about their families. How we worried about how we were going to safely eat. I think about the time we drove around, looking for bread.

Or maybe not. Maybe this thing is far from over. Maybe this thing will flatten every joke. Maybe the resulting economic depression really will be a Great Depression, and millions will be thrown out of work. Millions already are. Maybe these kids will hear stories about families that huddle together, frightened and confused, and thanked God the day it was over.

We have a staff meeting today at 7:30. We are going to figure out what we'll do next. A woman walked out of her car near my house, dressed for work. Where is she going today? Is she scared? She looks very serious, very determined. She got back in her car. She's gone.

Kelly was awake at 2 AM today, trying to buy groceries. We figured having them delivered was the safest way, and we can afford to do it, but there's less and less availability. She doesn't want me to have to walk into a store. We still have the N95 masks, two of them. They're still sealed. I talk about donating them and then we think we might need them if one of us is sick. My heart tells me one thing, my brain another.

Today the number of infected globally surpassed 1 million, with 54,000 deaths.

214,461 infected nationally, 4,841 deaths. 9,816 cases in California. 606 cases in Orange county.

Day 23-- 4/3/20

March 21st a 50 year old bus driver in Detroit named Kevin Hargrove posted a social media video expressing his frustration with a woman who openly coughed on his bus, imploring people to take the Coronavirus seriously. Four days later he developed symptoms. He died Wednesday.

258,611 infected nationally, 6,660 deaths. 11,317 cases in California. 711 cases in Orange county.

Day 34-- 4//14/20

I've been dreading and fearing writing again in this journal, simply because I didn't want to update those numbers at the end of each entry. It's depressing to do so, to see how quickly those numbers go up. We surpassed Italy a while ago, a country I think we thought we could point to and say, "Look how badly they messed up." What frustrates me the most is the complete abdication of responsibility at the national level. I'm not being dramatic when I say that. When asked, several weeks ago, if he was responsible, the president said, "I'm not responsible." Books are going to be written on that man's gross incompetence. History will remember his failings. Meanwhile, we get sick and die. I hope they build a monument to the pandemic outside his presidential library. Actually, that would be an insult to the victims.

It's gotten to the point where I just unplug myself from the news. Like all this is happening in another country. There's a war, somewhere, people are suffering. Meanwhile, I'm sipping my latte. This time, though, the war is here. The people dying are my fellow citizens. May God have mercy on us all.

580,878 infected nationally, 23,607 deaths. 24,334 cases in California. 1,283 cases in Orange county.