

The Pandemic, Walking, and Self Care by Eileen Anderson

COVID-19 has invaded our lives and altered our lifestyles. The recommendation is, "Stay home, do not go out unless you have to." How do outdoor enthusiasts cope with this? How do extroverts cope with social isolation? The introverts have to take care of us extroverts. For me, social media and Zoom have been a blessing. I don't feel socially isolated, especially when we can share pictures of outdoor scenes and communicate with each other. Does stay at home mean stuck inside or safe inside? One of my favorite authors, Laura Ingalls Wilder, wrote, "Some old-fashioned things, like fresh air and sunshine, are hard to beat."¹

Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books have been given much attention since the lockdown. Her book, *The Long Winter*, focuses on her family being isolated at home in winter with no supplies while trapped by mounds of snow. Laura's family and their neighbors were afraid to go out because they never knew when a blizzard would come. On the other hand, we are in a state of hysteria, hoarding toilet paper, paper towels, hand sanitizers, soap, etc. We are afraid to go out for fear of contracting the virus. There are others who feel that this is not comparable to what Laura described in *The Long Winter*, since we are not starving, we have insulated houses, and most of us have transportation. It is now spring with small businesses shut down and essential businesses open. We are instructed to stay six feet apart from one another and to wear face coverings.

I live in southern Connecticut, where the mountains, parks, water company properties, and shoreline provide wide open spaces. Yes, the facilities such as restrooms and camping cabins are closed. However, it is much more sanitary, even in normal times, to relieve yourself in the woods rather than the park facilities. Some of the most popular Connecticut state parks like Sleeping Giant and Hammonasset are getting so crowded that only a certain

number of cars are allowed. I try to live by Laura Ingalls Wilder's observation. I walk in a park or wooded area as much as I can. Plenty of space and fresh air easily allow social distancing. Bicycle rides in remote areas are healthy as well. Outdoor areas provide fresh air, exercise opportunities, and vegetation, all of which relieve stress. Stress is what causes people to be sick. One could only heal in a relaxed state. Fresh air and exercise promote healing.

Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, observed, "So I never lose an opportunity of urging a practical beginning, however small, for it is wonderful how often in such matters the mustard-seed germinates and roots itself."² The garlic mustard plants are seen growing in early spring unaware of the coronavirus, taking over meadows and woods. Florence Nightingale believed in an approach to healthcare that treats the whole person. She stated, "People say the effect is only on the mind. It is no such thing. The effect is on the body, too."³ Similar to Florence Nightingale's approach, as a Reiki practitioner, I have been trained to place hands on the client to stimulate the resting part of the nervous system, providing emotional and physical balance to the body. Since the protocol during the pandemic is distancing, my hands-on work and teaching have had to be postponed until they are medically safe. Instead, at this time I became a Reiki Master practitioner consultant and support my clients with remote treatments and meditations. This change in my practice is like a seed germinating. At home, my cat Gretagirl hunkers down by me while I share remote Reiki treatments and meditations with other practitioners. She doesn't recognize COVID-19.



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Pandemic Self Care (continued)

by Eileen Anderson

My distant Reiki practices have been growing like flowers in spring. Surrounding myself with nature has promoted that growth in sharing Reiki in these new ways with clients and fellow practitioners as well as current and potential students.

There is research about the 1918 flu in which patients in open air hospitals improved. Three former nurse co-workers, a retired speech pathologist, and myself were unable to visit our retired nurse friend, a resident of a nursing home. We substituted the visit for a walk at Hammonasset State Park in her honor. The walk was very healing for us. This is how "The Pandemic Health Care Walkers" was established.



Spring does not recognize COVID-19. Exploring the outdoors is one of the best ways to cope with the pandemic. Social distancing in the outdoors is less challenging than trying to avoid people while grocery shopping. Southern Connecticut offers land trusts, water company properties, shorelines, and neighborhood walks to explore. I should also mention that local cemeteries are peaceful places to explore. Despite the confusing spring weather, we "Pandemic Health Care Walkers" explore. Walking with our faces covered and taking care to avoid people makes us resemble bank robbers, especially when we are out of the woodlands and at an ATM. As we walk on different terrains, wildflowers, stone walls, and trees in different stages of budding greet us.

Birds, turtles, snakes, frogs, and ducks are in their habitats. We see dogs walking with their owners and even one swimming in the river at Tyler Mill Preserve. Plants and animals are unaware of the pandemic. Identifying interesting wildflowers and other plants soon became a passion for us. One of the pandemic walkers was intrigued by stone walls and bricks from an abandoned foundation, which gave her ideas to beautify her garden. Waterfalls brought us moments of peace and serenity. The sharing of perennial plants from one garden to another has become routine.

Other activities include bicycling with the pandemic walkers. UC Aristocrat, my friend's Morgan horse, grazes in the field and comes to greet us as we return from a bike ride. As my husband and I walk down our street, our elderly neighbor is taking care of her property complying with the order to stay home. She is smiling while she greets us.



How does one cope with the pandemic? It's being outdoors in nature, gardening, and Reiki practice and self care. The first week of May was Nurses' Week. What did we Pandemic Health Care Walkers do? We put on our face coverings and hit the trails.

¹ Whipple, Annette. "Laura Ingalls Wilder Quote and Printable," *The Laura Ingalls Wilder Companion: Exploring the Pioneer World of Laura Ingalls Wilder* (blog), April 27, 2020. <https://www.wildercompanion.com/2020/04/laura-ingalls-wilder-quote-and-printable.html>

² Cook, Edward, *The Life of Florence Nightingale: in two volumes. Vol. II (1862-1910)*. London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1913. Release date: July 16, 2012. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/40058/40058-h/40058-h.htm>

³ Nightingale, Florence, *Notes on nursing: what it is, and what it is not*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860. <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/nightingale/nursing/nursing.html>