

Diary entry

March 21, 2020

I've been saving newspaper articles but not keeping a diary of the coronavirus epidemic. I doubt I'll be consistent but I'll try to make a few notes. I'm writing for great-grandchildren (probably my brother's great-grandchildren, or Eunice's great-grandchildren, I may not have any myself) so I may try to explain more than I might otherwise.

I'm Edward Ordman, born Sept 10, 1944, so 75 years old. My partner is Heidi Tobin, age 64. Not married since tax, insurance, and pension laws would make it extremely expensive. I'm retired from teaching college math and computer science; I'm Professor Emeritus, University of Memphis, TN. (I retired young, in 2001, since my previous wife Eunice was much older than I was; she died in 2016). Heidi is retired from teaching US military members kids on US military bases in Germany - mainly elementary and middle school - for 37 years, retired in summer 2018.

Here are some entries from my interfaith web page at <http://memphisirg.org/events>

Online notes March 15.

With so many churches not meeting, many of the usual bloodmobile visits and blood drives are being cancelled. Consider going to Lifeblood to donate blood.

In the last two days, deaths in Italy have more than tripled, the Washington Post reports 368 in a day. The virus got started later in the US, so those numbers are ahead for us - and we hope that big group meetings were shut down fast enough that the growth rate will be slower here. In Memphis, the Symphony, Playhouse on the Square, etc., have cancelled. The reaction in stores has been spotty - my local Aldi had practically bare shelves (e.g. no produce), Kroger was well stocked except in a few departments (shortage of paper towels, toilet paper, orange juice, eggs, for example) and all of the things missing at Kroger were in full supply at the nearby SaveALot (Stepherson's) at least when I looked. (Apparently Stepherson's has a clientele that lives paycheck-to-paycheck and doesn't have extra money to be able to afford to hoard.)

The Memphis Jewish Community Center is closing; kosher food will still be available from the "Holy Cow" restaurant there, on a basis of phone in your order and they will carry it out to your car, between noon and 1:30 PM. (For the daily special, phone in by 9:30 AM). The kosher restaurant at the Jewish Home remains closed except to residents.

The Civil Rights Museum is open as of March 15. (then changed and closed)

The Brooks Museum has closed, as of Sunday 5 PM, for two weeks. They have much more material on their website than they used to, by all means enjoy that! <http://www.brooksmuseum.org/>

PLEASE keep in touch with your neighbors, especially the elderly and those with health conditions, and see if they are OK and (if you are

going shopping) can you help them avoid a trip out among people. I've been getting an "all circuits are busy" signal on my phone at times, so I hope people are maintaining social contacts by phone, e-mail, and so on. Many houses of worship have the services on-line and have sermons available on-line and on-demand; discuss them or give feedback.

I was impressed with the letter Temple Israel sent out a few days ago, on-line at <https://timemphis.org/our-response-to-covid-19/>. The letter from Calvary Episcopal is not online on their site but they gave me permission to reproduce it online. Balmoral Presbyterian has an excellent reflection on Lent (Our Lenten Journey as Sabbath) which is online.

Online notes

Match 17

More churches are closing. I don't think it is practical for me to list them individually, and I've decided not to list the few that have said they will continue to hold regular Sunday services since I'm not convinced that increasing attendance there would be a good thing.

The National Civil Rights Museum has closed. The Southern College of Optometry has closed, making its routine eye services unavailable to patients. [My routine annual checkup there was cancelled. I think I'll wait to see an eye doctor in N, although I'm supposed to have appointments twice a year due to my nerve damage in the optic nerve.]

Many churches (and other places) have online services and prior sermons available online. Previous years lectures from the Calvary Lenten Lecture series are online.

The Memphis Islamic Center is continuing programs essentially every evening, but they are now online, I think at 8:15 PM. Look at <http://www.memphisislamiccenter.org/> Previous programs are on YouTube.

For those looking to fill time at home, or for religious school equivalents: I recommend the college-level courses from the "Great Courses" ([thegreatcourses.com](http://thegreatcourses.com)). I have a very large collection of these myself, mainly religion and history oriented but some math and others, left over from days when Eunice was laid up. I'm happy to lend them, give me a call if interested. (If I get more than one or two calls, I'll make a list of what I have.)

