

Until Further Notice: A Year in Pandemic Time

Amy Kaler

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Determined to be a “faithful witness” to COVID-19, sociology professor Amy Kaler documented her shifting emotions, disrupted thinking, and attraction to nature. Spanning the year starting with mid-March of 2020, her concise, penetrating essays are valuable snapshots into life during lockdown, in response to the unknown.

As the unprecedented became quotidian, Kaler, a single parent, explored her new relationships to time and risk. Supermarket shortages reminded her of being in Zimbabwe in the early 1990s, and standing in crowded lines sparked her anxiety. A dual American-Canadian citizen, she was troubled by US news of rising infection rates and George Floyd’s murder. More than ever, nature provided consolation. Still, the pandemic hit home in a cruel way: her father died, hospitalized and alone, in December of 2020.

Kaler’s background in population health informed her constructive perspective on the unfolding pandemic. She fretted over science denial and governmental haste to reopen. Yet her entries also consider quarantine in the spirit of solidarity, rather than as a detached professional, probing her own psyche to track general trends of cognitive decline and inertia. Apathy and self-righteousness (“I am judgy as heck,” she confesses) are named as opposite dangers for good citizens to avoid.

“Curiosity Cabinet” is a highlight, telling the stories behind the PPE that Kaler amassed after a 2003 SARS scare. Other pieces reveal her state of mind through her reading material, like literature on hermits and Antarctica, and her love for her local river valley, which she hiked more in 2020 than in the previous nine years put together. “I experience a visceral pull towards the trees and the water,” she remarks. Inspired by Indigenous wisdom, she learned the names of native plants and discovered new attentiveness.

Perceptive, relatable, and witty, the essays of *Until Further Notice* are a perfect companion for pandemic recovery.

REBECCA FOSTER (September / October 2022)

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