

# Dancing Among Skeletons

Monday March 23 – Day 12

**"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." - George Santayana said it first. Winston Churchill said it better: "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it."**

The Covid 19 strain of Influenza is, by no means, the first worldwide viral outbreak.

Winston Churchill was a boy of 14 or 15 when he witnessed the Russian Influenza pandemic of 1889 – 1890. *H3N8*, the scientific name for that particular strain, killed more than a million people in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Political bungling, and mass ignorance of preventative treatment of *H3N8*, caused a recurrence of the virus in 1891 through 1894. The virus reappeared in multiple locations around the world, killing thousands more.

The cartoon on the right appeared in the January 12, 1890, edition of the Paris satirical magazine *Le Grelot* depicting an unfortunate influenza sufferer surrounded by a confusing array of dancing politicians, doctors, and skeleton musicians.

The French press referred to the bungling politicians of the day as "Potards" (knobs).



The Covid 19 virus of 2020 is enjoying the same success as the 1889 version, largely because our leaders, the Potard in Chief and Vice-President Potard have learned nothing from history.

The only way to defeat this latest outbreak is if we (the masses) listen to professionals; doctors and scientists who have learned from experience, and disregard self-serving politicians.

If we ignore pandemic history, we too may be....

..... dancing among skeletons.

# Ouch!

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## Tuesday March 24 – Day 13

Until today, I hadn't felt any real loss because of the Corona virus and self-imposed isolation. Bear and I have been coping well, finding joy in the small things, and generally enjoying life in the slow lane. Then, along comes Day 13.

We had a few chores that had not been attended to before the outbreak, so we chose today to complete them. There was a bolt of fabric in the city that Bear was to have picked up for Marshall and Deanna's wedding this summer, I needed to grab some files from my office, and I had a piece of building material in my shop that belongs to Aaron. We decided to venture out into the big scary world, while keeping a safe distance, and fulfil our duties.

The lady with the fabric wasn't available so that mission failed.

I dropped by the office, where 5 of the 35 people who work there were occupying a very hollow space. I spoke briefly with the new owner as I gathered my files and thanked my lucky stars on the way out that I no longer occupy his chair in these gut wrenching times for a business owner.

My visit to the hollow office left me with a hollow feeling, but the worst was yet to come.

I arranged to meet Aaron in his back yard to return the items. We had chatted the day before, so I didn't linger. For the first time in 40 years, I walked away from one of my kids without giving them a hug.....

..... Ouch!



# Foggy Clue

## Wednesday March 24 – Day 14

Day 14 involved sorting through pictures on my phone. There are a few mysterious images, so today's isolation exercise is a pop quiz.

A) Who or what made this mark – and why?

B) What kind of cactus is this?



C) What is this person doing?



Don't look on the next page until you have taken a guess at each.....

- A) \_\_\_\_\_.
- B) \_\_\_\_\_.
- C) \_\_\_\_\_.

The answer to all three questions on the isolation quiz is....

...I don't have a foggy clue.

The snow angel was on our garage roof today. It was obviously made by a bird, but I have no idea what kind, or what it might have been doing to make such a design.

We saw the cactus in Arizona a couple of weeks ago. It was among Saguaro cacti, but it was quite unique.



The person in the third picture is a complete mystery.



We took the photo in January, from the grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, where JFK was assassinated. She was a pretty young woman wearing a pink frock and 1960's hat, like one Jacqueline Kennedy might have worn. She is kneeling in traffic on the X that marks the spot where the assassination occurred. There were some phoney gold bricks spread on the pavement in front of her, and she was holding what looked like a wand.

Like I said, not a ...

... foggy clue.

Please send me your answers; I would be happy to have the fog lifted.

# From Slave to Master

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Thursday March 25 – Day 15

*Grab a beverage, it's a long one today.*

Fifteen days into isolation. By this point I had anticipated that the passage of time would slow down, but that has not been my experience. Calendar pages continue to drift by like falling leaves.



Despite Covid 19, there are still just 24 hours in every day; the *quantity* of time hasn't changed, it's the *quality* that has become variable. Under normal circumstances, our days are governed by external factors; duties, appointments, planned interaction with others and personal routines – they all conspire to control our time. During this period of isolation, those factors are uprooted, and we have freedom to choose how our time is spent. It is a difficult transition for many....

... from time slave, to master.



I have witnessed the full gambit, people who are flat-out bored and talk about it, people who are bored and don't admit they are or pretend to be busy, and people who are, by degrees, masters of managing extra time.

Having had some practice at reorganizing time the past year, I am inching toward the latter category. I don't know how to explain it, other than to post a chronological record of one day in isolation. So here goes.....

