

# My Light in the Wilderness

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# I Don't Want to Tell You About WS

I don't want to tell you how beautiful the view is as I gaze between my laptop and my larger screen positioned in front of my highly-valued ergonomic keyboard/wrist rest, but it is as distracting as it is an inspiration. Near the top of the unobstructed glass door, my favorite trinket from the MMA Gift Shop (would my Persona Narrator spell out Modern Museum of Art and what does doing so reveal?),

a small replica of Tiffany's Oyster Bay window, provides me with daily solace but elicits expletives from people taller than me if I forget to warn them to duck. In the middle distance is our extravagant collection of bird feeders, different foods in different receptacles to attract birds I can identify only through Cornell's Merlin Bird ID app on my phone, identifying them more of a should than a want.

The horizon is a three-dimensional landscape, one of those canyons begging to be burned rising to meet the atmosphere, clouds, hawks, drones, the occasional helicopter and when we need it, the little planes that fight fires by bursting their guts delivering water and fire retardants (but that's another story).

It's ironic that on this day, November 7, 2020, that makes me happy, having been longing to breathe free and now I finally can, that we are having the first day I can remember of what SoCal residents call "bad weather", enough wind that we lost a feeder during the night, chilly in the low 50s, intermittent spitting from the heavens, (but now I see it as something to write about).

I don't want to tell you that I promised myself I couldn't start cooking the Vegan Mushroom Stroganoff, the first real meal I haven't improvised in weeks, until I thought about what I really don't want to write.

Actually, I already wrote it a few days ago for week five of "Writing During a Pandemic", (but I decided I needed to tone it down when I couldn't get through reading it without breaking down). (Thanks to Ross Gay I can actually savor the delight of a trip to Sprouts, followed by creating a dinner to share with Larry.) Last year this time, my motivation would have been we were going to the Hollywood Bowl and having dinner in the Pool Circle.

I don't want to sound like the person in the front row always waving her hand, I don't want to be my usual TMI overly-friendly Midwestern-self but I'm gonna:WS (I never know when to use [writerstudio.com](#), [Writers Studio](#), [Writer's Studio](#) or [Writers' Studio](#), so until someone tells me, I don't want to use anything but WS), to my teachers Michele, Francesca, Rachael, Peter, and soon Joel: I took my first Online Memoir Workshop with Michele on May 12, 2020. Learning the benefits of not ranting came just in the nick of time. That skill (communicating without ranting) has been essential to my wellbeing. I mostly really don't want to tell you how life-changing this writing has been for me. I have identified WS as one of four influences of the past six months, that, at age 72, in the middle of this pandemic, having been deprived of family, friends, and a twice-in-a-lifetime trip to Africa, I like the Janice that I am better than any of the Janices I've been. (Everything in parentheses I've learned through WS.)



I

# Now That I'm Older

Now that I'm older, I've traded my vivid reds, cobalt blues and jet blacks, for taupes and teals and mauves.

I spend my funds on probiotics and fitness mats, toeless socks and new age practitioners, and say I don't care for chateaubriand.

I strike a yoga pose for no reason at all except savoring interoception, and try to make up for what I didn't do when I was trying to prove purpose.

I wear my Uggs in summer to cross the street to pee the dog, and put her poop in the neighbor's trash cans if they are still out.

I smile as if I don't understand until people give up trying to make me conform to their expectations.

I have sworn off mascara, don't care if I show cleavage or not, and practice taking five bites from the same square of chocolate.

I improvise vegan creations in my Instant Pot and slather olive oil over spinach and kalamatas and beets and jicama.

I find solace in my Diva Den and write in front of double screens floating atoprepurposed acrylic magazine holders lying on their sides.

I clean up desk detritus by zipping it into a roll-aboard, relegating it to a corner, only to discover the contents weeks later, expired worthless, never missed.

Before, I had to pay attention, avoid daydreaming, set a good example, follow directions.

I should let people know how I've changed, so when we gather once again, people who knew me then are not too shocked now

That I am unapologetically older, think about everything, And practice not thinking.



# Socks

Bare feet make me happy, and, when I burrow my naked little toes into Texas and Uggs (much preferred to Bernardos and Bandolinos) I'm even more thrilled. Given this level of ecstasy over toes yearning to breathe free, it's pretty awesome how much I also love socks. In fact, I'm amazed at the myriad of feelings I find in socks. (Well, actually, I mostly find my feet in my socks, but I manage to discover a lot more, too.)

