



Peony

REMEMBER

REPAIR

REUNITE

Helena Meyer-Knapp  
[meyerknh@evergreen.edu](mailto:meyerknh@evergreen.edu)

Memorial Day 2020

## INTRODUCTION

NONE OF US IS ALONE – Remember

IN REAL LIFE THERE'S NO INTERMISSION – Repair work  
Essential workers or Frontline workers?

WOMENS WORK – Repair work: The bigger picture

AND WHAT CAN ANYONE DO?

DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS – The ReUnited States

Let's not forget that we can laugh

# PEACEABILITIES

Craftsmanship,

Good Name,

Adaptability,

Courage,

Unpretentiousness,

Hospitality

Forbearance,

Determination,

Remembrance,

Generosity

Timing

Helena Meyer-Knapp is a scholar/activist and an immigrant for whom August 2019 marked the 50th anniversary of her entry into life and work in the USA. That work centers on peace making. Her life includes a marvelous family as well. She earned a BA in History at Oxford in the UK the country of her birth, and an MA in Communications and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Political Studies in the USA.

She was a member of the faculty (international relations and political studies), 1984 - 2017 was honored with Emerita status on her retirement from the Evergreen State College. From 2001 her research has taken her regularly to NE Asia, most often to Japan but also to South Korea.

An activist in public affairs since the 1970s, she has focused most of her efforts on local and national elections. Her public work began in the early 1980s with referenda in support of the Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze. Her college teaching also centers on engagement in public life, encouraging students to gather the materials, the skills and the momentum they need to participate in the community on their own behalf.



## INTRODUCTION

It was clear by late fall 2019 that my first pamphlet series — A World Turned Upside Down — had run its course. No matter how disturbing things might be, the 2020 election campaign, for example, I was ready to think about repair.

Life even then was bigger than US politics. Climate change, Black Lives Matter and rampant economic inequality were driving us in destructive directions. The Evergreen State College Longhouse Native Arts program, Obamacare's expansion of Medicaid and Greta Thunberg were among many inspirations for pressing on with repair.

In mid-winter 2020, based in the Lake District in the UK, I had become immersed in letters written by my family during World War II. Both the physical setting and the people writing those letters were irrefutable evidence of the capacity, indeed the will to repair.

The landforms in the Lakes evolved from volcanic eruptions and ice ages. Millennia after the last ice age, the locals level forests while mining metal ores and slate, raw materials for literally thousands of small factories dotted all over the region during the early stages of Britain's industrial revolution. The grass covered hills of today are a human artifact. One lovely barn in our village was built to store dynamite for slate mining. The stone quay that harbours our boats was used to ship the dynamite, an early part of the industrial transport system. The footpath down to the lake is public now because dynamite traveled that way. And yet its stunning beauty gives the Lake District status today as both a National Park and a World Heritage Site, recognized as the latter precisely because it represents human activities in a natural setting. What we love was damaged and repaired. Not back to what it was but right in a new way of being.

My family is similar. My grandfather's political activities in opposition to Hitler drove him to self-exile, first for his children and then later himself. Half of them having settled in the UK, at the outbreak of war their very Germaness called their right to be in the UK into question. Air raids over London early and then late in the war endangered them night after night. The family was dispersed as well, two siblings and parents in London, one teenage sibling in Geneva with her grandmother and one in the USA in college and working. The war letters, a result of this enforced separation, are often inspiring. What courage and hope. They are also immensely practical — rationed bacon is shared, stockings set off in a package from America. Above all the letters echo with hope for renewal. There's remarkably little comment about battles and fighting, but letter after letter heralds hope: in my parents' marriage, the birth of my oldest sister Jessica, the beauty of the Italian countryside. Jessica's birth was proof that fresh life was possible.

Born just after the war, the life I came into in the UK I can now describe as an imperfect but sincere commitment to renewed community and purpose across a whole society. Churchill, while still a war hero, was nonetheless voted out of power to make way for peace. The NHS was voted in. In these Virus Times where both leadership and health care are center stage again, it is worth remembering that in Britain in 1945, no matter how glorious the military victory, it was peace and equity that inspired government and citizen alike.



## NONE OF US ALONE: Remember

The politics of this failure is too familiar. The willful refusal of the Trump administration either to apply expertise to the challenge or to take full responsibility for the situation has been so widely discussed I see no reason to add to the talk. As my son Malcolm says, the only thing Trump needs is for us to pay him attention. So we won't.

