Our advertisers are offering pandemic relevant goods and services to our readers. London & Capital (pg. 8) has suggestions for keeping your finances safe. Janet Darrow (pg. 50) has adapted practices for home buying and selling in a COVID-19 world. The Pajama Company (pg. 43) has fashionable “shelter in place” attire available online. When you’re ready, La Grenadine (pg. 62) is the perfect place to recover from post-pandemic stress.

FAWCO club members - do you want to take your business worldwide? Consider advertising in Inspiring Women. Contact Elsie Bose at advertising@fawco.org to get started. We offer great rates and comprehensive packages for almost any budget.
This is not exactly the issue that our team had originally planned. But then 2020 is not looking like anything anyone I know planned thanks to the entry of some new words into our vocabulary: COVID-19, lockdown, social distancing, and so on!

But the ‘show must go on’ so here you are, a bumper issue of profiles and features to help you while away some of the hours until life returns to (what I suspect might be our new) normal. I would really appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete our Reader Survey, specifically about the balance between feature articles and member profiles.

As well as the magazine having changed slightly, our team make up, has too. Marie-Bénédicte, our Cover Coordinator, decided she didn’t have enough hours in the day for everything, which is something many of us can relate to I am sure. We are very sad to lose her. I would like to take this chance to officially thank her for her help and support as we have taken Inspiring Women from the earliest days to what it is today. Her Gallic wit, good humor, sound advice and brilliance will be missed by the team.

Liz x
Liz MacNiven, inspiringwomen.editor@fawco.org

The Cover Photo

The cover photo for this issue is an image taken by Brigitte Meuwissen of Celeste Bennekers (AWC Antwerp) and her family. We asked Celeste what she was laughing about in the photo: I’m unpacking the boxes in my children’s loft - we had just moved into a new house the day before the lock-down. The movers had told me that morning, they had a friend with the police and that he said it would be their last day working for a while, and boy were they right. Noon the next day, and the country of Belgium came to a halt. And here I was, locked in a strange house with three kids and boxes everywhere. My phone pings as I attempt to organize LEGOs, stuffed animals, and books.

"I'm going to be in your neighborhood, taking photos behind glass for a project, are you at home?" It's my friend and fellow board member, Brigitte! A message from the outside world! I emerge from my unpacking project like gasping for air while drowning.

"Yes, we are but I'm a mess. I'm unpacking and I'm in yoga pants, my hair is in a ponytail and I have barely any make-up on," I type.

"That's perfect," she responds.

So the doorbell rings and my children, who are already bouncing off walls, start bouncing off the ceiling, too. I raise the sheer curtain and they plop onto the couch.

My world - inside and out has been turned upside down. But yet, here are my children, my rocks, climbing over each other, yelling for sunglasses, and squeezing into the frame of the window to get a better view of Brigitte. Standing outside in the sun with her mask on, she laughs at the mania before her, and directs us. And then the dog wants to join in on the fun. She's climbing on the couch and although you can't see her in this photo, she, too, is in the middle of this hurricane of mania and I just have to laugh. Yes, Brigitte and FAWCO, this is my world in the Time of Coronavirus - full of energy, laughter and a little bit crazy. Documented for all to see. Thank you for the opportunity to share!

If you have a photo that you would like to see on a future cover of Inspiring Women, please send it in to us. There are full details of the photo requirements on page 84 of this magazine. Please note: we can only accept portrait orientation images.
This wasn’t exactly the summer we were expecting.

Business plans for the new year were in full stride. The rhythm of the day was set by your child’s school days and sport practices. Your calendar was full of club activities. Appointments were made. Trips were planned. Then, all of the sudden, it changed.

At first, we thought this would have an end. Two, three weeks and we’d be back to normal. But as the death toll relentlessly surged like a tsunami, we became aware that “normal” was going to need a re-boot.

So, as we do, we took an assessment and set our priorities. We faced the reality that the virus wasn’t kidding around and learned what needed to be done to keep everyone safe.

Some of us are so incredibly lucky, we have not been touched by the physical or financial effects of this pandemic. And when we see the wretched pain and suffering of so many others, we are inspired by our humanity (or perhaps our guilt) to help others. This is one of the biggest challenges in modern history. How we act and react will set the agenda as we move ahead.