Keep a diary. Your grandchildren's grandchildren will be fascinated. While we all expect that in a few months society will return to normal, there are at least two alternatives. (a) if things get back to normal, people will want recollections of the crisis - like the dramatizations by St. Mary's school of the Memphis Yellow Fever epidemic. (b) If the new normal is different from the old, people will want to know about the "old days". My librarian contacts tell me that it is worth preserving both hard copy and computer files for family; a pdf file is more likely to be readable years from now than a .doc or .docx

A WEBSITE YOU MIGHT ENJOY (PODCASTS): <https://www.unitedandtogether.com/>

One of the more bizarre stories of these days is told by Dr. Scott Morris of the Church Health Center. A patient came in with breathing problems, saying he wouldn't come in if he thought it was a cold, but came in for fear it might be the new virus. The diagnosis: lung cancer. A very serious problem, but actually caught earlier than it might have been due to fear of coronavirus.

To motivate diary-keeping, a yellow fever recollection story: I was visited a few years ago by a lady from South Africa seeking information on her grandfather, who had moved from Memphis to Port Elizabeth. He was orphaned about 1890 in the Memphis Yellow Fever epidemic, turned up on a church doorstep, and was taken in. We found a record in the record book at St. Brigitte's Catholic Church, the original handwritten note (in Latin) by the priest. It said the priest had given a conditional baptism, having no knowledge of whether the child had been baptized previously; he believe he was about nine years old. In about 1903-04, the British were losing hundreds of thousands of horses in the Boer War in South Africa; they were buying large numbers of horses in Tennessee and gathering them in the seasonally-empty tobacco and cotton warehouses in Memphis. The young man was hired to care for the horses on a boat sailing from Memphis to Port Elizabeth, and stayed there, enlisting in the British army (which promised to give the soldiers land after the war, but never did so, my informant says.)

Online notes:

March 19

Notes rather by way of diary, to show how fast things are changing today.

Cases in most parts of the US are rising 40% to 60% per day. Some parts of the country are issuing "shelter in place" orders, that is, leave home only to go to the doctor or to get groceries. Several European countries did this in the last few days.

There is a bit of a scandal over the fact that some Florida beaches have not yet closed, allowing Spring Break crowds of young people for a few more days. [One of Eunice's granddaughters and her husband have gone to Miami. After a couple of days, with the beach and restaurants closed, they returned home. WI think the trip was a bad decision.]

Colleges and schools will not return from their previously extended spring breaks and are trying to arrange on-line classes.

Here in Memphis,

The zoo is closing (I had been hoping it would close buildings but keep outdoor exhibits open, but no.)

Pink Palace Museum has closed (including historic homes and Lichterman nature center - again, I'd hoped to keep the outdoors open at Lichterman.)

YMCAs closing, Wolfchase Galeria (the large shopping center) is closing.

Memphis Restaurants closed effective this evening (take-out allowed), unsure yet about the rest of Shelby County.

State parks are open but no group activities (e.g. no guided walks.)

Most City buildings in Memphis and Germantown closed.

Greek Festival, Memphis in May, Beale St Music Festival, many fundraising events canceled or postponed for an unknown period.

#### Online notes

March 20

A story from the 1918 epidemic, worth recalling, from the Jewish press. Can people provide me stories from other houses of worship, or other stories?

<https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/276310/influenza-1918-albuquerque-rabbi>

The Church Health Center's message to faith communities:

<https://churchhealth.org/fce>.

They also have a Facebook group with church-related covid-19 news:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/clergycovid19/>

The local Episcopal Bishop, Phoebe Roaf, issued a statement on March 17:

[https://www.facebook.com/episwtn/posts/1570945459726780?hc\\_location=ufi](https://www.facebook.com/episwtn/posts/1570945459726780?hc_location=ufi)

Memphis Islamic Center has moved its daily evening live stream to 7:45 PM <https://www.youtube.com/user/MemphisIslamicCenter>

<http://www.memphisislamiccenter.org/>

There is an unusual Stations of the Cross meditation online here:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=209248523746862>

Indie Memphis (the movie group) is trying to organize on-line screenings and discussions of interesting movies.

<https://www.indiememphis.org/movie-club>

Returning to my own diary, entry of March 21:

In mid-2019 Heidi and I decided to start traveling again (following a year and a half of major home remodeling after we got together full-time in mid-2018), hoping to do a lot of exotic travel while we were still medically able (in my case, age; in hers, heart trouble and anxiety issues.) In mid-January we went to Vietnam and Cambodia. This included a cruise down the Mekong River from Phnom Penh to the Mekong Delta. While we were in Cambodia, it became clear that the coronavirus later called covid-19 was spreading internationally. Our cruise boat was stopped at the border from Cambodia to Vietnam, in the middle of the river, and boarded by Vietnamese officers who asked each person about our health and took our temperatures. Questions included "have you had diarrhea, have you had coughing or sneezing?" Heidi said no to both (falsely). I said "Yes, ordinary traveler's diarrhea, my normal seasonal allergies." Heidi got very upset at me, fearing I might get the whole boat quarantined. The Vietnamese accepted my answers.