Marie Kondo taught me (and Shinto taught her) to express gratitude towards inanimate objects (clothing) while cleaning my closet, taking the opportunity to identify what does, as well as what doesn't, bring me joy.

So today, I took my new Lululemon socks in both hands, inclined my head towards them as if they were Ms. Kondo's revered business card, expressed gratitude for their service (worn only once), paused for a moment, and put them in my bottom drawer (the giveaway drawer). Not every pair of socks has to be worn threadbare to teach a life lesson. I thanked my new Lulus for teaching me so quickly that, even if they were a helluva bargain on sale and pretty darn cute, socks made with unnatural fibers that grip my feet as if there were no tomorrow, are not for me.

I thanked them for reminding me how much my toes need air, and I released them to thrill some other feet less easily asphyxiated. (Now, because the Lulus are no longer demanding attention in my drawer, I have the capacity to notice other delights.) Ah-hah! My favorite Cole-Haans! These low-cut purple striped tone-on-tone beauties are made of bamboo, and therefore breathe and wear cool even hidden in sneakers not meant for the gym. When I hold these cuties in my hands, I remember the thrill of buying them on 5th Avenue, hearing the clang of a Salvation Army bell as customers came and went. Manhattan at the holidays is magical, especially if your granddaughter is one of the Claras at RCMH and your Gen-Exers have an impressive spreadsheet of dinner reservations and you escape cooking the turkey for at least another year. (I also remember being thrilled by the flesh-colored CFMs I bought the same day, but I thanked them for their service on my 70th birthday

and released them to bedevil someone else's lumbar. Nancy Pelosi, how do you do it?)

I've had an entire collection of Injinji brand toe socks since back in the day when I was unclear whether or not yoga had something to do with the milky stuff people eat out of small cartons. Despite the difficulty of getting too many or too few digits into each of the five toe sleeves, my collection of Injinjis is highly prized. Each little piggy has a cozy pen of her own, thus providing protection against the hot and cold flashes that played havoc with my wellbeing, side effects of a neurological disorder undiagnosed for 60 years which disappeared when I became a gluten-free vegan. (Even though I no longer need them for their therapeutic value, I still wear the black Injinjis that show above the throats of my white tennis shoes, because I abhor white socks once white is just a memory, and I don't mind black socks that aren't white.)

Hands down (feet down?) the best-in-show, blue-ribbon winners are the hand-made socks that Fran knitted.

Remarkable Fran, at 92, having never smoked, several years after she was surprised to learn she had stage four lung cancer and only six months to live, was still knitting hats for people she met at chemo. But back in the day when her knitting required forethought and veteran skills, and she wasn't just trying to use up leftover yarn before she died, I was the lucky recipient of much of her dedication: a bona fide couture coat for Carina Maltese, a rakish hot pink beret for me, afghans with intricate colors and patterns, chosen with much forethought, made to order for everyone in my family.

My favorites, however, are the cozy woolen socks, knitted and purled continuously from a single skein that are miraculously striped. They are the only socks that I allow in my Texas and Uggs, and they reside in the most favored part of my sock drawer to delight my day (and tomorrow, too).

# Today I fell.

Mountain goat stance improperly assumed,  
scaling vertically-challenged hard-scaped frontage,  
while planting political yard sign.  
First step on the left side of the stoop is the  
Second step on the right side of the stoop.  
Topsy-turvy year, par for the course.

Step back to admire handiwork.  
Big mistake.  
Whoops! Landed on landing.

Zen pause,  
mindfulness:  
I fell well.  
I breathe,  
assess,  
consider options.  
I roll and rise,  
hightail the few short blocks to home  
before adrenalin evaporates,  
phone husband from garage  
for next move assistance.

Calm prevails.

YouTube videoed Pashmina sling,  
immediate ice and immobilization  
praised by urgent care.

Bones intact,  
questionable soft tissue,  
Motrin.

Gratitude for training,  
regimens,  
fitness.

Movements now deliberate,  
split between building new neural pathways  
operating left handed,  
and  
right handed discovering movements to add to  
occupational therapy.

My goal is to  
continue the delights  
of everyday life,  
doing for myself.

Fire drill without the fire....  
if you don't count the Bobcat Fire  
over the next rise.

Today I didn't evacuate;  
I stood fast.