First and foremost, we take care of our families. We discover that some family members soar. Often our children are incredible little humans, some of our partners are amazingly resourceful and some of us are finding the patience we never thought we had.

Zoom is everything, and many of us see more of our family than before. There are masks in the front hallway for those trips to the grocery store and hand sanitizer in every room.

The Inspiring Women team felt that it is important to capture what was happening right now and share it with our readers. We have special features from some of our members and their experiences in a time with no precedent.

I ventured into the “feature format” by sending out a questionnaire to FAWCO friends worldwide about their “sheltered" lifestyle. The response was spectacular. Thanks to Liz for allowing me to include it. It is fun and I hope you enjoy the Lightning Round along with the photos that everyone so generously shared.

For me the responses were a wickedly secret delight. Through them I could be with all of you. It’s bad enough when we say goodbye after each conference or meeting, but we didn’t even see each other this year and I MISS ALL OF YOU. So, channelling my mother:

   Do what the doctors (and the scientists) tell you.   Wash your hands.
   Don’t spend money like you print it.          Quit teasing your sisters!

I’ll see you on the other side.

Elsie Bose
I grew up right outside Washington, DC in Prince George’s County. Special memories are of visiting my grandparents, who lived on Rhode Island Avenue, who we took on picnics with us down on The Mall. We would run down the stairs of the Washington Monument and race along the Reflecting Pool to the Lincoln Memorial. I could never get tired of the Museum of American History. It remains my absolute favorite with too many exhibits to mention save one, the miniature doll house. How I wanted to have one like that!

When I was 10, we moved to Anne Arundel County, on the other side of Ft. Meade, of NSA fame. This was more rural and much closer to the Chesapeake Bay. I loved living near the water and am glad I do that here in Hamburg, too. I went to high school and university, playing field hockey at both. I think playing on a team formed my sense of togetherness and community-mindedness. I bloom and revel in working on group projects.

Since I commuted to college to save money to travel, my first experience leaving home was the three months I spent traveling around the USA in a VW camper. Two friends and I drove over 15,000 miles, discovering famous and other not so famous spots across the country. We visited many national parks and I loved the camaraderie the rangers had with each other and their interaction with the visitors. In my last year at university, I worked as a National Park Ranger at Ft. McHenry National Park & Historic Shrine, telling the story of the Star-Spangled Banner. It truly is the best and most rewarding job I have ever had.

The summer I spent traveling the USA was the catalyst for yearning to travel. I then spent a summer traveling Europe on the Interral train pass and decided then to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship. That is how I spent a year as a teaching assistant at a secondary school in Hannover, Germany.

As part of their teen years, German kids take dance lessons: Waltz, Cha-cha-cha, Disco Fox, and many more. During my year in Hannover, I decided to take dance lessons and enrolled in a course that advertised for female dance partners for the Army Officer’s Candidate School. I signed up, met my now husband, Dietmar, and remained in Germany, attending university and working in bilingual kindergartens in Kiel. We eventually moved to Hamburg and it has been home ever since.

With my family on a Geocache Tour
Early on I began teaching and tutoring English and only recently retired from that after 30 years. I have been very active in the AWC Hamburg for over 20 years. I needed to be able to have a conversation without having to explain my culture and to laugh out loud without being judged. Dietmar and I have two daughters, Rebecca (24) and Allison (21), who were raised bilingually. We have always been a close family, taking vacations together, having game nights, and spending weekends at my in-laws’ lake house in northern Germany.

**How did you get involved in the COVID-19 response?** Through a friend in my club’s Stitch n Bitch group, Jette R., a few of us began sewing nose and mouth protectors for my local hospital. We received the fabric and instructions from the hospital and from time to time, Jette stops by and picks up finished masks to deliver. After I posted on Facebook about this, I received a request from a former employer to make masks for his staff for when the schools re-open. I have also sewn masks for neighbors and friends. My fabric supplies are rapidly dwindling!

Still in the midst of sewing face and nose protectors, I also received a request from the hospital where the AWC Hamburg’s From the Heart Working Bee delivers heart pillows and drainage bottle bags to please deliver another batch for their patients. Ally and I quickly cut, sewed and delivered over 50 drainage bottle bags.

**Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you.** The biggest change in my typical day is that I do not get up before 8:30 a.m! I usually eat breakfast with the girls in front of the TV watching something truly silly like *Temptation Island* or *Too Hot to Handle*. I watch 30 minutes of CNN and the German news channel N24 for an update.

I spend time at the computer working for the FAWCO Foundation Board, researching topics I have never had the time for, finishing online photo albums I started two years ago and reading, reacting and staying in touch with friends on Facebook.

Afternoons are spent sewing and doing household and garden chores. If the weather is great, I’ll commandeers a lounge chair and read from the stack of digital magazines that have collected on my iPad.

We trade off cooking dinner which is a treat because I don’t particularly enjoy it. We watch TV in the evening, either just released movies, a sitcom or classics no one has seen but me but which I feel my family would be enlightened by: *Dances With Wolves*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Blues Brothers*, *Spinal Tap*, and the like.

**What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19?** I find I don’t do well lounging about the whole day.
I had always thought what a day to myself with no obligations, no commitments, no schedule would be like. I have now experienced it and have rejected it. But I LOVE spending all day in my leisure wear, aka yoga pants!

**What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself, and others through COVID-19?** I like house renovations, but not the work involved. Seriously. As for others, I admire others who do like renovation work. I could watch them all day.

**What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19?** I need time to myself. I love my husband and daughters, but I need a few hours each day to be alone in a room. I need the time to decompress, think about the good things in life and remain calm for the next bad news the human race has to deal with.

**What 3 things are you looking forward to doing once the pandemic subsides?**
- Vacation on the beach on the French Atlantic.
- Visiting my family at my nephew’s wedding in Ohio.
- Grocery shopping more than once every two weeks.

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**IN CONVERSATION WITH TRACY**

Tell us something about yourself that not many people may know. I have said many times that comedy is my religion and Steve Martin is my god. I love humor in so many forms: stand-up comedy, old-school comedy films like Abbot & Costello and Blondie & Dagwood, too many sitcoms to mention, current memes on social media, and my goofball family who just gets sillier and funnier every day.

If you could go back in time, where and what year/decade would you go to? I think I would have liked to live in the 1950’s. I love the fashion, the music, the emphasis on family life and limited shopping hours.

What advice would you offer to yourself five years ago? The adage that you don’t have to please all the people all the time is worth taking to heart. Plus, it is ok to say “no.” Be polite when talking to people who you feel may not be as enlightened as you are. Everyone is intelligent in one field or another.

Road rage is not worth the anger it causes you. Laugh at the idiot and keep on driving. It makes them mad, but you remain calm and balanced.

Who is the first, non-family, person you want to see in person when the lockdown ends? I want to see my Stitch n Bitch friends from the AWC Hamburg. We have all become close friends outside the club. We support each other in all of our endeavors, our husbands get along like partners in crime, and we all have a wicked sense of humor when we are together.

Taking the opportunity to goof around!
TOGETHER

We are currently faced with threats to our global economy and the safety of our loved ones. Priorities and routines have adjusted, and with a little planning now and a precautionary overview of your current position, you can prepare yourself to take charge of a situation, which can seem very daunting.

What can you do to protect your financial life?
It's important to have a comfortable level of cash as an ‘emergency’ fund, and money set aside for your short-term plans. At a time when so many people are faced with a reduced income or challenges with their business, it reinforces some of the core requirements of a solid financial plan. You do not want to be forced to sell your investments at the wrong time.

A few things to consider
- Hold off on major expenses
- Adjust your non-essential spending
- Pay down expensive debt
- Buffer your savings
- Review your health and life insurance

Looking to the future
Once you have the basics in order, take a look at the full picture of all of your global assets, and consider how your different accounts and investments are serving your future goals.

These goals are likely to be centered around your:
- family
- career
- lifestyle
- property
- retirement
- charitable giving and longer-term legacy planning

Regularly review your plans to ensure you are on track.