**Health Canada Warning:** What you are about to read is intended to be insightful but could be perceived by some as a self-serving rant. You may enjoy it, or you could get the same reaction you do to a Facebook posting of somebody else's dinner, or their latest jigsaw puzzle accomplishment. If, at any time, you feel the need to stop, please do so. Your health could depend on it. **Fair Warning.**

I woke up at 4:55, put on my watch and took a trip to the washroom. I don't wear my watch to display the time, although I think it still has that capability. I wear it to count my steps and standing time, record my elevated heart rate when I exercise, remind me of appointments and tell me when the bread is ready to come out of the oven. I call it a "watch", but it is technically a computer, and a more dependable storage box than my brain.

I crawled back into bed and clamped on my headset. I enjoy listening to Bob Chelmick's *The Road Home* at 5:00AM on CKUA, on days when I don't have to race off. There have been less "racing off" days lately so Bob and I are getting well acquainted. If you have never spent early mornings on *The Road Home*, I recommend it. Bob re-broadcasts an hour of quiet talk, mellow music, and poetry from a cabin in the woods, early weekday mornings. It is a good way to start

the day. I often make a few notes while I am listening and plan my day. The coffee pot called from the pantry about 5:30, and I listened to the second half of the show in my armchair with a brew.

At 6:00 I was on the treadmill. I have made early exercise a habit since I quit rushing off to work every day. Exercise has a positive effect on physical health, but it is really my brain I am exercising as I take each step. Working out is like seeing a therapist.

I really need treadmill therapy lately because while I walk, I watch news. The news the past few weeks has been disturbing, to say the least.



This morning I watched MSNBC, BBC and Fox News. I spent about 15 minutes on each channel, ingesting programming from the left, the middle and the right, to get a broad perspective. Trump was dominating all three channels today. *Smart, like an ox News* was pandering to Trump’s self-proclaimed “stable genius” routine, despite his almost farcical handling of the Corona Virus crisis. Having watched reporting for 45 minutes, from every angle, I continue to hold the opinion that Trump is a dangerous, degenerate, moron, with no empathy.

See why I need therapy.

Exercise and information behind me, I switched off the TV and won’t watch it again until this evening.

Shower, hop on the scale (still holding a downward trend), dress, breakfast (cereal, milk and an orange, since we are in full disclosure mode) and I am ready for my day by 7:30.

I have a few missions today, and some aspirations of outdoor activity now that the mercury in the thermometer has ventured out of its scrotum. I have been invited for a coffee by friend Colin, and we are low on some groceries. Never, in my wildest imagination, did I ever think that either of these two activities could be a life-threatening event. Armed with a tube of Clorox wipes for the grocery cart and two yardsticks to measure the distance between my coffee buddy and me, I am off to the battlefield.



Despite the more leisurely pace these days, I am still multi-tasking - it’s a hard habit to break. On the way to Okotoks, I called a friend in Regina. Dave has been a customer since 1976 - that’s 44 years if you are counting. Somewhere during the first year our business relationship turned to friendship, and we have managed both roles simultaneously all those years. We both sold our businesses in the past couple of years, but we decided we still need to dabble. Dave

recently bought half of a gravel pit I own near Regina, so I called him today to discuss business and to catch up. The business portion took less than a minute: “*our gravel has been in the ground since dinosaurs roamed the earth, so it can probably wait another year before we dig it up*”. Business decision made, we talked about personal things, i.e., life as a recluse. Dave just got

back from Mexico, so he is locked down in rigid quarantine for two weeks, and however long after that. Yes, the gravel will stay with the dinosaurs until this crisis passes.

While waiting for Colin at Tim Horton's, a big delivery van pulled up and the guy attempted to get a coffee at the counter. The doors were locked so he came back empty handed. I rolled down my window and asked if he wanted me to run through the drive-through for him. He hesitated but decided not. What has the world come to when it could be poisonous to hand somebody a coffee?

Colin and I had a great chat, across an empty parking stall, in our respective vehicles. Colin and I have been friends for several years; we share an interest in motorcycles and coffee shop banter. We discovered today that we both like canoeing - neither of us have done any paddling for a few years, but we decided that a trip down the river would be a good thing to do when the plague is over.



From Tim's, I made a hurried stop at Safeway, then headed home via the mailbox. Tim's allows coffee *withdrawals*, but you can't make a *deposit* in their washroom, so I was quite happy to be home.

That business taken care of and the compost taken to the bin, I scrubbed down like a surgeon. I made salsa, retrieved a 10 kilo bag of flour from the bottom of the driveway (graciously delivered by friend Gervais, from a bakery in High River), talked briefly to an elderly neighbour to see if he needed supplies, did some Covid updating and Trudeau bashing with neighbour Dave by telephone, texted some family members, did office work for half an hour, received a timely joke (right) from my accountant/friend Cheryl and forwarded it on to a few people, sharpened the kitchen knives, prepared supper (roasted ham, scalloped potatoes and Caprese salad), topped up the hot tub and tested the chemicals (it was so windy, there were whitecaps in the tub while I was filling it!).