Today I cared about my local  
city council election  
and  
planted a sign.

I fell, and  
wrote a poem.

## II

# Labor Day 1918

"Labor Day 1918 is not like any Labor Day that we have known!" President Wilson called for Americans...to take to the streets in a national show of support. More people died during the 1918 pandemic than the total number of military and civilian deaths that resulted from World War I.

I am the fourth generation to grow up near Oakley, an unincorporated community in Macon County, Illinois, located along the Norfolk Southern, 8 miles east-northeast of Decatur, the county seat. My father's mother is the narrator.

October 10, 1918 I used to think my life would be larger. However, that was before Pa died, and President Wilson's Department of War decided my brother Willie was needed more as a farmer to grow fodder for livestock than he himself was needed as fodder for the battlefield. Willie would be home and safe and our family farm would survive and our corn and wheat would support many. However, that was before Willie caught the flu riding a crowded military transport from Ft. Riley, and he now rests in the family plot at West Frantz Cemetery.

Responsibility for the farm fell to Earl and me; we left our life and our books and our teaching in Evanston, and brought our dear little Quinter downstate to the homestead. And that's why, once again, we are here, amidst the horse-pulled plows and haystacks, the cornstalks and culverts of my childhood. I gaze east and all I see are flat fields; I gaze west and all I see are flat fields. I am a spider caught in a web of black dirt stretching from one horizon to the next.

For over a hundred years, my ancestors have tilled the Black Gold of the Plains, growing a cornucopia of grains. Ma did not ask forgiveness for the pride she felt when their prosperity afforded them the luxury of driving their only daughter to the train station in a shiny black trap with "Miller Family Farms" painted in gold on the side, and a red tassel in Nellie's bridle. At Mt. Morris College, my hands held a watercolor brush, a fountain pen, a basketball, but now we have returned to the farm of my forefathers, and my hands are calloused from gripping a potato knife, a darning needle, a butter churn.

I watch my son as he starts his daily walk to "Blue Door", the one-room school two miles away. Before he rounds the corner, he stops, plants a barefoot toe in the dirt, turns his wide-brimmed pith hat to me, and offers the smile that melts. Secure in the knowledge I will still be watching, he waves and continues on. I try to keep my love for him untainted by worry. We wait, not knowing what will be next, who will pass, or why they were chosen.

Autumn was my favorite season. As a child, I meandered among the pumpkins, discovering orange globes partially hidden by the cornstalks left over from the harvest, waiting to be plowed under, compost for next year's crop. I look at the same scene now and see decay, rot, plant life on its return to dust, but without the strong promise of the dust that comes from spring plowing.



# Cora and Earl

Oakley, Illinois September 1918

The Millers drew out their kitchen chairs simultaneously, but before they sat down, Earl went around to Cora's side of the table and held hers, while she scooted and closed the gap to the table. He then double checked that Quinter, sitting atop two Sears catalogs, was secure in his chair, before seating himself across from his wife. He took a moment to smile, trying to mask his concern.

"Why, thank you kindly, Earl" she said, smiling coyly, with a feigned note of surprise, as if the scene wasn't repeated nightly. A little civility remaining in their bleak, rural existence went a long way to keeping despair on the other side of the door. And yet, despair seemed ever nearer.

As always, he responded, "Why, of course, my dear". Earl regarded the wedding present that graced their table nightly, a pewter bread bowl filled with apple muffins, the fine linen cloth covering now faded. The family heirloom Bavarian china platter held the last of the fresh corn.

Tonight they feasted on fried chicken wings. After the breasts and thighs were sold at market tomorrow, they would have the necks for their dinner, the backs the next night, and finally, saving the best till last, the sweetbreads and organ meats. They would need to go into their larder soon, but there was scant enough to last the winter. For now, however, no one was going hungry and it was important to both of them to protect their child's sunny personality.

"Nellie and I will be going to Decatur tomorrow and I think the prices have been holding up", Earl said with his usual optimism. "Please eat your sandwich before you arrive at the market. I don't want you to bring anything home, and please don't leave Nellie at the stables. There are too many draft horses dying for no reason, and I have a suspicion that the flu is spread through animal excrement."

Trying to lighten her mood, Early smiled wryly and said "Horse shit has been with us as long as I can remember, but the flu is less than a year old." "Earl Please watch your language", she warned, glancing at the boy. ..."however, I'll keep her on a lead, away from other animals that live near the tributaries, and I promise, I'll be careful."