Investing as an American abroad
Investing whilst living abroad can be viewed as a ‘no-no’ for US citizens. But that doesn’t mean you have to sacrifice your sanity, or your wealth. Here are a few tips to help you coordinate your strategy:
- Ensure your portfolios don’t contain any PFICs (Passive Foreign Investment Company) funds. The biggest investment in the UK for example are ‘funds’ which are punitively taxed by the US
- On the flip side, if you invest in a non-EU fund not on the UK reporting list, like some US mutual funds, these can be taxed heavily in the UK
- Track any gains or losses from your portfolios for each US and UK tax year. Remember, the tax years are different so this can be complex and time consuming for you and your accountant

Having a joined-up approach
We often find that our clients have accounts and investments spread across different jurisdictions. It’s likely that your US accounts are looked after by your US domestic adviser (if you have one) and your global assets by another adviser. Along with issues we’ve already mentioned, you may find you are taking too much or too little risk overall, as the whole approach has never been considered fully – just each part of it in isolation.

It’s important to take advice from specialists, who understand the pitfalls and can help you organise your global assets. Providing you with a joined-up approach to managing your wealth – and ultimately achieving your financial goals.

Stay safe and please do get in touch if there is anything you would like to discuss. We’re working remotely but it’s business as usual for us. We’re here and very happy to help.

To discuss any of your wealth management needs. We’re here.

London & Capital Wealth Advisers
T +44 (0)20 7396 3388

APART

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London & Capital are proud partners of FAWCO
"We’re going on a bear hunt, we’re going to catch a big one. What a beautiful day. We’re not scared. Oh no! Grass! Long, wavy grass! We can’t go over it. We can’t go under it. Oh, no! We’ve got to go through it. Swishy swashy! Swishy swashy! Swishy swashy!"

It’s never been my favorite children’s book or song. I know. Call me a bad Mom. The repetition is good for kids, but it is just the kind of chant that grates on my nerves. Besides. Are swishy and swashy even words? I don’t think so.

But here I am, in a locked-down house in Antwerp, Belgium with three kids – ages ten, eight and five. It’s a bit like a school break – I’m used to spending school holidays with them. The kitchen is a constant battleground between eating and cleaning. My daughter (the 10-year old) creates her own Lists of Things to Do, while my sons primarily occupy themselves by wrestling with each other on the couch. (Why? Why?) Yet, during the school holidays we have playdates, take trips to the Fine Arts Museum in Gent, or day trips to the Netherlands to visit friends. We head to indoor playgrounds, grab gelato from trucks in city parks, and spend hours browsing the shelves of libraries. Of course, these entertainment options have evaporated into wistful memories during the Belgium (and world’s) COVID-19 lockdown.

“Cosette! Holden! Brecht! Get your shoes on. We’re going on a walk!” I shout up the stairwell. Silence follows. Or perhaps a shuffling of feet without conviction. Maybe one of them trickles down the stairs. My patience is growing thin. I begin to wonder. . . how do their teachers do it? Then in my moment of weakness, I start to contemplate the future teenage years; this is not the positive, helpful thinking you need to focus on during CoronaTime. I shake the thoughts.

“Get your shoes on, please,” I repeat, and my children pull on their sneakers. My usual measure of success – balance a budget, conduct a Board meeting, connect with FAWCO – has been diminished within the past few weeks. Yet, with eight shoed feet and eight jacketed arms exiting my house before noon, I step into the happy sunshine with a feeling of great achievement.

We moved into a new house the day before the total Belgium shutdown. This meant that we were immediately locked into box-filled, omg-where-is-my-toothbrush/sheets/wine-opener, with no-memories house. We felt trapped in a messy AirBnB but there was a newness and distraction to the experience.

With my husband on a conference call, my children and I head down our unfamiliar street – my gaze toggling between my new neighbors’ houses and my children. My youngest son insists on wearing his Halloween costume whenever we leave the house. It was a simple H&M purchase last October. A bat hoodie. I find it only slightly ironic that my son is dressed as a BAT during our Corona walks. My middle child sports a pair of my aviator sunglasses which are three times the size of his face. He means business. He brings pen and paper for documentation purposes. My daughter is the primary lookout.

I’d seen it on Facebook – articles about putting Teddy Bears in the windows and encouraging others to participate. A friend of mine had rung my doorbell a few days before. She toled her kids in a double stroller. “Ah yes, we’re counting teddy bears!”
she had said from the sidewalk. My internet radio plays NPR from a corner of my kitchen. A Dallas reporter recorded his walk with his children.