Instead in our remembrance work, let's grieve that far too many are dying because of the places they sleep each night: Structural derelictions of duty in many nursing homes and in prisons everywhere.

**Nursing homes** have already drawn widespread attention. Even during the first outbreak in Wuhan it was clear the virus is dreadfully dangerous to the elderly and those harboring chronic diseases. Day to day life is a hardship even for people whose elder care home is thus far virus free. A cousin lives in such a place. She and the other residents are in total isolation, forbidden to invite into their rooms anyone but staff. She can have a medical "attendant" in the apartment for several hours on weekdays. Her daughter can visit only once a month, as chauffeur to the doctor for glaucoma shots. Most of the time Julia is utterly alone, meals delivered to her room in paper bags. Like a prisoner in a cell.

Yet more heartbreaking at least in the UK and USA, in Spain and in Canada, are the many older people who are dying in places wide open to viral disasters. The first viral storm in the USA hit at the Life Care nursing home in Washington State. The CDC reported in early March that the place had generated 129 confirmed infections: 81 residents, 34 workers and 14 visitors. In Athens, Tennessee, the Life Care Corporation's home state, about another of their homes the headline read: "Life Care: 39 employees test positive, now 97 cases in all." Wikipedia describes the company thus:

The **Life Care Centers of America** is the largest privately held long-term elderly care company in the US, with facilities across 28 states, and the third largest in the US. It is headquartered in Cleveland, Tennessee. It was founded by Forrest Preston in 1970, and he remains the sole owner, chairman, and CEO. As of 2015, the company employs 42,000 people. (April 29 2020)

In 2016 Life Care paid \$145 million to settle a Federal investigation into Medicare fraud. There is very little in these virus disasters or this corporate culture which comes as a surprise. Nursing home bills are almost always paid in full by the Federal government under Medicare. They have become a gold mine for owners who know they can pay most staff minimum wage, while their supervising government agency weighs itself down in paperwork and politicians, even heroic Andrew Cuomo, wreak havoc on the legal options that might hold the corporations accountable.

With structural conditions so flawed, local remembrances strategies can nonetheless create a better future. Family members coming together in small home-based groups might well find resilience in shared action, in petitioning, for example, that their particular "home" publicly and explicitly memorialize its losses, the staff, the residents and even the visitors. The blame culture in the USA reliably bedevils that kind of search for solidarity and one can expect Life Care and other corporate entities to resist the idea. As I see it, a memorial panel prominently displayed in a lobby would be a real service, a reminder to all of the need to honor the staff and take care of the people living with them.

## NONE OF US ALONE: Remember

**Prisons** inevitably elicit much less compassion than the elderly. Also, despite crowded conditions and minimal care for those locked inside, it took longer for prisons to show themselves as high risk hot spots. By the end of April however, the situation was clear. Cleveland's News 5 reported on April 29th:

Nearly 80% of the inmates in two Ohio prisons — some 3,500 people — have been diagnosed with COVID-19 since the virus that causes the disease was detected in the prison system March 29.

The Marshall Project, which tracks criminal justice data, reports that by the week of May 20th there had been over 29,500 COVID cases in US prisons with at least 415 deaths. In the list of 1000 names in the New York Times, just one identifies a death in jail, singled out because he just missed out on release.

I was already aligned with those in the policy and academic communities who have concluded that there is a direct line of descent from slavery through Jim Crow and segregation to mass incarceration. As Sabrina Strings put it in the New York Times on Memorial Day Monday:

The era of slavery was when white Americans determined that black Americans needed only the bare necessities, not enough to keep them optimally safe and healthy. It set in motion black people's diminished access to healthy foods, safe working conditions, medical treatment and a host of other social inequities that negatively impact health.

Recent perilous events — Deaths: a black man jogging and a woman quietly at home, and near deaths: a teenager on his front porch falsely accused, and a bird watcher in Central Park against whom a white woman called the police, are stark reminders that the legacy of lynching and terror is too easy to reignite, too hard to repudiate.

It also remains easy to deny the echo of slavery that reverberates in the dangers and constraints faced by African Americans today. Columbia University philosopher Michelle Moody-Adams, using Thomas Aquinas's term "affected ignorance," places the burden for change squarely on the shoulders of the dominant culture. Facts about infant mortality and red-lining, about unemployment and police violence will finally make sense if one accepts that a single system of structural and inborn suffering ties them together. The refusal to protect the descendants of slaves, now in our prisons, from the virus we all fear is particularly stark.