A note of self-pity began to escalate: "If anything happened to you or her, I don't know how I'd get the crops in. All of the day laborers have gone to war." "Nothing is going to happen to me, and anyway the church would help." "...unless too many others came down with the flu at the same time." "Cora", his smile not getting to his eyes as he reprimanded gently. Changing the subject he asked, "Did you get a chance to paint today?" "Yes, I captured the apple orchard on a sturdy rectangle of cardboard, but I'm almost out of red." "I can take time to go by the river tomorrow and bring back that clay with iron that you like." "Why, Earl, that would be wonderful", her mood changing at his thoughtfulness. "Of course, dear Cora. Anything to keep my bride happy." She blushed. Quinter was going on five. She was hardly a bride. After her brother died on the Ft. Riley military transport, they had to come home to the farm to raise food for the war effort, but Earl still behaved as if they remained in Chicago, gentrified. That provided some solace. She hoped for the best and that would have to be enough until the pandemic was over.

# Century Farm

The last thing of you is the Century Farm, earth likened to black gold, but now laced with chemicals that produce the highest yields, the cost of nitrates rivalling the cost of seeds to plant. No, I won't let the land to the highest bidder. Yes, I know that would discourage the tenant from shepherding the land like you did.

Dying on New Year's Eve, Did you choose today to leave so that I wouldn't leave tomorrow?

I find the remnants of your life as local hero: high school football letter sweater, college marching band uniform, plaque commemorating your board service at the Building and Loan and the Macon County Farm Bureau, and my favorite, your certificate for Outstanding Palmer Method Penmanship.

Family photos distributed appropriately, antique farm tools divided among a local museum and favorite relatives, carefully constructed genealogy charts that I must keep in the hopes that someday I will care the way you did, the boxes of dominoes that remained a favorite pastime long after the church allowed playing with cards like they did in gambling halls.

In those days, Aunt Ida and Uncle George took the January train to "Iowa-by-the-Sea" for her health during the bitter Okaw Valley winters when wind and snow seep into every pore. Though you had given me permission, I still felt a sliver of guilt when I sold the farm and traded for a condo on the sand. It is a block from that little bungalow they rented, the one in the sepia photo.

# Not Great Expectations

In those days, Aunt Ida and Uncle George took the January train to "Iowa-by-the-Sea" for her health during the bitter Okaw Valley winters when wind and snow seep into every pore. Though you had given me permission, I still felt a sliver of guilt when I sold the farm and traded for a condo on the sand. It is a block from that little bungalow they rented, the one in the sepia photo.

"Being a hairdresser" created a detailed image in my head: a weather-proofed screened-in porch, snow-frosted storm windows in winter, condensation from the room air-conditioner in summer, cracked and peeling linoleum floor, a welcome mat braided from rags, a shampoo-chair and hair dryer standing sentinel in opposite corners, my cutting station in a third, leaving the remaining nook for a baby or two in various bouncing contraptions, the bookcase Dad fashioned from the walnut tree of his childhood now relegated to holding shampoos and conditioners.

I hadn't even gotten my period yet and already I was tethered to life as a farm-wife. I hadn't even taken my SATs and this was the future she foresaw for me. That was when I understood that she would never understand me, the day I decided never to trust her with my vision of what lay ahead. That was the first time I suspected I wouldn't stay on the farm.

All I had to go on were tattered copies of Redbook and McCalls at the doctor's office, the models on the stand-up cardboard cut-out CD promotions at the bank, and my precious subscription to "Teen Magazine", but when I heard "I just meant that you are so good at doing other people's hair", I knew the bar was set pretty low. Anything that didn't resemble a failed home permanent, merited "so good at doing other people's hair". If you could leave the house within 24 hours of the procedure, it was a win.

It took another four years before my eyes glazed over when she talked to me. I had just returned from a whirlwind band trip to Europe (20 concerts in 30 days in seven countries). Descriptions of what I had seen were met with extended awkward pauses followed by non-sequiturs, pedestrian facts about neighbors that hadn't ventured outside of the tri-county area and had no ambition to do so. I was sad to realize how little she got me, and even sadder to realize I needed to give up wishing it were different.