My children and I peruse the city streets - avoiding the few bicycles, empty buses and trams. We explore new cobbles and memorize unfamiliar street names. We gaze into gorgeous windows lined with enchanting Art Nouveau details and count 109 Teddy Bears – my middle child recording each sighting with a tickmark on his pad of paper.

Care Bears stand proudly in windows, their bellies forward in a Care Bear stare. “Mama, which one is that one?” and I scroll through decades of memories to resurface “Tenderheart Bear! Cheer Bear! Friend Bear!”

There are hand-drawn bears, well-loved bears, tiny bears, huge bears, and a chicken. A woman gazes from her window and points to her hidden bear in the corner – tucked behind a frosted glass windowpane. She smiles and we smile back. A human connection between windows. And Teddy Bears.

We return home by snack time. As they munch on crackers, cheese and apples, I head upstairs to my sons' bookshelf and run my fingers across the titles I unpacked a week ago.

“Come on, I want to read y’all a story,” I tell them.

With them all nestled on the couch, I begin. “The First Teddy Bear, by Helen Kay,” I read them the book my mother had read to me as a child. I flip the pages and my children learn about the American President, Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt, and a humble candy store owner in Brooklyn who made toys at night. At a time when the USA was mocking the President for not shooting a small, cinnamon-colored bear during the Great Bear Hunt of 1902, Morris Michtom, the candy store man, celebrated the President’s compassion. He and his wife stitched a toy bear and asked the President if he’d mind it being named after him. “I cannot imagine what good my name will do,” President Roosevelt wrote, but he didn’t mind. I tell my children that when I was twelve, I went to the National Museum of American History (part of the Smithsonian Institute) to see the very first Teddy Bear.

2020, the year of Coronavirus. We are isolated, scared and vulnerable. People are sick and dying. The future is unknown. On the subplot, children (and adults alike) are also missing their friends, wanting the comfort of their routine and craving human connection. Unfortunately, there’s no way around this. “We can’t go over it. We can’t go under it. Oh no! We’ve got to go through it!” Like the President’s Great Bear Hunt of 1902, we venture into the unknown expecting one thing, but we are finding compassion and comfort instead. Inside that narrow, gloomy cave is a bear. A Teddy Bear. And amid it all, I’ve found a new place in my heart for Bear Hunts.

Celeste Bennekers grew up in Plano, Texas and currently lives in Belgium where she is the President of the American Women's Club of Antwerp. In a former life, she worked in public accounting and was an auditor for American Airlines, where she traveled constantly visiting major (and minor) airports all over the world. She now shares the love of travel with her husband and three children, ages ten, eight, and five, who attend local Belgian schools. Although she’s far from home, she can be seen around Antwerp wearing cowboy boots on rainy days, celebrating Cinco de Mayo, and loves frying chicken and baking biscuits for her family and friends in her great-aunt's cast-iron skillet.
CATHY FARNAN
Member: American Women’s Group in Paris
From: Shady Side (near Annapolis), MD
Lives: Paris, France

I grew up on the Chesapeake Bay, near Annapolis, MD where my parents were avid, competitive sailors, racing a 41’ sailboat around the Bay. While winning was fun, my dad was also incredibly patient, teaching many friends and co-workers the joy of sailing. My parents frequently welcomed young sailors into our home, often offering them a place to bunk down for the summer. Racing as a family taught us teamwork, trust and flexibility; with the quick change of the wind, we could be idly drifting or pounding through a wicked storm. No matter the weather, if it was a race, we were out there on the Bay. Respect for the water, weather and family were important lessons growing up.

Childhood family vacations were all spent sailing on the Bay. It was a big shock, after graduating from the College of William & Mary, to be transferred to Kansas City, MO with Marriott Hotels (as assistant comptroller). I had never been west of the Appalachian Mountains and wasn’t sure if I could actually survive without a view of the water! But I quickly adjusted from eating steamed crabs to eating barbeque and soon met the love of my life, Don. My future husband’s first introduction to my family was an invitation to crew an overnight race in Annapolis! My brothers gave their blessing when he didn’t get seasick despite some rough weather! Thank goodness, he had passed my family’s “sailing test” and we soon married, looking ahead to life with “why knot”? The love of sailing continues through the generations as our three daughters have also gained a love for the water and boating.