Remembering the damage the virus is doing in prisons needs to be amplified by remembering the centuries of damage imposed by the legacy of slavery. Prisoners at least in some states may find it easier than nursing home families to create local, collective remembrance rituals and symbols. The Black Prisoners Caucus, active in 10 Washington State jails is probably in a position to define for itself which are viable ways to institutionalize the memories. Regardless of what they achieve on the inside, society at large will have failed yet again if the memory also is confined and not shared, if Americans with black skins are the only ones to carry the sadness and the loss. In truth, the whole society loses if the least privileged among us lose.

## IN REAL LIFE THERE'S NO INTERMISSION —Repair work: Essential workers or Frontline workers?

Before what the onset of “Virus Times,” it was clear that many characteristics of our global economy were flawed, but in prioritizing, determining essential versus expendable, prior rankings now seem arbitrary. I was certain once that cars were more problem than solution and public transport was more solution than problem. Thus far, in Korea, China and in Japan, public transport seems sustainable. In the Bay Area on the west coast of the USA, BART stations and trains are virtually deserted. Freeways built for commuters are empty and fast. Also private cars seem preferable because we know they are virus free. Our son in Berkeley has lost his job, a COVID layoff. So too have in-laws in his wife’s family. The V-P level still works as do the factory staff, but middle managers and fashion designers for retail brands are gone. Actors and other “live” performance groups are probably mystified about how the future will unfold.

**Essential Workers** One blessing of these difficult months is the bright light shining on a class of people too often invisible, who are doing essential work, work we genuinely cannot do without, not even for a few days: Cashiers at food stores, despite Jeff Bezos dreams of cashier-free, in-store retail. Subway and bus drivers, even for almost empty trips. Long distance truck drivers. A carpenter leaving his construction job for union protection as a garbage collector finds he is even more essential now than he was, though construction is back in the Bay and also in the much more tightly shut down UK.

Construction workers give me hope. They represent the spring time of renewal — a society growing once again. And to keep working they have had train in the new kinds of social relations: distancing and masks, sanitizers and temperature checks. Their ability to adapt so effectively to these guidelines also makes me hopeful. Builders know how to revitalize the old and also how to create the completely new.

Construction workers can only work because we have reliable systems of survival staffed by essential workers many of whom understand all too well the narrow space between life and death. Often their jobs provide barely enough for their own survival: in hospitals they are the health aids and porters, janitors disinfecting patient rooms and the food prep staff hidden in the kitchens, keeping everyone fed. Some not only do essential work but they provide essential emotional support. The workers in nursing homes carry the heaviest burdens. Many have witnessed too much death. Child care workers heading to work are vital too. There are even some “essentials” doing what they must in their own homes: school teachers and grannies keeping open the pathways to education and keeping parents sane.

In all of this I am speaking about the USA which has handled employment and unemployment in its own particularly brutal way. I have no way even to begin to talk about essential work for the Chinese except to know that much of what was made in China and came to the USA on that global supply train turns out not to have been essential. Some, medical equipment and supplies, innovative computer chips and . . . remains essential. As we consider our new-style future we will have to reconsider how much of the essential we make for ourselves. We are likely less willing to depend on others, whether competitor or ally: European and Japanese cars, Brazilian beef and New Zealand lamb, clothes sewn in Bangladesh and El Salvador. Does renewal entail reopening these supply lines, does it require reducing our needs or will we become once again a nation of makers ourselves? It is hard to tell, but with the exception of Chinese



## IN REAL LIFE THERE'S NO INTERMISSION —Repair work:

Essential workers or Frontline workers?

medical equipment and pharmaceuticals, it is clear that unlike the cashiers and janitors, masks and sanitizers, large parts of the global supply chain can hardly be described as “essential.”

**Frontline workers.** Many have been calling essential workers “front line” workers. By experiencing the virus as an enemy and saving lives as a battle, other metaphors from warfare come all too easily to mind. But in most places this virus has not put nations on a war footing. The language of disaster relief is a much better fit. Furthermore appropriate metaphors can help our perspectives shift. Ending a war requires peacemaking which depends on the loser among the enemies agreeing to stop fighting. That is not how survival mechanisms in viruses work. Disasters end when we commit to investing in repair.