I thought of her comment when she and Dad visited me in Cincinnati. I was immersed in my dissertation, and so spent my time writing, thinking, applying, struggling to be what I was trying to be. I wondered if she knew what I was doing, what I cared about, what was important to me.

Two years of college and teaching in a one-room school hadn't whetted her appetite for the wider world, nor had it armed her with curiosity about a daughter who saw the world quite differently than she did. I would have tried had I thought there was a chance, but I didn't want to disturb whatever fantasy she still had about me being tied to her apron strings, living down the road from her, my children yet another generation to have Mrs. Mull for second grade, a shampoo-chair providing extra income.

It was years before I trusted that I had really escaped her grasp, before I braved having children, fearing she would seize the opportunity to come and help, that she might take over, be in a position to influence my daughter to become a hairdresser in a farmhouse with a weather-proofed screened-in porch.



## III

# Bones

Here I lie and they called me Bones. I percussed at every opportunity, beginning with playing the spoons and occasionally exchanging them for the older method using real bones.

At an early age I chose adventure over predictability. I looked at the horizon and accepted its beck and call. I saw the Great Prairie and the Rocky Mountains and got caught up in the Gold Rush culture.

My new bed was a mattress of soft grass and a blanket of stars. My nightly prayer was Thank you, God, for freedom.

My new cousins were gamblers and rogues, itinerate musicians gunslingers and stagecoach drivers, women of the night and prospectors.

But one day, it was enough.... and so I went home and wandered into town as if I had never left. Having thought I died long ago,

my relatives were surprised but welcoming,

and in my teetering old age I was content to play with the nieces and nephews, regaling them with tales of my adventures but now I'm home..... to rest for eternity.

# The Reluctant Farmwife

The land had been in my family, longer than anyone could remember. Dark, rich earth called "Black Gold" grew crops that filled our nation's breadbasket, and therefore, compared to the landless, we were wealthy.

I know I should have felt fortunate to have a loving family to be food secure and to have shelter, but my mind and my spirit needed to be fed, too.

Having been to college, I had read and talked about ideas. I had studied art and painted with oils. I had played sports and was photographed with black-stockinged legs criss-crossed behind me as I lay on my belly with my chin resting on the basketball.

The sacrilege of scissors, had never touched my pompadour. My waist was cinched and my white blouse was crisp with just the right amount of pleats and lace and pearls.

But, alas, I fell in love with handsome, rakish Earl. He was my royalty. And so, we left the world of literature and philosophy, the world of science and history, and moved back to the farm to make our own history, but I never stopped dreaming and thinking and longing for my life when I read and talked about ideas.

Had I been born 100 years later, I would have been described as someone who "thinks outside the box". And now here I lay in West Frantz Cemetery, and this is the only thinking outside the box I can do.



# Rakish Earl

I was rakishly good looking, fun-loving, and bright. This was the currency with which I wooed my "Black Gold" princess.

I wanted to be a scholar, on a shoestring, had managed to leave the dairy farms of Iowa behind, to seek my fortune at Mt. Morris College. But then, one chilly winter night, my dormitory burned to the ground, and with it, my dreams went up in smoke.

So I built a new dream, married the daughter of a landowner, and became a farmer in Illinois.

I traded my rakish good looks for a rake and a hoe, a tractor and plow, corn and beans, a barn and haymow.

I yoked my team, and hitched my wagon, I attached it to a star. I was content to be yoked to my princess with her crisp white blouse and her pearls and lace, her hair that had never been cut even once, and her fetching demeanor and face.

Dreaming on the inside and farming on the outside.

V.

# Champagne Problems

*You've got to be taught To hate and fear, You've got to be taught  
From year to year, It's got to be drummed In your dear little  
ear You've got to be carefully taught*

I've been White Privileged since my parents were a gleam in their parents' eyes, but I got White Guilt when I was nine. We were on a family road trip from Champaign to Sarasota, and I saw segregated water fountains and toilets. Too bad the people that made those rules didn't sing the same childhood songs I did: "Jesus loves the little children....red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight...."

