

## Home Alone

Bonnie Carnivale

We arrived home from Tucson March 17, 2020, shopped for groceries March 18; I at Hannaford's and Wally at BJ's where he scored a 12-pound bag of King Arthur all-purpose, unbleached flour. (I didn't know why I needed a 12-pound bag of flour but Wally had heard it was a dear item.) Then we isolated.

It's April 11th and everyone is *social distancing*; this phrase new to our conversation, this behavior our new normal. I've used up that 12-pounds of flour. This is what it made:

Two loaves of old-fashioned white bread made with an egg and milk and shortening, a bread that makes a 3-cheese grilled cheese sandwich that tastes like home, and grandma.

Two loaves of oatmeal bread with molasses and sunflower seeds so rich and full of goodness.

One round loaf of country bread with some wheat flour and topped with seeds and oatmeal.

Two round loaves of French Country bread, a two-day process, with a tang similar to sourdough.

Two loaves of Italian Easter Bread, with grated Pecorino Romano cheese and lots of fresh ground pepper, a family tradition I've recently adopted with a recipe from Wally's mother's cousin's wife, lolanda.

A loaf of cranberry bread—nut-free.

Banana bread with the surprise of toasted coconut and almond extract.

My friend Tom's recipe for perfect chocolate chip cookies and

Betty Crocker's peanut butter cookies made with almond butter instead of peanut butter.

When I wasn't baking, we were walking. Every day except that rainy one. I tried walking with friends but when I learned that they weren't taking Dr. Fauci's or Dr. Redfield's advice as stringently as Wally and I, I stopped. It made me feel creepy. So, I've embraced my inner recluse. And oddly, I don't mind. That I don't mind is also creepy.

When not walking we work in the yard where I think about nothing except the next leaf or weed, and I count the swells of prospective daffodil blooms still snug in their pale green garb holding tight to their slender leaves. (The thing about daffodils—plant a couple dozen bulbs in your yard and they multiply. I've spent the last several years sharing the separated bulbs I dig up.) Our yard is just about cleaned up so I've moved across our road to the un-lived-in house where I begin by removing leaves from around daffodils that I planted two years ago.

One day we drove to my brother's property; his 36 acres on Meaderboro Road in Farmington. Dan was there, cutting down young pines to clear the field. He kept his preferred 10-foot distance. His Carla stopped with coffee and donuts for him and we visited, they sitting on a log, we 12 feet away in our camp chairs. After a bit Carla went back to work and Dan returned to his trees. Wally and I crossed

the field and into the woods near the southwestern property line designated by a stone wall, our destination an old family cemetery. Whose family is unknown to us. The cemetery is our unofficial project. I planted daffodils there last year. We pulled out pine seedlings. We'll go back soon with a saw to cut over-hanging limbs and trimmers to hack back overgrown juniper bushes and rakes to sweep away the leaves.

The foundation of Dan and Carla's house is complete, the septic in, the well dug. The house will sit on the height of land with field and woods and mountain views. I can't wait for it to be finished. Carla is an architect; it will be an unusual house with a flat roof for a deck and a garden.

We had a picnic and as I looked up at blue sky, wisps of clouds, vultures riding the currents I knew I could stay here—quarantine here. It didn't feel at all creepy.