Ambulance drivers and triage nurses in hospital reception tents? In disaster terminology they are “first responders.” Ventilator doctors facing yet another death and mortuary workers? They are the “clean up” crew, the ones who make it possible for us to even begin to consider repair. After an ice storm in Olympia, neighbors, first responders, head out into the street, chain saw in hand, to clear away the debris. This allows power crews and fire trucks, the docs and ventilators of an ice storm, to get work. First responders and clean up crews live intense, unrelenting days and nights. In some ways they are wonderful lives too. One’s usefulness is unquestioned and very visible. The hardships one undergoes are unmistakable. Even before Virus Times we admired such men and women.

Virus work is harder to visualize as disaster response partly because its timing is indeterminate. Natural disasters have beginnings and ends. They last hours in a hurricane, moments in an earthquake, though aftershocks are likely for days or even weeks. Disaster seems instantaneous in a tornado, though waiting for a funnel cloud to arrive must be terrifying. Where will it actually touch down?

During one Olympia disaster the rains were torrential. On and on. 98 days in a row and yet not a flood. Floods are frequent in the northwest and cleanup can take a while but the waters recede. This rain was a maker of mudslides. Some were quick. Sand cliffs came crashing down. One showed up as a gentle slide. A community of houses with stunning waterfront had been built well above a layer of glacial gravel. The gravel began sliding. The community's roads cracked and crumpled. Then houses buckled. Pretty quickly people realized they were all headed towards the water. Federal emergency aid never came. Why? Disaster management in the USA is event based. The mudslide had no beginning and no end.

There will be no obvious end to this disaster either. Trump is betting on vaccine as victory, a goal many would share. After that there will be no need for all those irksome things like masks. Right? That’s a risky bet. Successful vaccine will require distribution that is fair, wide and quick. Given our fractured health care such that outcome is doomed, not to mention hostile pressures from Trump’s anti-vax allies.

If we are willing to learn from the countries that lived through Ebola and Sars, Mers and H1N1 we will accept that repair from this virus has to be structural. We must allow the virus to teach us: to stay clean ourselves, to stay away from school or the office if we are sick. Above all, to accept that to stay in good health, we will need sincerely to care about the effect we have on everyone around us.

## **WOMENS' WORK**      Repair work: National leadership asserts itself

While the virus has been spanning the globe it has also lead forcefully to the reincarnation of The Nation State. Not that nationalism was moribund before. Trump, Putin, Xi Jinping, Brexit, Polish and Hungarian politics . . . there were plenty of leaders intent on bolstering their own national “brand,” but even their leadership was floating on a planet wide system of trade, travel, media, finance and pollution.

The rupture wrought by the virus has been dramatic. Though biologically it can be assumed that's impacts ought to be un-national, the virus's actual effects have varied dramatically from place to place.

One part of the variation is genuinely mysterious. Why Wuhan first and hardest? Why hot spots in Lombardy, Iran, New York City and Spain? Inside any given home, why the old people and not the children? Why could Japan turn back the dangers once catastrophe threatened?

Another part of the variation clearly results from a combination of governance and culture. I've written elsewhere about culture, particularly Japan. What I have written can be found in the Letters from Asia section of my website [peacemakerpress.com](http://peacemakerpress.com).

### **Sacrifice for victory**

It's governance that interests me now. Specifically three kinds of leadership. I use the phrase “Virus Times” to denote my refusal to consider that one can be “at war” with a virus, knowing that Trump is not the only person to eagerly grasp the war image. Recently he seems, like George W., all too ready to hoist a very premature “Mission Accomplished” banner.

No, the leader who truly has been a “wartime” leader is Xi Jinping. The criteria? First and foremost that he was and remains genuinely willing to demand huge sacrifice, including huge amounts of uncounted death. What was done in Wuhan was sacrificial: it was total physically and economically fatal for many, and imposed so as to prevent any other part of China collapsing. Wuhan must die so others could live.

In the event, the virus was bigger than that first sacrificial act. So, in effect, China's entire population found itself conscripted into Xi's vision of war against the virus. Government mandated apps installed on every phone regulating and monitor movement served as the call-up papers. Local cadres controlling the entrance and exit from apartment buildings ensured the government could ration food and other scarce resources. The bodies of those who died from the virus were cremated, families forbidden to collect the urns or to perform mourning ceremonies for the dead. Public remembrance of the COVID Dead, such as it will be, will be allowed only for those on government generated lists of casualties. The recent compulsory testing of every single person in Wuhan, while protective, also compels continued compliance with the government's war.