*You've got to be taught to be afraid Of people whose eyes are  
oddly made, And people whose skin is a different shade, You've got  
to be carefully taught.*

*To Ashley's remark "Your body is lucky; You take such good care of it", I respond "Where I come from, we call that self-indulgence".*

We both wear masks on my back patio, sprawled on a futon for the ZenThaiShaitso bodywork that follows the yoga lesson. Tears stream down my cheeks because the moment is so perfect: the sun, the breeze, the new age playlist punctuated by real sounds from nature, the luxury of caring touch, gratitude for health, for white privilege, for my very life, for karma....inhale...can I possibly stop waiting for something to go wrong and just live?.....exhale.....I see myself in twenty years.....inhale.....Mona Lisa smile.....exhale....yoga clothes, flowing scarf to camouflage the neck.....inhale.....exhale. I don't need permission to commit to the body work regimen. I need to give myself permission to spend the equivalent of a house payment on bodywork.

I had a bad habit (three times?) of using "girl' or " girlfriend" in a way, borne, not of malice, but of an assumed familiarity that was intended to be buddy-buddy, as in "Girlfriend, you have got to get a pedicure!" It was perhaps a feeble attempt to be a part of the Black Sister "Waiting to Exhale" humor I so enjoyed. The few times I had used it, however, I didn't like the way it sounded, demeaning and pejorative. After those times, I paused, but obviously not long enough, because it came out again yesterday, in an informal, relaxed moment. In the company of one of my closest friends, an African-American male, amid relaxed Happy Hour banter, the word "Boy", slithered out of my mouth, and I felt I might as well have uttered the N Word.

*My MAGA-radar went on red alert, the moment I met the Tech Department Manager at Staples. Was it my age, or my sex, or was he threatened by my knowledge of wireless ergonomic keyboards? I quickly labeled him as an overpaid, under-educated WASP-ish dick with an inflated opinion of himself. Didn't he know he might not even have a job if I wasn't willing to risk exposure to a deadly virus to be in his store? I was angry that some more-deserving person, preferably a person of color, didn't have his job. Being this opinionated after very little real data, is not dissimilar to racism. How can I point a finger?*

*You've got to be taught before it's too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate,  
You've got to be carefully taught!*

*"You've Got to Be Taught" from South Pacific*  
Rodgers and Hammerstein

# Don't Forget Their Names

*Burdened by racism, sometimes apparent and sometimes not,  
they trudge through city streets,  
one foot in front of the other, Nikes, Docs, Tevas,  
fear, determination, exasperation etched in their faces,  
one raised fist, jaws set in determination,  
two raised fists, faces exhilarated, hopeful.*

*It could be Minneapolis, Portland, Chicago.  
There's always Mobile, Birmingham, Selma,  
and now there's Paris, Praetoria, Sydney,  
as well as Fairview, Greenville, Anytown.*

*They don't want Stop and Frisk,  
They want to Stop Different Treatment for Different Pigmentation.*



*Puddles in the streets from sweat, urine, hoses,  
the same flotsam and jetsam that trails after most long races,  
water, paper, snack rinds, muddy down-trodden grass,  
And the heat, too much heat, always the heat, never enough  
breeze.*

*The Human Rights Marathon  
Requiring air and breath as both noun and verb,  
The Desideratum to articulate, Air, broadcast, state, vent, voice.*

*Before it was our leaders,  
Malcolm, Martin, Medgar.  
Now it's our neighbors,  
Stephon, Breonna, George.*

Everyone marches or watches  
Everywhere, always.

## VI

# Cooking in the Time of COVID19:

## How Two Former Foodies Manage Life in the Culinary Slow Lane

With a well-developed disdain for being told what to do, following recipes is not my strong suit. I started cooking for the family when I was ten, when Mom had to take care of my poor, stroked grandma that came to live with us. Nowadays, if things get more complicated than the recipes from my spiral-bound child's version of Betty Crocker's How to Cook book, I proceed on instinct.

Somehow, using my 6-inch rolling pin to flatten the tube biscuits before wrapping them around cocktail sausages for that Tuesday night family favorite "Pigs in a Blanket", laid the basis for an intuitive approach to cooking.

My current dilemma is not unique: how to prepare nutritious meals that will be tasty enough to boost our spirits, healthy enough to fortify the immune system, but won't keep me chained to the stove.

I begin by figuring out the theme of the week. To say that the weekly themes are dictated by a matrix, is overthinking the serendipitous combination of factors that go into meal planning and preparation: pantry archeology, Instacart availability, and what remains in a package opened a day or two ago.

This week is dictated by how much my Larry has recently whined about my new plant-forward approach to cooking, and how much ground turkey I have leftover from the recent batch of the UC Davis Vet School recipe for homemade dog food I made for Carina Maltese.

