

Hello, friends!

Let's play WORDLE.

Martha exercises her gray cells virtually every morning by attempting Wordle on her phone. (Apparently so do 300,000 other folks!) How are your neurons and synapses working? If you are not familiar with Wordle, the game's goal is to guess the five-letter Wordle of the day in no more than six tries, pairing trial-and-error with logic. Each guess must be a valid word.

So how are we? Same as USUAL; no big changes since last year.



OK. Because the "U" and the "L" are yellow, we know that there is a "U" and an "L" somewhere in today's word (though not in those positions.)

Most of our daily routines bear a striking resemblance to our routines of twelve months ago . . . or 24 months ago . . . or . . .

We've taken a steady stream of OLLI courses -- classes about James Madison, Kant, architecture, and Mozart, among others.

Frannie continues to warn us at all hours about the presence of every vicious dog roaming our sidewalks (as well as complicitly evil dog-walkers) and of equally suspicious delivery persons approaching our house.

Martha's been enmeshed in raising money for both OLLI and Washington Latin. Although she put in a lot of hours behind the register at Politics & Prose over the winter holidays, bookselling gigs have dropped in number. She continues, of course, to read at an astonishing pace; her recent focus has been on Russia, countries bordering it, and its mid-20th century history. (Cheery stuff!) And, of course, her knitting needles click away producing teddy bears, scarves, afghans, and sweaters. We both love our subscription to *The New Yorker*.

We let you know back in March about Steve's newest collection of recordings (which are now available on streaming services such as Spotify); he was very pleased with the quality of the five tracks entitled "Seems Like Old Times." For whatever reasons, though, in the last few months he's done less writing and less performing. Maybe that will pick up again.

We continue to try to endure the embarrassingly poor performance of our local professional once-world-champion baseball team; Steve is convinced that he could throw a curveball more effectively than any of the guys on our Nationals pitching staff, but the phone never rings in our bullpen.

Back to Wordle: Shall we try everyone's least favorite 5-letter word?

U	S	U	A	L
C	O	V	I	D

Oh well. No helpful letters that time. We've never liked COVID!

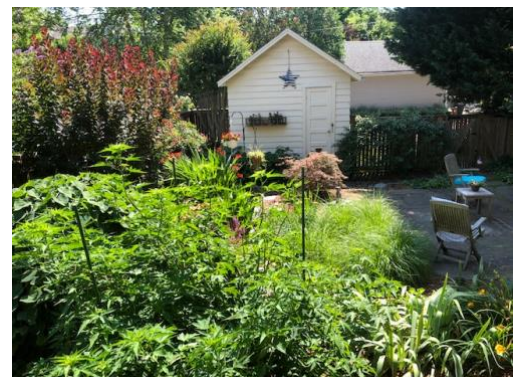
Not to gloat, but thus far both of us have evaded the virus. Despite shots and boosters, though, it just feels as if it's only a matter of time.

Steve did go through a disconcerting two months this winter. In the middle of November, he suddenly saw the world with double vision, which, most certainly, is NOT double the pleasure. After ruling out a host of potential (and very unpleasant) prospective causes, the ophthalmologist told us that the cause was probably a microstroke (definite emphasis on the word *micro*) and that the vision could simply correct itself . . . and it did! By mid-January his vision was back to 100% normal. HAPPY ending!

U	S	U	A	L
C	O	V	I	D
H	A	P	P	Y

Hmmm. Well, our answer contains a "y"!

Speaking of normal vision, we still love looking out our dining room picture window during every season to see the plantings, the birds (including Carolina wrens), the squirrels, the bunnies, and, one morning, a gorgeous fox!