After a few days in Saigon, our tour ended. We flew to Hue for two and a half days, to visit places where Heidi's former husband Richard Toohey had served when he was in the US Air Force during the Vietnam war (he died in 2015, cancer attributed to agent orange exposure.) We hired a private guide and had wonderful tours of Hue and the former Demilitarized Zone and nearby battle sites - Quang Tri, The Rockpile, etc. By now fear of coronavirus was becoming widespread - one restaurant in Hue had a sign "No Chinese will be served." HJue has a large Chinese population and it

was assumed that some had been to China to visit family during the Tet holiday a few days earlier. (We saw a lot of Tet decorations in Hanoi, Saigon = Ho Chi Minh City but still commonly called Saigon, and Hue, but missed the actual celebrations since we were in Cambodia which does not celebrate Tet during the five-day holiday itself.)

On the flight from Saigon to Hue and the flight back, we were interviewed about health and our temperature taken (thermometer gun pointed at forehead) before boarding.

During the last three days we were in Hue and Saigon, our flight arrangements home changed at least four times. American Airlines pilots refused to fly to Hong Kong, so Hong Kong to Dallas flight cancelled. Vietnam barred Cathay Pacific from landing in Vietnam so our Saigon to Hong Kong flight cancelled. Some people from our cruise were trying to arrange flights Saigon - Singapore - Sydney - back to US, or around the world via Dubai or Kuwait. In the last twelve hours, Vietnam renewed landing rights for Cathay Pacific and we flew Cathay Pacific to Hong Kong - the Hong Kong airport was virtually empty except for a few plane loads of people changing plans - and the Cathay Pacific from Hong Kong to Chicago, long wait there before a United Airlines flight to Memphis. We'd originally been booked on American Airlines - I far prefer Cathay Pacific, if I have a choice. Better meals, better service, more space. (I'd known that from earlier trips.) Our trip - 32 hours door to door - began and ended on February 8 due to crossing the Date Line. We were health-interviewed and temperature taken four times between the Saigon airport and release from immigration in Chicago. (In one case, consecutive tests by State Dept contractors and Homeland Security contractors, who joked that the two organizations could not cooperate and save money.)

On return to the US, Heidi stayed at home almost entirely for 14 days. I went out for groceries. Heidi came along when I gave a preplanned talk at Lemoyne-Owen College. I'd donated some African woodcarvings there as we downsized (from two condos to one in Memphis, six houses to two counting all of Heidi's places in Germany and Virginia) and they asked me to speak about those carvings during the Black History Month lecture series there. I don't know much about African wood carvings but several came from Malawi so I talked partly about the history of Malawi, where the long-time dictator had been educated at historically black schools in the US and where he eventually retired and presided over a very peaceful transition to a multi-party democratic government. The audience was small, which was fine under the circumstances, (it was raining), although in the third week of February there was still little fear of the epidemic.

President Trump, who has had a severe opposition to anything suggestive of science, had spoken saying the disease was "milder than the flu", would not be an epidemic, that the US government would control it completely, that it was a Democratic hoax, etc. The right-wing press and radio commentators said it was a Chinese germ-warfare experiment designed specifically to weaken the United States. (Trump changed dramatically in less than a month, denying he had said the things he had been filmed saying earlier.)

After February 23, when we felt free to go out again (having had no symptoms, the disease apparently usually showing within 14 days after exposure) we resumed my active inter-religious activity. I attend churches, synagogues, mosques, etc., and try to keep them all on speaking terms. In one seven-day period we went to at least nine religious events. a typical program for me and only a bit more active than usual for Heidi (Eunice and I occasionally managed 14 in a week). I recall within a ten-day period or so Sunday Services at Holy Communion Episcopal and Balmoral Presbyterian, five Lenten Lectures at Calvary Episcopal downtown, Friday evening at Temple Israel, Saturday morning Torah Study at Temple Israel, a coffee-discussion at the Turkish House. I went to the Friday sermon at Masjid As-Salaam and Heidi to a Turkish House cooking class. The first Saturday in March was Mosque Open House day - we went to Masjid As-Salaam and the Memphis Islamic Center, at the latter I had a nice talk with my good friend Anwar Arafat, now the Imam there (I had become friendly a year or so ago when he was at Masjid Ar-Rahman. He's an excellent speaker and explainer in English.)

