

FINDING LIGHT IN A LOST YEAR

by Carin Fahr Shulusky

EXCERPT

April 2020 – When It Rains, It Pours

On April 1, I picked up my calendar, as I did at the beginning of every month—usually to see what we had coming up and to schedule more—and started crossing off everything. I had already crossed off the March trip to Paris. Now I crossed off this month’s planned trip to the banking conference in San Francisco. I slashed through the conference in New York. And with a little more pain, I crossed off the two Broadway shows to which I had tickets. An old college girlfriend was going to go with me to one and Dan the other. Broadway closed. New York closed. All crossed off, as was the St. Louis Symphony concert to which we had tickets. Canceled. Hockey, canceled. Three birthday parties, canceled. My appointment at the nail salon, canceled. Hairdresser, canceled. Canceled, canceled, canceled. April was looking so gloomy.

The only exercise I was getting was walking through one of our beautiful parks with the kids. Sometimes, we took bikes and rode a trail. But with April came gloom and rain and even that little bit of escape became impossible. Then the St. Louis County Executive closed all county parks. We were now required to wear a mask if we were out in public, especially indoors, and to stay six feet apart wherever we were. The gloom was growing daily. My life had no order. We were in free fall.

On April 9, we got a big shot in the arm, as it were, when \$2,400 appeared in our checking account—a gift from the U.S. government. Officially the money was part of the Economic Impact Payment, but the payments were more often called stimulus checks. We just called it salvation. Like many families, we weren’t sure how we would make ends meet. This money was a gift from heaven—or the government, depending on your point of view.

By the second week of April, our school district was making an effort at learning. They asked parents to pick up “home learning packets” from the school. When I drove up to the school, someone handed me the packet for our kids’ grade levels. But when I got home, there was little explanation

about the work. It was terribly disorganized and made little sense to me. Katlin wanted to learn more, and Oliver wanted to learn less. I just wanted more alcohol. Lots more. I decided hard times called for hard alcohol. Wine was OK now with lunch, but by dinner time, I needed a cocktail.

I set up a place in the basement family room for the kids to study. I tried hard to make Oliver work on letters and sight words. He would work with me for maybe thirty minutes, then he'd start disrupting everything I did. He'd rip papers and run away. Meanwhile, Katlin was trying to figure out her lessons with great frustration. She didn't know what was wanted of her, and I couldn't figure it out either. Oliver did everything in his considerable ability to disrupt our efforts. Most sessions ended with all three of us crying.

Not only was I failing at trying to teach my kids, I was failing at keeping them out of Nathan's living room office. Every time Oliver ran away from me, he ran right into one of Nathan's meetings. No order. No peace. No joy.