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## News

- **Knock on Wood!** I have been heartened and grateful at the level of cooperation we have experienced from parents, faculty, and--most importantly--students. Their diligent distancing and mask wearing has been a tough adjustment, but our students have been incredibly compliant in a spirit of care for each other and the staff here. So far the net effect of our coordinated approach (and our relative isolation) is zero COVID-19 cases! A powerful, if unintended, product of our cozy bubble is a heightened sense of community at Oli--things feel very good.
- **What if?** While we are working hard to maintain an infection resistant environment, we cannot guarantee an infection free one. We have in place rapid and proven measures to detect, isolate, and treat cases and our COVID Team reviews these weekly with our RN, using CDC, NHDH, NHDE, and other authoritative sources as our guide.
- **Gobble Gobble!** Thanksgiving will be a cozy affair right here in Pike, NH, complete with free range turkeys (grown here by our own Sharon McCallie-Stellar and her rancher husband) and homemade everything. We will have fun events including the official pardoning of one of these turkeys by yours truly.
- **Holiday Bonus!** We appreciate your patience as we work to provide enough calendar clarity to plan while also responding in real time to COVID risks. Since cases are currently going up, not down, we plan to implement the same bubble-generating policies over winter break that we employed at the start of school. To achieve the initial two-week home quarantine for both faculty and students, while also allowing for some holiday travel, we have decided to extend winter break. We can do this without missing instructional time because we are skipping our usual Thanksgiving week at home. We will communicate more details regarding winter break soon, but for your planning purposes, our revised winter break dates are now: **December 18 - January 11 and 12**. Faculty may travel from December 18 - 28th, and must stay in the area for self-quarantine and testing from December 29 until school starts.

## Dear Oliverian Family:

Here's a text exchange from earlier this week...

**Mom:** HAPPY ANNIVERSARY WILL AND BETH!!!

**Beth:** What?! Oh my gosh, you're right. Thank you! I totally forgot! : O

**Will:** Thanks for the reminder, Mom! I forgot too! What do you have planned for us? ; )

**Mom:** Hahaha. Big dinner, balloons, champagne, fireworks, and a marching band. Don't be late!

**Will:** If we start driving now, we can make it to Kentucky by 2 am--not technically our anniversary, but whatever. Keep the lights on.

Forgetting our anniversary has become a cherished, if accidental, tradition for Beth and me. For the first 15 of

our 27 years of marriage, anniversaries were well-planned, well-funded events fraught with high and divergent expectations. We did what we assumed was normal and necessary--dressing up, fancy dinners, cards, gifts, champagne, flaming desserts. Alas, nothing kills romance like trying too hard; so, perhaps unsurprisingly, these celebrations often ended with me sleeping on the couch.

Then one year we just forgot.

We were in bed with the lights out after a busy day when Beth whispered, "I think it's our anniversary." We both checked our phones and cracked up. It was, sure enough, October 23, but only for another hour or so. So we turned on the lights, got up, and took a sleepy walk with ruffled hair to our local late-night restaurant in Boulder for beers and a brownie sundae. It was the best anniversary we'd ever had.

Since then, we have practiced a kind of half-intentional forgetfulness regarding anniversaries. No calendar checking. No planning. No gifts. No expectations. They just kind of sneak up on us, less a fraught attempt to resurrect the romance that led to our wedding than a gentle reflection on what has followed--the good and the hard, the sickness and the health, the plenty and the want.

These days, we don't show up for our anniversary--dressed up, nervous, expectant; instead, our anniversary shows up for us, sometimes in the form of a text message. The absence of hoopla allows us to take a calm and reflective breath before signing up (with a nod and a kiss and maybe a hastily purchased glass of champagne and repurposed birthday card) for another year of this singular adventure called "Us".

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This year will force all of us to "forget" some of the traditions we have assumed are normal and necessary. The usual conventions for birthdays, holidays, visits, and vacations will have to yield to quarantines and travel limitations and other moratoriums resulting from this pesky pandemic. But I suspect that, like our anniversaries, relinquishing expectations for *how* we celebrate might bring into relief *why* we celebrate.

We have already had this experience with the 2020 virtual spring graduation. There was much angst over the necessary absence of pomp and circumstance. But the surprise was how intimate it felt to literally and figuratively zoom-in on each graduate in their own home with their own family and celebrate them in a way impossible in an auditorium. Like Beth's and my beer and brownie anniversary, it was arguably the best celebration of its kind I've ever experienced.



My hope is that a few things will result from disrupted norms. The result of less frequent contact with loved ones, aka distance, might make our hearts grow fonder, our appetite for connection greater. Birthdays might be less a noisy party than a focused celebration of a person's existence, journey, and future. The absence of family during thanksgiving might make us all the more thankful.

Saturday is Halloween. For my three and a half year-old, this was supposed to be the culmination of a full year of anticipated candy collecting from strangers. We planned to don Colton's battery-powered skeleton costume, join some friends, a drive to the local neighborhood with the most houses and best candy, and hit it hard. This would be followed by a party with cider and donuts followed by a sugar coma. Great stuff. But instead, Halloween 2020 will have to be less about a candy expedition and more about cozy time with mom and dad at home, drinking cider and cuddling on the couch in our costumes in front of a not too scary animated Halloween movie. Maybe that's not such a bad thing.

A well-researched feature of highly resilient people is a talent for "reframing" challenges, changes, and setbacks--aka seeing the glass as half full, looking for silver linings, counting blessings, making lemonade, et cetera. For some, this comes naturally. For others, like me, like most of our students, it requires practice. As part of my own practice, I am constantly looking for the forced and (hopefully) fleeting opportunities these times are providing to abandon form in favor of meaning and to connect more deeply with the original purposes of these disrupted traditions.

In most cases connecting with the "why" of cherished traditions means connecting with gratitude, joy, generosity, hope, (candy), and--most importantly--each other. If we can manage to do that, our glasses won't be half full. They'll be overflowing.

Warmly and hopefully,

*Will*

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