There are plenty of holes in the story China is telling about the virus. This is not the place for them. It is the warlike mobilization which deserves recognition. In this, I would argue that China is unique. None of the other autocrats are at war. Putin and Johnson seem almost lazy, both far too ready to shirk the actual

## WOMENS' WORK

### Repair work: National leadership asserts itself

responsibilities a genuine war leader like Churchill or Xi assumes to himself. Furthermore China's warlike agenda continues. Next on the list? The final conquest of Hong Kong.

Poor city. What Wuhan suffered will look mild in comparison to what happens to that beautiful town and the 8 million who live there. The wealthy already have homes elsewhere and are probably leaving right now. Its banks and trading companies already have centers in Singapore and, according to Bloomberg, Manila. Why Manila? Because as an ex-US colony it has plenty of English speakers. Any doubt that China's government will be brutal is contradicted in Tibet still suffering more than 60 years after the invasion, and in Xinjiang with its million or more incarcerated Uyghurs. Their only crime is to be religious. How much more will Hong Kong suffer, whose crime is freedom of thought?

## Survival and Life

No matter what the media message, most leaders tackling the virus have not acted like military campaigners and most aren't even talking as though they are. In some places the virus struck with ferocity and so unexpectedly that it emerged far more powerful than the government's ability to strategize any response. This group includes Iran, Spain and Italy. In other places, it tapped into pre-existing protocols for handling epidemic disease. Indeed despite grim warnings, Africa as a continent has not yet been decimated. In Sierra Leone and Congo they already know about clean hands and social

distancing. Airports have wash stations and nurses know to isolate the infected. As of today few African nations appear to have even 10,000 cases. Is Madagascar's herbal remedy also going to turn out to be a success? I have no idea, but I am clear that most people have not even heard that it might exist. Africa is too far over the horizon.



There are other places in the world where survival and life have more visibly become beacons of hope for the rest of us. Think New Zealand and Taiwan in the Pacific. Think Germany and Slovakia in Europe. The heading for this section gives it away of course. In each the government is led by a woman: Jacinta Arden. Tsai Ing-wen. Angela Merkel. Zuzana Caputova of Slovakia.

## Survival and Preservative Love – how to think well in Virus Times

One of my guiding lights in working on peacemaking is the philosopher Sara Ruddick. Her book on the thought structures and strategies of parents who care for small children caused a stir. Detractors

## WOMENS' WORK

### Repair work: National leadership asserts itself

wondered: Surely mothers don't think? They feel. They are too busy. Diapers and food, inoculations and table manners are not the stuff out of which epistemologies are made.

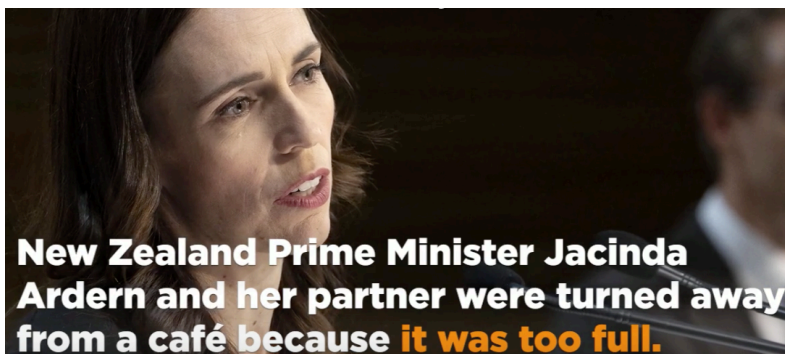
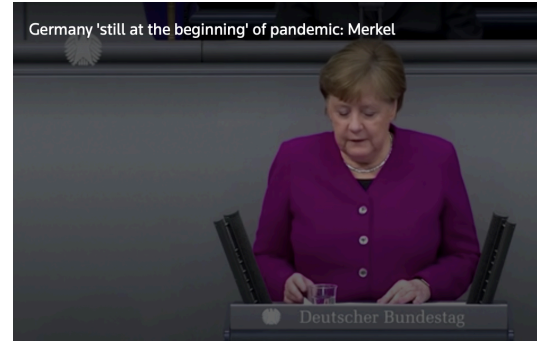
Ruddick's "practicalist" epistemology considers that parenting tasks, most often undertaken by mothers, demand high level reasoning in three specific domains: preservative love, the development and use of personal aptitudes, and training for social fit. Furthermore, similar reasoning skills are of great value not just in family life but also in the public arena. Other academics added valuable depth to Ruddick's schema by arguing that "preservative love," to some suggestive of merely of teaching how to cross a road and health check-ups, requires of many parents the skill to analyze strategies for survival itself.