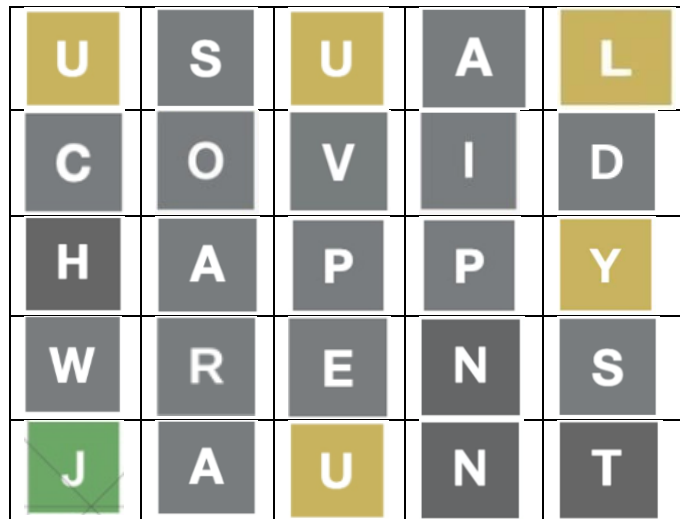


Let's try WRENS



Oh dear, no luck with that word.

Have we gone anywhere on a JAUNT?



Hey, we're making progress; we know now that today's word starts with a "J."

We've traveled very little. There *was* one promising plan. In early April, Martha was going to drive to Williamsburg, Virginia with Beth Darasz who was flying south from New Hampshire. They were going to treat themselves to a couple of nights at a spa. In the meantime, Steve was to head in the opposite direction, flying to New Hampshire for a couple of days with Beth's husband Peter. Steve did arrive (on time) at Manchester Airport, and he and Peter had a great time. Beth's flight, on the other hand, was canceled and the replacement flight delayed to the point that when she finally did get to National Airport, the girls decided simply to remain in DC for a staycation. They too had a good time regardless.

Any summer plans have been complicated by Martha's need to be available for five weeks of grand jury duty starting in late July. She didn't opt to reschedule this civic obligation because she will be teaching a class at OLLI this fall – an overview of German grammar and syntax with enough vocabulary for travelers to Deutschland.

OK, let's give our Wordle that final shot. Since this is *our* Nation's Birthday letter, we are going to cheat a little and use a number.

U	S	U	A	L
C	O	V	I	D
H	A	P	P	Y
W	R	E	N	S
J	A	U	N	T
J	U	L	Y	4

It took us six tries, but we did it!

"I'm trying to figure out
how to chirp without
sounding so damned cheerful"

The New Yorker
June 20, 2022



Well, the above was our cheeriest take on the moment. While we understand how incredibly fortunate we are, we do have our dark moments . . . with increasing frequency.

We have felt the loss of four friends in these last twelve months: next-door-neighbor for thirty years Ed Hoke; childhood friend Robyn Brown's husband Steve Hoffman; headmaster Norm Jason; and Mt. Holyoke classmate Jamie Vernon.

In terms of current events, we'd be gloomy enough if we worried only about Putin's criminal invasion of Ukraine, about the lack of sensible gun regulation, about the continuing vibrancy of the COVID virus, or about our medieval Supreme Court majority.

Beyond all those disappointments, however, we both can find ourselves overwhelmed and stunned to think that we may live long enough to witness two of the greatest implosions in human history, that of the fragile environment of Planet Earth and that of the democratic republic of the United States of America. We don't believe we are being hyperbolic. Whatever we envisioned the twenty-first century would be like and how our own last few decades would play out, this is not it! We know we are not the only ones dealing with this angst.

Surely climate change, which is undeniable, is only going to accelerate, probably with consequences sooner than later that we haven't dared to imagine and that will impact us, one way or another.

And we're very nervous that the uncivil body politic of the U.S. is only going to continue to polarize and unravel. The flawed-but-inspired experiment that we celebrate today may be doomed not by differences between liberal and conservative viewpoints but by an extremism that threatens accuracy of information and fairness in elections. We have found the revelations of the House Select Committee hearings simultaneously chilling and reassuring (in that we have been introduced to witnesses who are honest and loyal to the Constitution and to the principle of fair play.)

The degradation of the environment is not apt to improve, but maybe the political atmosphere of the nation can find better balance and accord.

Here's hoping that a year from now we all can feel a little better about things!



Martha and Steve

Image courtesy of our go-to photographer Val Aschenbach