

One Day in May, 2021
May 15, 2021
Adam L. Clevenger, 2005

What a difference a year makes sense the last Hanover History Department One Day in May. Despite still needing to be somewhat isolated and COVID-19 still filling the news and social media, there is more hope this year. In 2020, we naively thought that the pandemic and the quarantine would be gone within weeks, then months, and then by summer. However, being almost two weeks since my second vaccine, the end feels more realistic...albeit still far away.

Today we had a BC, or Before COVID, experience; we welcomed our first overnight house guest in over 15 months. In fact, she was the first non-family member to be in our house! Our friend Laura visited from Washington, DC, where she works for USAID. Laura and my wife, Jess, have known each other for twenty years since serving in Peace Corps in Nicaragua together. She arrived late Thursday night and will leave tomorrow. Today we got up had coffee before we attended two neighborhood kids' birthday (a real treat for an out-of-town guest, right?). Before the party, she helped hang baskets she shipped us from her last foreign USAID posting in Dakar, Senegal.

This spring has been colder and drier than usual. We had unseasonable snowfall in April and several bouts of frost well into May. The rain we typically get in April waited until May. Today is overcast, with sprinkles and cool. No signs of Brood X cicadas, though I wonder how many we'll have given our neighborhood was redeveloped since their last emergence. I'm late planting summer plants in the garden again this year because of the weather. However, our cold-weather plants like peas and salad greens are doing very well. I'm crossing my fingers for a better garlic harvest; last year, much of our garlic rotted before we could use it. We had to buy garlic from the grocery store for the first time in a decade!

Tonight, we ate out...in a restaurant! We took so much for granted before 2020, like little things, for example, eating out inside a restaurant. Another seemingly mundane thing I miss now more than ever is meeting people in person. This past week, I met people and even did a fundraising training live and in person, only the second time since March 2020. I haven't adapted well to training virtually. I need to be able to see participants' reactions and adjust based upon their engagement. Virtual platforms just lack human quality. Leaving the hour workshop, I was tired from being "on" and energized by the group's response.

Another thing we took for granted before was participating in activities. Though I appreciated the slower pace last spring, cabin fever set in this winter. So many activities transitioned online, which just weren't that engaging. Our oldest daughter, Olive, who is eight now, returned to acting class last fall. And aside from a brief shut down in the fall, her dance class has met in the studio. She also recently joined a running club (I never thought we'd have a runner). She ran in her first race today and placed 2nd overall and first among girls participating!

This time last year, I struggled with being a home-school teacher. My business had slowed to almost nothing, so I could devote the time to Olive's classwork. Still, I quickly discovered I was not meant to be an educator. Olive started the fall of her third-grade year at home. By the fall, teachers taught more online, and I wasn't needed as much. However, there were almost hourly interruptions. She finally went back in October, but the entire county school system shut down by Thanksgiving. The timing couldn't have been worse as my business finally started to rebound. She was home until late January. I'm impressed with her progress this year, despite what felt like insurmountable challenges. She thrives in class with her teachers and friends, but I was still worried she'd fall behind this year. But, her reading and spelling have both improved, and she continues to love and excel in math. Thinking today, she has less than three weeks of school left, which is just astonishing. It appears that this summer will look somewhat like Before COVID as her camps are all still set to run.

The pandemic has affected us all, even our four-year-old, Helena. She was out of daycare from March to August last year. During her time at home, she learned to go to the restroom for herself and started sleeping without a diaper. Her vocabulary really increased, mainly due to the tubes she had in her ears right before the quarantine. However, her sleep regressed terribly! Helena had been our sleeper; she slept 12-15 hours a night solid. She didn't sleep through the night for nine months because of a lack of routine and engagement with friends. She is improving now, thank goodness!

Also, two significant changes since last May 15th include the addition of two new COVID puppies. It's hard to believe that we started quarantine with two completely different dogs than we have now. We are approaching the year anniversary of losing our black lab, Aioli. Shortly after the One Day in May 2020 version, I found Aioli late one night unable to stand or walk. I rushed him to the emergency veterinarian, but he likely had a mass burst and couldn't be saved. He had been my companion for 11 years, most of that time lying next to my desk every day. This past February, we had to put down our other dog, Pumpkin. She had been in and out of surgeries and vet appointments for two months. Initially, she had a benign mass on her spleen, which we had removed. She never fully recovered and eventually developed an irreversible condition that caused fluid in her chest.

In July 2020, we welcomed Pico, a rescued flat coat retriever named for Olive's favorite food, pico de gallo. And in March of this year, we adopted Taco, a chocolate lab mix, a name courtesy of Olive. They play well together, but it has been challenging to have two puppies at the same time while also feeling the loss of our other dogs.

After Fifteen months of the pandemic, it seems almost more challenging to reengage than it did to enter quarantine. Last March, businesses, and schools shut down, and we were ordered to stay home. That was definitive. Without clear guidance or even conflicting information, emerging from the pandemic has been marked with more questions than answers, fear, doubt, and anxiety. We had questions and concerns about sending our girls back to school and daycare. How about aftercare? How do we continue to work if they are sent home to quarantine for two weeks? When is a cough just allergies or a cold? How often should we get

tested? When is it safe to not wear a mask, or should we wear masks regardless? What interactions will put us at the greatest risk of contracting the virus...have we had it and just not know?

Being vaccinated was no question for my wife and me. The science was sound, and we felt the benefits greatly outweighed the potential adverse effects. Olive celebrated each time a family member or friend got each dose of the vaccine. First were my wife's parents, then my aunts, followed by my mom, Jess's brother and sister-in-law, and finally us. A crucial upcoming question will be vaccinating the girls. We assume the risk of an emergency-approved vaccine. Still, doubt gives me a bit more pause to understand the possible long-term effects.

I am finally hopeful that we may see an end to the pandemic. These many months have been a rollercoaster of hope. There have been steep inclines of gathering hope, equally steep and speeding declines into a lack of hope, curves, twists, and loop-d-loops, and even dark-covered passages of despair. But finally, I am hopeful that the pandemic's end is near.

Of course, 2020 brought many new challenges. A renewed focus on the struggle for racial justice and equity, which began with the murder of George Floyd and others, continues. Unlike the rollercoaster, the struggle has simmered and boiled throughout our history. The country seems to teeter with the fight for racial justice and equity coupled with inflamed political divisions. I chose to study political science and history at Hanover. Still, I found myself abstaining from the political process last year out of frustration and disgust. My love of history perhaps elevated as I learned more about Ante-Bellum America, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Great Migration.

Having always preferred colonial and early American history, I shied away from the Civil War. This year I completed Ron Chernow's biography of Ulysses S. Grant and Doris Kearns Goodwin's massive and beautifully written book, "Team of Rivals." Both books gave valuable historical context for the years following Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow. Additionally, I gained relevant perspective into the lives of leaders beyond the century and a half of mythmaking.

Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr's documentaries "Reconstruction" and "The Black Church" were superb. I read *The Water Dancer*, a historical fiction novel by Ta-Nehisi Coates, which gave a glimpse into the lives of slaves. I'm currently listening to an anthological book of oral histories about the Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson, called *The Warmth of Other Suns*. The stories, as well as historical context, vividly address the struggle for freedom from Jim Crow. This history about African Americans told from their own perspectives has been enlightening and challenging.

I am thankful for my Hanover education; it has helped me this past year. Critical thinking, a basic understanding of science, and an openness to new perspectives and ideas have assisted me.

Thank you to Dr. Sarah Vosmeier and Jennifer Duplaga for organizing this project again this year.

Hanover, hail to thee.