

Rocks

ALONG THE WAY

BY BONNIE DWYER

In this time of physical distancing, daily walks in the neighborhood are a welcome relief to the claustrophobia of being inside; you can tell by the number of people and dogs out at any given time of the day. Poets have long revered walking. Robert William Service wrote,

Walking, walking, oh the joy of walking!
Swinging down the tawny lanes with
head held high;
Striding up the green hills, through the
heather stalking.



hood. In Sacramento, the walking story yesterday was about art, people who chalk the (side)walks with encouraging phrases in colorful graphics.

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But who would have ever thought those walks would become news events? On NBC Nightly News March 30, the broadcast concluded with a story about Teddy Bear Scavenger hunts. In cities across the country, people are placing teddy bears, large and small, as well as other stuffed animals in their windows. Children keep count of the bears they see as they walk through their neighbor-

hood. In Sacramento, the walking story yesterday was about art, people who chalk the (side)walks with encouraging phrases in colorful graphics. Out here in the 'Burbs where I live, we have bears, but they are not stuffed. They are, however, attuned to the moment and appropriately attired. My early morning weekend walks are along a divided parkway that winds past a small lake and then a golf course. The sidewalk is separated from the street with plantings and is particularly beautiful right now, colored by flowering trees and wisteria-topped fences. On a recent Sunday, as my dog Izze pulled me down the street, sniffing every bush and tree, we started spotting small rocks with painted messages along the way. After the first one or two, we started looking for them and taking photographs. As I focused on one, a woman jogged

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by, and then stopped to say that it was her daughter who had turned rock painting into an afternoon art project with a friend, followed by a walk to place them.

These serendipitous moments seem to mean more now—they become stories on the nightly news. They add a bit of poetry to the day, even if it is only a phrase. Usually, in times of distress, we turn to each other for stories to add perspective and context, to help us understand how others have navigated daunting circumstances. But few of us have personal stories equal to this virus moment. Parallel experiences do not readily come to the fore.

Poetry speaks uniquely to this time, and rapidly goes viral. As did the words of Lynn Ungar in her poem “Pandemic”:

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?

A friend sent me the poem on a Sabbath morning, and it was my verse for the day, the balm in Gilead, a way to claim and calm the moment. There was comfort in her advice:



Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.

As I read the words, I immediately wanted to know more about the poet, so turned to Google. She was not far away from me, near Oakland, a minister in the Universalist-Unitarian Church. A mother. A poet who has found the lyrical in beauty, lilies, bread, even with our current obsession with hoarding TP. I found her generous spirit centering.

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.
Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Poetry, teddy bears in windows, chalked sidewalks, rocks along the way are how some people are reaching out with their hearts, their words, proclaiming their love for the world, for each other. While the current time can be seen as a time of trouble, the worst of times, it is also the best of times as we rediscover our need of and love for one another.



BONNIE DWYER is editor of *Spectrum*.