Our accounting careers were anything but boring, as we were offered fun, adventuresome opportunities. We eagerly accepted with “why knot”! From Missouri, to Arizona, Virginia, Tokyo, Washington DC, New York City, and now Paris, our lives have been full of experiences, travel and fun that we never imagined. When we were transferred to Japan, I became quickly involved with the Tokyo Union Church Women’s Society and ASIJ PTO. Volunteering was mentally and spiritually rewarding and introduced us to lots of new people. I have found there are many non-profit organizations in need of financial skills and advice.

The day after we moved to Paris in 2016, I joined the American Women’s Group in Paris, making life-long friends, participating in many tours, excursions and tastings.
After a few months, I joined the governing board as VP Finance, then VP Activities and now am the President. As Don and I look forward to retirement in the next year, it will be interesting to see what else appears on our horizon...in Annapolis, in the next year, where we are lucky to have a family home and where our three daughters, two dogs and one son-in-law are currently hunkered down during the COVID-19 confinement.

What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response? As the President of AWG Paris, our first response was to cancel our member activities. Our club hosts almost 200 activities per year with about 2000 participants! More importantly, many of our members are older and live here alone; the social interaction of AWG Paris is important to all of us. We immediately started reaching out to our members via email to create Friends & Neighbors Groups and to contact members by phone. While many of us know each other socially, we don’t always realize that another member lives quite close by, perhaps in our own neighborhood or block! Creating Friends & Neighbors groups provided our members a new opportunity to connect with another member who lived close to them, and, in case of emergency, could also drop off food, medication or smiles. We also began offering “virtual” coffees, Aperols, and classes to our members. Our first Zoom brought so many smiles to our members’ faces; it was truly the best moment of my “pandemic presidency”! Members have also found creative ways to continue AWG Paris’ participation in feeding the refugees and homeless. Sandwich making at home and then handing off delivery within 1km to a neighbor who then passes the sandwiches on to the next person...we are doing what it takes to stay socially connected while physically distancing!

Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you. In Paris, we must complete an attestation in order to leave our apartment. And while we are allowed specific activities (grocery shopping, walking a pet, brief exercise, going to the doctor, etc), we must stay within 1km of our residence. Spring is usually pretty grey and wet in Paris, but this year, we have been fortunate to have lovely, sunny weather. Getting outside every other day for a walk has been key to staying sane! Our Parisienne apartment is beautiful, but I miss the outdoor space of our sprawling home in Annapolis!

What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19? After a few weeks, my husband and I have settled into a routine of generally eating breakfast together but working in different rooms of the apartment. Giving each other privacy and respecting each other’s work space has been helpful! Honestly, if I don’t see him until around dinnertime, it’s not a bad thing!
What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself, and others through COVID-19? The difficulty of COVID-19 is losing control of your plans for life. While our lives have often changed course, this unpredictability is definitely creating stress in our life and our families. The stress of the unknown impact on their futures, livelihood and family is hard to manage from overseas. While we Zoom and FaceTime frequently, sometimes it simply feels like we should be there hugging them through it all. One thing that amazes me is how accessible via FaceTime, Zoom, Skype and video conferencing everyone is, no matter their age. My 97-year old mother-in-law has learned to FaceTime...it is awesome to see her laugh and stay connected to her 14 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren, even during these difficult times!

What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19? Since only the grocery stores are open, I was thrilled recently to see my petit market has potted herbs for sale! These now fill my kitchen counters with greenery and lovely possibilities of delicious meals! My time is also filled with AWG Paris online meetings, reading, playing Mah-jong with my USA girlfriends and clapping every evening on our balcony in appreciation of the French health care workers.

IN CONVERSATION WITH CATHY

Tell us something about yourself that not many people may know. I have gone canyoneering here in France! While I love ziplining, sailing, scuba, white-water rafting, biking and kayaking, I hope to NEVER go canyoneering again. Truly the most scared I have ever been in my entire life. At one point, I told the guide that “if I died, he would definitely not be getting a tip.”

If you could go back in time, where and what year/decade would you go to? Living in Japan in the mid-90s! Not sure if it’s because we raised our daughters there, or if it was the rose-colored glasses, but living in Tokyo was simply fantastic for our family.