Tonight, I'll make turkey meatloaf. In order to understand how long and at what temperature to cook it, I spend 60 seconds doing an Evelyn Wood internet blitz while simultaneously recollecting Mom's recipe. Keep it simple: binders (egg and breadcrumbs) and flavors (onions, garlic, salt and pepper, ketchup and mustard). This is not a gourmet endeavor; this is a turkey meatloaf. The more boring I make it, the more Larry will like it, and the less I will be tempted to taste it. (For health reasons I'm a vegan, and if I'm going to risk food allergies, it won't be over turkey meatloaf). Focus on keeping it simple while maintaining a modicum of self-respect regarding my culinary skills.

My husband recently opined about tender haricots verts cut in slivers, and I long for the green beans picked daily from the garden of my childhood. The reality is, however, for the fourth night in a row, I'm not yet to the bottom of the super-size bag 'o beans selected by the well-intended Instacart shopper. (Raw, all they need is a squeaker to double as a toy for Carina.)

I try to coax these stubborn digits into something delectable by first cutting them into pieces so short that the strings are manageable, followed by a two-minute nuke, and lastly, I saute them with onions and garlic in jalapeno olive oil, and pair them with a succotash of leftover rice and zucchini. (I avoid the word “squash” as it reminds me of our hopes for the summer. )

I remember fondly Grandma’s Illinois farm version of creme brulee, always served in “custard cups”, and I love having an endless supply of those Libbey 6.25 oz. glass bowls with lids. As soon as I make anything, such as our standard desert of fresh fruit, it goes into these pre-prepped portion-sized servings. Two go on the table for the meal, and two go into the refrigerator for later. Formerly, for our grab and go life, now they are for our grab and stay life. Add a square of HU Salty Dark Chocolate (brand name short for Human, also missing in our lives), and “Voila!”: “How Two Former Foodies Manage Life in the Culinary Slow Lane”.

## VI

# Delirium

After greeting the anesthesiologist, she relinquished control. 10, 9, 8...she was good at interoception and hoped the surgery dream would rival how she felt ninety minutes into a sativa gelcap. 7, 6, 5...first came the technicolor version of anatomy charts, and then the movie started. She composed the score as she went along, a Fig Newton of Her imagination that soon turned into a Tom and Jerry cartoon with Jerry laughing his head off, looking remarkably like AOC as he was chased by an angry Tom, looking remarkably like Moscow Mitch, glissando-ing the length of the clavicle,

changing directions on a dime by spinning in the AC joint to gain momentum, melody augmenting, meter changing from 4/4 to 6/8, for the slide along the scapula, crescendo on a descending passage indicating something's gonna happen, grabbing onto the subscapula so as to make his momentary airborne escape to the safety of the trapezius, extended dominant seventh chord suspense, maybe even a fermata while he is airborne, landing in territory that had not been damaged, and where he would be safe from Tom, of course, ending on the tonic. Pregnant pause before applause.

Headlines can be used to focus the reader's attention on a particular (or main) part of the article. The writer can also give facts and detailed information following answers to general questions like who, what, when, where, why and how.

Quoted references can also be helpful. References to people can also be made through the written accounts of interviews and debates.



# O, the places we'll go!

O, the places we'll go!  
The things we will do!  
The people we'll see!

nowhere to go...nothing to do...no place to be, but here...

Once I was a working gal,  
but now my little dog's my pal.  
I name the lizards, watch the birds,  
and try to write like clever nerds.

I planned to podcast, sing, perform,  
But now, thinking is the norm,  
I wanted busy, but tired of dizzy,  
and now? All I want is fizzy.

Prebiotics, Probiotics, Kombucha, Lectin-free,  
Anything to soothe the gut and be the newer me.

O, the places we'll go!  
The things we will do!  
The people we'll see!

nowhere to go...nothing to do...no place to be, but here...

frenetic, kinetic morphed into aesthetic,  
doing into being, blind into seeing.

I used to be out of breath; Now I practice breathing calm.  
First ice the joints, hands, knees and shoulders; then the Tiger Balm.

mountain pose tadasana  
tree pose vrikshasana  
Down dog adho mukha svanasana  
sun salutation surya namaskar  
rest in the heart

O, the places we'll go,  
the things we will do,  
the people we'll see,

nowhere to go...nothing to do...no place to be, but here