

To Hug or Not to Hug....That Is the Question...

By Barbara Meltzer

We Village members are doing our best to cope during the Pandemic by setting up new routines, decluttering our houses, and occasionally treating ourselves to yummy desserts.

But after almost four months, the Pandemic continues. The virus spikes and more people are hospitalized. Yet, Los Angeles moves into Phase Three of opening up the economy.

What rituals or behavior, we wonder, have members changed---if any? Masks still being worn? Finally getting to a favorite restaurant? What about that overdue haircut? Visits with friends or family that are not Facetimed or Zoomed? And what about hugs?

Here are some responses from Village members:

Barbara and Dale Joyner now social distance with a limited number of friends for Shabbat dinner while watching live-streamed temple services. As part of their Shabbat ritual, Dale has mastered the art of challah making. The Joyners have also allowed their house cleaners back, but to clean hard surfaces only. "We leave the house and return two hours after they have left," says Barbara, who also now goes to the market once a week between 6 and 7:30 a.m. She admits to having "an insane glove/mask ritual."

Susan Levine has "confessed" to getting a haircut. Having the first appointment of the day, Susan felt safe in the one-person shop. Susan's overall plan is to wait a minimum of two weeks after a service reopens before going. While her "toenails are turning into claws," she will wait until the end of June for her "much-needed mani-pedi." And to ensure absolute safety for her husband Joel and herself, Susan is determined "not to attend any Trump rallies."

Andrea and Terry Pullan have been very strict due to ongoing contact with their grandsons, baby Asher and 4-1/2 year old Noah. Because they have all self-quarantined, the family will be going on a little vacation to an Airbnb that awaits them in Murrieta Hot Springs.

Devoted to her two grandchildren, Sandy Silas has found a safe way to visit with them weekly. She attended a peaceful demonstration that passed by her house and bought flowers from a flower truck in her neighborhood. Sandy and her husband, Perry Oretzky, have enjoyed the company of friends at their home, all socially distanced and masked.

I have a small patio just outside my living room. It is filled with mostly potted plants and small bushes that I tend carefully. I do have a gardener who visits about every four months to do the things I cannot do. After much pondering, I decided a visit from Neeley would be safe. He didn't need to enter my apartment to reach the patio. We were both masked and gloved and talked while distancing. It worked. I felt so good about the decision and I do think all of the plants whispered a little thank you to me.

As things stand, we are pretty much on our own to determine how much risk we are willing to take. But about those un-hugged hugs...New Yorker cartoonist Emily Flake said, "The hug we couldn't hug, seemed to manifest as an almost visible thing between us and float away unsatisfied and disconsolate." Let's all find a way to save the hugs and the unseen smiles...There will come a time, hopefully soon, when we can set them free.