I had a near miss with a deer while driving my quad down the driveway to get the flour. It is one thing to hit a deer with a truck, but I think Bambi might have won if she had collided with my buggy.



Later, I put the last coat of touch-up paint on my play station project. I downloaded the plans for the table from a US website – the instructions billed it as a “weekend project”. I don't know how long weekends are in Arkansas, but I have invested the better part of three weeks on the table so far, and it still needs lid hardware. I am happy with the result though.

After supper I jotted down some notes while listening to music. I read the e-paper for a half hour, but not much had changed since *Morning Joe*. I inspected the hot tub again, to see if the tempest had capsized the craft, and if the water temperature had returned to peak. No, and No. The tub is still intact but there will be no bathing tonight, lest there be significant shrinkage.

I tried to read a bit before going to sleep, but my book fell on my forehead after two pages. At 9:30 the lights went out.



There are a thousand ways to live a life in isolation. The way I chose to live Day 15 suits me fine. I don't need external stimuli – TV, video games, drugs. If I see the slavery of boredom on the horizon, I make a right turn onto the creative side of my brain and the boogieman goes away.

**Health Canada Warning:** Congratulations, you survived a smug posting, you are well prepared for Corona Virus!

#### A LITTLE BACKGROUND

The question I am asked most often is “Why do you call Terri, “Bear”?”

Fair question.

It certainly isn't because she shares any qualities with the *grizzly* variety of bears, quite the contrary.

I have called her *Bear* since the first day we met, in 1986. One of her friends called her “Ter-Bear”. I adopted the nickname and shortened it to *Bear*.

The name works on many levels. Instead of calling her *mom* around our younger kids and *Terri* around my older sons, I use the universal *Bear*. It seems to work.

The name works well during this time of isolation. If we are out and feeling crowded, I yell; “Hey, Bear!” and social distancing happens.

Bear is a great comfort, especially now, but always. Kind of like a teddy bear when we were kids.

So, there you have it.



# Lonely in the Middle

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## Friday March 27 – Day 16

My observation on day 16 is how divergent attitudes are toward the Corona Virus pandemic. We all watch the news and take advice from sources we trust, but the interpretation of that information ranges from one end of the spectrum to the other, depending upon who you observe. It is so confusing to me that I felt a need to create this Coronameter to try to make sense of it all.

My *Coronameter* is completely subjective. It ranges from the green Safe zone on the left, to the Danger zone on the right. I have concocted fictional characters and inserted them onto the meter to provide a visual reference that might help me understand how the same virus can be interpreted so many ways, by so many people. If you see yourself in this matrix, it is your own imagining.

On the far right is Ashley. Ashley is 21 years old; she lives with her thrice divorced mother near the beach in Carmel, California. Ashley watches a lot of reality TV (without realizing it is *not* reality) but has never made it through a full News report. She and her friends are on spring break and have a massive party planned for the weekend. Corona? Yes, there will be beer!



Ashley is in the highest possible risk bracket for contracting Covid 19. The good news is that she is young, and her grandparents had the foresight and resources to build an exceptional healthcare system, so she will probably survive.



This guy has a name, but he doesn't want us to know it – we will call him by his initials, YQ5. YQ5 also doesn't want us to know where he lives, all we know is that his home is on the outskirts of a remote community in southern BC. YQ5 has been preparing for the Corona Virus outbreak since 1983. He lives in an underground, lead-lined bunker with a mound of hoarded toilet paper to sleep on. He has enough water, beans, and rice to last for two years. YQ5 has not made any human contact since the first Trudeau administration, so it is unlikely that he will contract the Covid 19 virus. YQ5's health is already suffering from advanced neurological issues.



Bashir and Bob share a space on the Coronameter, just left of Ashley. Bob lives near Rhubarb, Texas, while Bashir resides in Sandoon, Iraq. Bashir and Bob are quite different, but they share status as fundamentalist religious followers. Both pray to the same Abrahamic God, but their Prophets are dissimilar. Bob and Bashir both carry well-worn books, written by ancient, desert dwelling nomads, which they seldom read, but from which they each derive their own, unwavering version of the Truth. Bashir and Bob both have lovely wives, but it is difficult to see the beauty because of their facial treatment choices.



As far as Corona Virus is concerned, one of them thinks it is a hoax and the other believes that the virus was planted by somebody with a different skin tone – it doesn't matter which believes what, they are interchangeable. Neither Bob nor Bashir has stocked up on food or supplies, other than ammunition. Both have decided that if this virus is real and they need anything, they will just go get it from the Jews (who hoard things, don't you know?).