So: Good parents do three things. Preserve Life. Fit the Person to the Society. Grow the Person's Natural Aptitudes.

Sacrificial leaders like Xi are happy to shed lives and change the social reality into which people now need to fit.

Lazy teenagers like Trump and Putin turn all attention back on themselves, their feelings and their freedoms. Think Trump refusing to wear a mask in public. Anything for attention, for their right to act without social constraint anywhere, at any time.

Under pressure from a pandemic scale virus, smart leaders preserve life, nurture people's skills and try to develop new, inclusive strategies for social relations. Sadly for a rather large a segment of the US public such goals sound dangerously socialist and/or feminist.



Looking for vivid evidence of the mothering/practicalist in governing I found myself contrasting the websites crafted in Arkansas and New Zealand to set out instructions for "reopening" social interaction at religious events. New Zealand has confidence that its people have learned their social roles well enough to interact judiciously. Arkansas sets down basic assumptions and rules. COVID 101.

## COVID-19 GUIDANCE FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP Arkansas

Effective May 4, 2020:

During Phase 1 of Reopening Arkansas, places of worship may resume corporate, in-person services if they can comply with the following directives:

Houses of worship are **strongly encouraged to continue to offer online platforms** for participation in worship because it is not yet advisable/feasible for all congregants to come for in-person services Post signs at all building entrances advising congregants not to enter if

They have had a fever of 100.4°F or higher in the past 2 days

They have cough, shortness of breath, or other symptoms typical of Covid-19 They have had known exposure to someone with Covid-19 in the past 14 days . . . . .

New Zealand moved to Alert Level 2 at 11:59pm on Wednesday 13 May.

## Play it safe New Zealand

You have more freedom of movement at Alert Level 2, but it's up to each one of us to keep the rest of New Zealand safe.

These are the most important things that you can remember and do:

COVID-19 is still out there. Play it safe. . . . .

## Religious events and public venues

### Funerals and tangihanga

Up to 50 people can attend funerals and tangihanga at Alert Level 2.

Funeral directors can register with the Ministry of Health to allow up to 50 people to attend a funeral or tangihanga. The Ministry of Health must be satisfied that a range of public health measures can consistently be met, such as physical distancing and hand hygiene.

Food and drink is permitted after the service provided the venue can meet the physical distancing and hygiene requirements for food preparation and serving. This includes groups of no more than 10 people eating together, food served as individual portions and not from a buffet, and no alcohol may be served or consumed on the premises.

In the United States many people, myself included, express concern that the right to be ourselves might be at risk, that harmful constraints might be proposed which would threaten my identity. Applying Sara Ruddick's terminology this represents a yearning to be my own controller of social fit. This is indeed a vital part of human life. Right now however, and with particular urgency, smart government leaders balance empowerment/aptitudes and survival/preservative love and with training for the new kinds of social fit that co-existence with this virus will demand. The stability of this triad can easily turn destructive if any one of its elements becomes dominant. Excessive commitment to survival will lead to

paranoid isolation. Excessive commitment to social fit, already intense enough in the glare of social media, risks the torture of unbearable levels of external scrutiny. Excessive commitment to personal aptitudes means people with guns feel free to storm legislative chambers crying “end the lockdown.”

### **Repair – Avoid looking back to what we once had. Aim forwards to create a bright future**

Though keeping people alive as COVID roams the world is admirable, there is a risk in all that smart maternal thinking which empowered whole societies to adopt new patterns of cleanliness and distance shopping, learning and work. The risk is that crisis oriented approaches will block our view of the wider question: what kind of a world do we want to create?

Clearly we want one which is more resilient should another virus spread. We need to become more like Sierra Leone, ready to whisk out the cleaning stations and stand in lines 2 meters apart from each other. Quite likely we can learn from Japan and Taiwan that masks are appropriate whenever we fear we might put others at risk even if it is just a cold. We could learn from Taiwan how to spur skilled and speedy technical innovation on behalf of the greater good. All these, along with a better system of stockpiles kept in reserve for perilous times, stockpiles of food and fuel, of medicines and equipment, of shelter and bedding. Even perhaps stockpiles for off-site education and offsite-arts.

