

Dear friends,

We were tempted to begin our annual summer greetings to you by quoting Dickens's opening twelve words of *A Tale of Two Cities*. But that seemed so clichéd; we'll let you dredge those up on your own. But through the last twelve months we have bounced between elation and near-despair. Has that been your experience? [Misery loves company](#), and [these are the times that try men's souls](#).

Let's [keep on the sunny side of life](#). Some of Martha's closest college friends had had such a good time seeing one another at their 50<sup>th</sup> reunion two years ago, that they decided to get together in mid-September. Travelers came to D.C. from the West coast, Texas, Florida and Cape Cod. Martha had arranged for visits to museums and meals at a few good restaurants. The weather was spectacular, and there was time simply to relax and catch up. The inability to see even local friends over recent months makes the memory of that get-together all the more special.

We were consumed throughout October with watching our hometown baseball team navigate its way through the post-season with heart-stopping drama. As a die-hard Nats fan, Martha was, of course, especially caught up in this, but even Steve was drawn in. We were at times inclined to give up with tears welling in our eyes, but [there's no crying in baseball](#). And so we oscillated between rationalization ("At least they made it this far.") and optimism ("Maybe they can actually pull this off!") Need we tell you that our wildest hopes were, in the end – in the VERY end – rewarded with come-back performance after come-back performance and, yes!, a World Series title? One of our happiest memories of the year was being in the crowd on the sunny, warm afternoon of Saturday, November 2nd when Washingtonians gathered along Constitution Avenue for a congratulatory parade. [\(No rain on that parade!\)](#) We have no expectation that we will ever again be living in a city whose baseball team reaches the summit, but once will suffice!



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our very own Curly W.

Over Thanksgiving, we [counted the cars on the New Jersey turnpike](#) in order to have a lovely celebration with some of Martha's paternal cousins and their families -- as we had done many years in the past. It was wonderful to see folks we hadn't seen in a long time. We were especially glad to have gone since the wife of Martha's cousin Scott passed away unexpectedly a few weeks later.

[On the road again](#) in December, we were off to North Carolina for a pre-Christmas visit getting to see the Cowens and the Haugens minus our nephew Kyle who was at work in Vail.

And then, The Virus hit the fan. [Houston, we have a problem!](#)

We have (mostly) stayed put because, as we learned from Dorothy, [there's no place . . .](#) well, you know. Our newest fashion accessory is always at hand. ([Who was that masked man?](#)), and, knock on wood, we have stayed healthy.

Our Osher Lifelong Learning outpost at America University became an even more central part of our lives. As the chair of its board of directors, in mid-March Martha was drawn in on a daily basis – sometimes hourly – to the process of pivoting from a students-in-a-classroom “college” to an online learning experience. Who imagined that a four-letter word beginning with Z would be so important to our sanity? Indeed, many of OLLI's teachers were willing and able to convert to making presentations via Zoom. Lucky us: all five of the classes that we'd registered for in the spring semester continued (after just a week or so of adjustment), and we've just finished a June series of four-session classes – one about the toughest case various judges had faced in their years on the bench and the other about the Big Bang and everything that has happened in the universe since. Just realizing that the universe is 13 billion years old helps to put things in perspective! Martha is already plotting her course selection for the fall.

Early on in The Isolation, we distracted ourselves by working on this jigsaw puzzle, a reminder of Politics & Prose, our favorite independent bookstore, where Martha works now and again. All of the in-person author talks, of course, were cancelled, but she (and her obedient taxi driver and her loyal canine) spent one afternoon per week making home deliveries. Then she worked Saturday afternoons at the store's “grab-and-go”, and next week, as the store itself reopens, some days she'll count customers in order to limit the number of bibliophiles inside at any one time. She will list this on her résumé as “bookstore bouncer.”



Steve kept the musical pedals moving, writing and performing. He was in his favorite recording studio throughout the fall, AND he made a pilgrimage to Nashville in October which included a recording session on Music Row with his long-time friend and collaborator Rob Bartley. What fun! All of that resulted in an eight-song album entitled "Going Down The Road Feeling Glad". As you may remember, he provided himself some focus during house arrest by preparing a virtual concert on Friday, May 15 which helped raise money for a Covid emergency fund administered by Washington Latin.



So, on we go. As Steve sings in one of his recent songs: "All we can do is carry on."



courtesy of our trustworthy photographer Valerie Aschenbach Hoke

When the dog bites, (not that ours would) when the bee stings, when we're feeling sad, we simply remember our favorite things – such as wishing you all a happy Fourth -- and then we don't feel so bad! Stay safe; and don't look back; something might be gaining on you.

Hackneyedly yours,

P.S. Special thanks to, among others, Tom Paine, the Carter Family, Tom Hanks (twice!), Judy Garland, Charlie Brown, Julie Andrews, and Satchel Paige.

Martha and Steve