By March 10 it was clear that the virus was spreading in the US and that there would have to be drastic measures to control it - although due to governmental neglect and errors, which I'm inclined to blame on Trump cutting science budgets and cutting science and epidemic advisory staff, there had been very little testing and diagnosis by this date, and little planning. Even on March 20, when over 1000 cases had been diagnosed in New York, relatively few tests had been given and one university estimated that New York City probably had 10,000 or more undiagnosed cases.

Anyhow, by March 10 we realized that normal life would change dramatically. We took the widow of one close friend out to a restaurant meal on March 13, when restaurant traffic was already light, and another on March 16, when the restaurant was essentially empty. We all agreed that that was likely to be our last restaurant meal for many months.

Heidi has been practicing fancy cooking at home, and I'm very much enjoying the results. But on March 18, as an experiment, I went out and brought home Vietnamese food carry-out. This was my second time bringing home carry-out, one had been perhaps March 14 +/- as an experiment.

(end of "remembered reports", although I may add more later)

Telephone trouble: (Written down since I've enjoyed my grandmother's memories of "the old days", e.g. pre-automobile.)

It has been raining a great deal, and on about March 12, our land-line telephone ringer stopped working (the phone could call out, with static on the line, and if someone called we sometimes heard a small tinkle.) I had to wait an hour on hold to get the telephone repair person (I was transferred between three people, with that total hold time). The web site and ATT app did not work or just told me to call telephone repair on the phone. They said a repairman could not come until March 21. (Luckily, for the last year Heidi and I have had cell phones; we were very late adopters of cell phones). They gave no news on when on March 21

he might come, and on March 20 I called to ask, hanging up after an hour and a quarter on hold. The repairman came this morning March 21, spent an hour tracing lines, and said that a manhole down the street was full of water; he could request that the company send a team to drain it and check the splice there, but he had no idea when that would come; he frankly said they were spending little money repairing copper wire anymore, and it was time for me to give up the land line. I hate having to carry the phone room to room in the house; I'll try to rig a many-handset cordless phone to talk to the cell phone by wire or Bluetooth and ring when the cell phone gets called. Then I'll probably have to change phone numbers on my business cards etc. For the moment, I'll settle for a recording on my land-line phone service telling people to call my cell.

Afternoon of March 21. We are getting some automated phone calls from the local government, New London, NH. One today reports that the Sutton Fire Department is stocking canned foods and that they can be picked up there at certain hours; people who can't get out or have other special needs should call the Sutton fire department to make deliveries. (Sutton is a very small town, large grocery stores are at least ten miles away.)

March 22, 2020

A great many businesses are closing ? especially places where people might congregate or interact, theaters, gyms, bowling alleys. Best Buy, a large appliance and electronics store chain, will not let people in ? they will take on-line and phone orders, deliver and leave a box outside your door, or you can drive to their parking lot and they'll carry smaller items out to look at or buy in the parking lot. Home Depot, the biggest home-repair and hardware chain, is having reduced hours but still open.

I'm continuing downsizing, sorting old files, scanning old papers, e-mailing people (a lot with Rabbi Feivel Strauss; we might do an on-line class together in lieu of one of temple Israel's usual class meetings. Heidi and I are calling a lot of family members and old friends, in lieu of visits. We still hope we can drive to New Hampshire from Memphis next month - it is too cold now, 14 degrees F and snow predicted later this week there. Heidi is doing a lot of jigsaw puzzles.

March 23, AM

A friend, a widow, has been knocked down in the grocery store by a man grabbing a loaf of bread out of her hands. (The manager did tell the man never to come back to the store.) (This happened in Utah.) Here in Memphis, the shelves at my local Kroger's grocery are perhaps 1/8 empty - very little bread and many canned goods absent, as well as many fruits and vegetables. They have lowered hours - used to be 6 AM -11 PM, with one Kroger's a few miles away open 24 hours. Hours now are 7 AM- 9 PM, with the first hour in the morning reserved for the elderly and handicapped. I went this morning - they were limiting purchases of toilet paper, paper towels, bottled water, and some other things, and the manager was arguing with some people at the checkout line who had piled shopping carts high with toilet paper and bottled water.

The New York Times finally published a graph of the rate of growth of diagnosed cases on a logarithmic chart, something that had been much needed - it shows clearly that in two to three weeks the US could easily

have over a million diagnosed cases, if we are capable of doing enough testing.

I was looking through a few slightly older newspapers - as recently as March 9 the Christian Science Monitor had an article talking about the possibility of the US shipping surgical masks, respirators, etc., to China to help with the epidemic there. Only two weeks later, we are worried about how fast China can make them and ship them to the US to help with the epidemic here. This reminds me of how suddenly this came on.

The newspapers are starting to attack on Chinese in the US, presumably because President Trump insists on calling it the "Chinese Virus".