Repair for resilience is one thing. Deeper, at the social and physical infrastructure is where we need to do the work if we are to create that bright future. Donald Trump’s 2016 election campaign was successful of course in part because he promised infrastructure work but he was looking back – patch the potholes, repair the bridges, renovate the coal fired plants to continue using coal.

The future I am talking back cannot ignore maintaining the old while we create the next but the next has now to come into view: the physical infrastructure that puts a roof over the heads of those who have none; the social infrastructure that gives essential workers financial returns that recognize our total dependence on them; health care systems that do not depend on an employment for financing health, rearranging international relations to lower material dependencies and increase collaboration.....

There must be and will be debates about what direction that deeper repair should go. The virus, by calling the old ways into question has made space for our imaginations. Let’s get them to work.

## WHAT CAN ANYONE DO?

Two suggestions

(1) **Make memorials for those who lost their lives to this virus in 2020.** There's no need for me to say again that this is not a war, but so many deaths lie will heavy on the whole world and I am pretty sure we need collective and not just private ways of mourning.

Inspirations for my particular version of a memorial? The AIDs quilt. Judy Chicago's sculpture The Dinner Party. Maya Lin's Vietnam War Wall. We cannot know how the ravages of this illness will fall away, though some hope for an early vaccine. Regardless, 2020 is already a transformative year. We can turn our sewing skills freshened up in masks towards memorial panels. Like this.



2020 April 4  
Walter North  
aged 83

Embroider a small square with a design — the cover peony is my suggestion if an image would help you get started. Start sewing any time. If sewing a group panel, add more flowers and more panels if more people die.

Following Maya Lin's vision, list people for a group panel by date rather than by name, thus making a memorial expandable if new losses occur. Made of cloth like this, squares can be sewn together to make a wall hanging that can be installed where it would be right to remember groups of people. Nursing Homes and Prisons, Transit Centers and Hospital staff rooms. Churches, Temples and Mosques. Schools and Colleges. Naval aircraft carriers

Attach to the peony a rather smaller rectangle with a name and dates. Like this.

Leading with the year and the date is compatible across cultures and countries as well.

A sheet of light-weight paper with the peony image lies inside this pamphlet alongside advice about one way to do some sewing.

(2) Take up some role in the USA 2020 elections with passion and compassion.

### after the election

Rob Knapp October 2008

after the election  
anguish will continue— either the easy kind,  
the fault of my enemy,  
or the hard kind,  
the anguish my ally makes with my conniving.

after the election  
all beings will still need saving whether it rains red or blue

after the election  
bodhisattvas will still arise— either the easy kind,  
chanting like my friends,  
or the hard kind,  
those who see suffering I cannot but only my enemy can.

after the election  
all beings—all— will still need saving.

## DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS: The ReUnited States

Every four years the United States joins together to share in the election of a single team of leaders, the President and Vice President. All the other elections in which we vote, and there are thousands of offices nation-wide are, in some sense, local. They measure the ideals and intent of only some of us a city or county, port district or fire department, only occasionally even as much as an entire state.

Every ten years, as the Constitution requires, we are merged together in a national census, a count of every single person in the country, even visitors on a certain day. This year it was in April. Who knows how fair, complete or inclusive such a count could possibly be. Sadly its results will haunt us for 10 more years.

Every few decades some particular domestic or international event will rend and bind this society in fundamental ways: The Civil War, Jim Crow, Herbert Hoover's Great Depression, World War II, JFK's election and his assassination right after desegregating schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

2020 bids fair to be the year in which all three combine as they did when Abraham Lincoln was elected President, the first Republican ever to hold the office. Will Donald Trump be the last? I suspect not, because I make the assumption that the party will repair itself whenever he is done with it. I may be wrong. Rending and binding are quite often two sides of the same coin. What creates new bonds has to rend outdated ideas and connections.

In these highly polarized times it could seem fanciful to imagine a ReUnited States. There are threats to be sure. The current Republican party seems determined to corrupt voting rights as much as it can. Trying to learn to live with the virus has caused huge fissures as state governments tread different paths to health and repair. Millions and millions of us have lost their livelihoods. It is all too clear that Congress has once again managed to turn its "rescue" legislation into an amazing bounty for the rich and powerful.