What advice would you offer to yourself five years ago? Stretch! We all need to stretch our minds when we are young and stretch our bodies as we grow older!

Who is the first, non-family, person you want to see in person when the lockdown ends? I can’t wait to go to our church, the American Church in Paris, and thank God for family and friends, and for His Grace and protection. Also USA girlfriends, our family dogs in Annapolis and my hairstylist...for hugs, doggie cuddles and hair color!

At the Musée d’Orsay

Snowshoeing in Annecy with AWG Paris
In my 30+ year career in education, I have seen teachers, administrators, students and parents deal with short term crises: the death of a staff member or student, a possible live shooter, an earthquake, weather-related closures, a school-wide case of the flu. Academically, these were all “short term” situations - a day or a week might be disrupted, a field trip or exam might need to be rescheduled. Suffice it to say, most educators (in places where education is typically accessible and free to all) have never had to manage a situation of this magnitude. COVID-19 has changed everything, and in many cases, in the blink of an eye.

Unprecedented times need to be dealt with in unprecedented ways, and educators stepped up to this challenge. Schools went into overdrive as teachers copied materials to deliver to students, learned new technology, and researched and/or created virtual learning opportunities, while administrators and staff sorted out how to continue to provide food, technology and support to students who depended on the schools for such assistance. This, of course, was only half the story. Simultaneously, families of all shapes and sizes were trying to adapt to this new and semi-permanent school paradigm while also managing their own fears, financial issues, health and employment situations.

So where are we now and what are we as a society learning about education, both from an academic and systemic point of view? What are/should be the priorities in learning and teaching? How do we manage access, equity and privilege issues to ensure that the achievement gap isn’t widened for our most vulnerable and underserved populations (SDG #4)? How do teachers maintain personal and academic relationships with students, while honoring families’ current realities, stresses and limitations, as well as their own? What, if any, will be the long-term academic effects on our students?

While these and other questions will be pondered, reacted to and studied in real time and for decades, it is important to maintain perspective and perhaps take a long view in order to maintain students’, teachers’ and families’ sanity. One of the “upsides” of our current situation is that we’re all in this together: virtually EVERYONE at ALL levels of education in almost EVERY country has been affected in some capacity. From colleges and universities down to pre-schools, this four-ish month hiatus of traditional education is happening simultaneously world-wide. Students (and parents) should take comfort in knowing that any skill or knowledge gap they might have going into the
new school year will be a universal issue and will be managed at the micro level as schools adjust their curriculums to meet this new reality.

That being said, I hope schools are truly focusing on the most critical aspects of curriculum and learning during this time. We need to ask ourselves, “In the big picture, how detrimental will it truly be if the average student misses four months of new curriculum in a roughly 117-month K - 12 school career?” The best models of education I have seen during the quarantine have prioritized reality, enrichment, reinforcement, flexibility and feedback. On the contrary, schools that have tried to maintain operations as usual (prioritizing new learning, testing and traditional grading) and have attempted to stick a square peg in a VERY round hole have created untold (and some told!) stressors on all stakeholders, regardless of their expertise level in managing full-time remote learning. As I heard or read in passing (sorry that I am unable to remember the source), a high school senior noted that it’s not the last three months of her K-12 journey that will make or break her academically and personally. She explained that it was the preceding 12+ school years that have truly laid the groundwork for her future successes. Words of wisdom from an 18-year-old, a reality check and a lesson in perspective for the rest of us.

If history tells us anything (think World War II and Hurricane Katrina), it’s that we are resilient as a world society. If the present situation tells us anything, it’s that schools are often the lynchpin in the community structures they serve. From providing meals to safe spaces to counseling to learning, schools are both physical structures and vibrant, living, breathing communities where relationships and bridges are built and social, emotional and academic skills are learned and nurtured. School staff have met this quarantine challenge head on and have reacted with humor, perseverance, sweat, tears and creativity. I have never been more impressed by my profession and I am proud, now more than ever, to call myself a teacher.

All of that being said, it is one thing to read an excerpt/opinion from a teacher not currently on the frontlines, but another experience entirely to peek into the world of a current teacher and her student. I am honored and humbled to introduce you to my daughter, Laura McKelvey, as she shares her thoughts from the field.