Back over on the left we have Betty and Barney Doright; they are members of the Limousine Left. Betty is a leader at the BC Government Employees Union and Barney heads up a department at the Worker's Compensation Board. The Dorights live in a gated community near Vancouver, the kind where viruses can't get in because they don't have a code for the gate. Barney and Betty have been working from home since Covid 19 first surfaced. They don't go out – ever. The Dorights have ordered in all the supplies they need from the very best organic suppliers (the kind of places that viruses don't go) and they have it all delivered by medical interns.



Barney and Betty have decided that they will not be intimate until the pandemic subsides – germs are the enemy! The Dorights are well into the Safe Covid 19 zone.

Fred and Wilma Funster have a home in Brandon, Manitoba, and another in Palm Springs. The Funsters have three grown children and seven adorable grandchildren. Fred and Wilma packed up their snowbird residence a little early and drove back to Brandon a couple of days after the pandemic was declared. They tried to keep their distance for a few days, but the pantry was empty, the car needed an oil change, and those adorable grandchildren really needed some hugs. They haven't seen Wilma's mom in the home in Winnipeg all winter, so a trip to the Big Smoke is also imminent.



The Funsters watch *Fox News* and dial into *Radio Redneck* daily, none of that sissy stuff on *CNN*, so they hear what is going on, albeit slanted in a somewhat westerly direction. The Funsters, their children, grandchildren and parents are all just outside the "safe" zone on the Coronameter.

And then there are the Paton's.

**It's lonely in the middle.**

YQ5

Dorights

Russ & Bear

Funsters

Bob and Bashir

Ashley



Place the orange arrow where you believe you are on the Coronameter, and the green one where you think you should be. If either is outside the Safe zone, you might want to reconsider some habits.



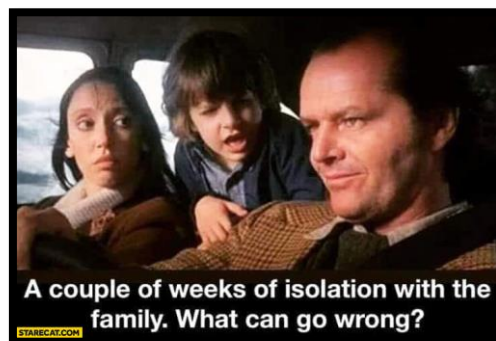
# I Like Our Chances

**Saturday March 28 - Day 17**

You may have noticed during my “day in the life” bit on Thursday that I never mentioned Bear. It is not that she isn’t a huge part of every day; it’s just that she had a sore head that day, so I was giving her some space.

Living together for as long as we have, we have a sense of what the other person needs, and we try (but don’t always succeed) to give it to each other. I use the plural “we” here, but the reality is, Bear does empathy way better than I do.

During this time of intense isolation, it is important to find a way to coexist without becoming the people depicted in these jokes:



We might even discover some new and interesting things about the people we live with while quarantined, if we try.

Bear and I have spent the better part of three and a half decades together, but I am finding personality traits in her that have remained hidden until now. Here are some of the things I have learned about Bear in the past three weeks:

- I drink the wine; Bear gets the headache. It’s a good deal for me.
- Bear likes flowers - a lot. This batch, purchased on our anniversary, is probably good for another two weeks before she will toss them.



- Bear has a green thumb, who knew? I rescued a little tomato plant from the garden, just before the frost last fall; as with flowers, Bear wouldn't let me throw it out. She planted it in a pot in the dining room and has nurtured it into a mature, if somewhat scraggly, specimen. We have already harvested a few fruits and are waiting patiently for more to ripen.



- Bear and I differ greatly on how to get a good night's sleep. She likes it cool; I like to be warm. Bear has solved the problem by rolling up half of her covers before she turns in. She calls it the "wall", which seems like it has other, Trumpian, implications; it's almost as if she wants to keep certain people out?



- Eating every meal at home has brought out complex inter-personal challenges. Bear is on a strict diet, and I am in a cooking frenzy, as a creative outlet. She is focused on simple, whole foods – I crave pizza. We are still working through this; Bear has agreed to try some small portions of my concoctions, and I have agreed not to pout if she tears the crust off her pizza.



Bear's future,

and mine.....



There is no guarantee that any relationship can survive in intense period of isolation, but Bear has the gift of empathy....

.... I like our chances.

To Be Continued.....

If you want to add a name, friend or foe, to the broadcast list for future posts, please direct e-mail to [russ.paton@icloud.com](mailto:russ.paton@icloud.com) and I will be happy to oblige.

**Stay Safe,  
Find Joy,  
Russ**