And yet . . . what appeared to be an internal, Democratic Party debate about health care and the public option is now truly a matter of national discussion. Our romance with the tradition of employer driven health insurance is fading fast because 20% of us have no employer. The 1930s Great Depression included the entire country in a nationwide Social Security system, despite the fact that nothing resembling it had ever existed before. It does not seem naive to assume that the 2020 Depression will demand another large stride towards a more sustainable and intelligently managed health care system, both financing and its management. Andrew Cuomo in New York drove hospitals in his state into levels of cooperation heretofore completely inconceivable.

Even the reddest of States are waking up to the notion that "what affects the least of us affects us all." Everywhere there is talk about masks and social distancing, super spreaders and park closures, golf and airplanes. This is not Denmark and nor is it Japan. There is no underlying consensus but there are several common topics of conversation. All of us, no matter where, worry about senior citizens. Across the entire country, shops are making special opening times for vulnerable people and that category has now expanded beyond the age boundaries that were first set up. One of my Poli Sci gurus once said that



## DEEPER THAN ELECTIONS: The ReUnited States

momentum for change requires only a shared description of the problem. In so many polarized policy issues in recent years there seemed to be no way to reach even that modest benchmark. With the virus we are further ahead. Not home free but further ahead.

\* \* \*

These United States have probably never united in beliefs and policies. As a nation we are the embodiment of conflict, paradox and compromise. We accepted the cruelest compromise, the enabling of slavery as a minimum if the original 13 were to united in the first place. The electoral ambiguities that followed— small and large states having equal numbers of Senators, indirect election of the President and Vice-president, a central bank and national foreign policy, state control of health care and disaster management, are at the very best a mixed blessing.

So what can “reunited” look like after a year with the virus, when November comes around?

We would be all be voting, mostly by mail. Washington State’s “liberal” electorate has long inclined to Republicans when it comes to managing the franchise. The current incumbent Kim Wyman was the active agent behind the state’s decision to adopt an entirely mail ballot. We have lost a ritual and gained both fairness and inclusion. Voting by mail this year will spread and most of us will be glad.

Governors will still be working with scientists to set policies to cope with the continued presence of this virus in our land. If standards shift as time goes on, so they should. Government responses when the virus first showed itself were necessarily clumsy and often faulty. Remember the urgent quest for ventilators? That now has passed as the docs and the deaths have shown how few patients really gained from them. But masks? That’s different. We are not Chinese about them. China’s recent National “parliamentary” meeting had every single attendee in an identical mask. No, in the USA there are designer masks and home-made masks, and surgical masks, and anti-pollution biker masks and N95 masks and together they combine to limit the number of aerosol droplets that pass from person to person. Masks and distancing are expected to be as present in Arkansas church gatherings as they are in the city of Berkeley on people waiting in line at the fancy grocery store.

Many of us will also be working hard to elect a President ready to take responsibility in confronting the economic, educational, health, transport and above all the equity challenges we now so clearly face.

Franklin Roosevelt in similar times, set up for the USA a cabinet of leaders each of whom promoted different recovery projects. Some failed, many succeeded and over time the disaster retreated. Those who lived through it were forever transformed. So we will be by 2020.

There is an important reality which underlies all of the options, a reality we can chose to grasp with enthusiasm or a reality we can chose to forget. Here’s a slogan for it.

**AMERICA IS GREATER THAN TRUMP.**





Let's not forget that we can also laugh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uL52AuF4QzY>



Get Lost  
Corona  
by  
Daniel Emmett

Sarah Cooper mimes Trump speaks the words. Thanks to the Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/14/trump-lip-sync-video-memes-sarah-cooper-tiktoks-interview>

Read (or reread) the Hitch Hikers Guide to the Universe. It was a family favorite when our kids were young: the TV program and the books. We still have the books and the complete audio from its original incarnation as radio show. In the second volume the protagonists come upon a space ship full of cryosuspended bodies. Adams' prescient and hilarious mind concludes that these people, the Golgafrinchans were the humanoids who settled the earth. Arthur Dent our hero asks what they are"

*"You mean you've got a hold full of frozen hairdressers?" Arthur said.*

*"Oh yes," said the Captain. "Millions of them. Hairdressers, tired TV producers, insurance salesmen, personnel officers, security guards, public relations executives, management consultants, . . ." and telephone sanitisers to boot.*

Adams prescient? oh yes.

I for one would give a lot for a good haircut right now.

Personnel officers? They are vital in an employment crisis.

Also we need to sanitize everything!!