As I settle into the kitchen/office in my studio apartment to start the day, I remind myself of my new, previously unimaginable reality: I teach from home. Let me start by saying I’m glad to be able to stay home to help protect myself, my community and my students. I have an “essential” job that I can still conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic, so I get a paycheck and stay out of danger at the same time. This is an incredible privilege. Also, I hate it.

I am a 6th year chemistry teacher at Johnson College Prep, in Chicago’s south side Englewood neighborhood. I’m also the head of the science department, an advisor (counselor/homeroom teacher) to 24 sophomore girls, and the varsity baseball coach (our canceled season is still a tough pill to swallow). Teaching during a pandemic has required fast acquisition of skills surrounding education tech, constant contacting of student families, and a re-imagining of the exciting and far-reaching plans I had for my sophomore chemists this year.
While I lean on trust, community building and collectivist (as opposed to individualist) mindsets in my classroom, I don’t know how to create this experience for my students at home. As I juggle the learning curve of Ed tech, virtual meetings and my coaching check-ins with other science teachers, I prioritize providing enriching content in a way that students will be able to access at any time: video lectures with follow-up assignments. This direct-instruction approach is nothing like the student-centered, discussion-based classroom my students and I have built since August. In class, I spent time studying my students’ learned behavior patterns and guiding them to embody their identities as learners and scientists. Now I record 15-minute lectures a few times per week (which each take more than an hour to create), give electronic feedback on assignments and host weekly virtual office hours attended by 5-8 students who are craving a connection with their teachers (often not the straight-A students you may expect!). I no longer get to see students take risks, endure frustration and learn from each other. I’m putting in the same behind-the-scenes effort of lesson creation without any of the incredible “aha” classroom moments that keep teachers going every week.

While working on these logistical teaching pieces, another top priority in my job description as a remote-learning teacher is weekly contact with the families of my 24 sophomore advisees. Every week I hold my breath after I ask the parent/guardian if everyone at home is safe and healthy. At this point, they all are. A few students are displaced (staying with relatives with better internet access), some caregivers are in the hospital for non-COVID-19 related issues and many are still working outside of the home. I log all of this contact in PowerSchool, our online record-keeping software, and call the next family. Some guardians don’t respond, so I text the student, as our guidelines on (well-documented) cell phone contact with students have been loosened during this crisis. As has always been the case for teachers, this part of the job does not end at 3:00 p.m. I talk to families at all hours, as they have updates and are available between work shifts. I find this task draining. Normally it’s students’ jobs to get to us. Now it’s my job to get to them, provide the resources they need and, of course, teach them chemistry.

A major goal of frequent family contact is to increase student engagement in remote learning, which is hovering between 20 and 25% schoolwide. The thought that only a quarter of the sophomores I inherit next year will have completed the (modified) freshman curriculum is a daunting one: how will I fill those gaps for them? Through surveying our families, we found that roughly 80% of them have internet at home, about 50% of students had a computer on which to complete schoolwork and the other 50% had only cell phones or no hardware with which to complete work*. As I work on this piece, there is still one advisory family I have not managed to contact in five weeks, and the uncertainty of their health and safety weighs on me daily.
Ultimately, students are most affected by this unprecedented school interruption. While I will return to teach at JCP next year, students will not get another chance at this year. I asked a current young woman who inspires me (one of my sophomore advisees, Alyja Cousins) to weigh in on her experience. Alyja has a 4.53 cumulative GPA and is one of only two sophomore peer mediators at JCP. Regarding her current educational situation, in some ways, Alyja is relieved. As a high-performing student, she feels pressure to be competitive in the upcoming college admissions process: “[we] teens are way more stressed out than we should be and this pandemic provided the break we’ve all been longing for. We get so much work [in a traditional school setting]... so this break is overall beneficial to teens’ mental health.” As a self-motivated young woman, Alyja is confident in her ability to work through the material provided by her teachers on her own, reaching out for help when she needs it (she and I spent a long time puzzling through a Khan Academy question about bond polarity).

Alyja does, however, worry about herself and her fellow students missing out on the social-emotional benefits of being at school. “Sometimes, school is an escape... Maybe [some students’] friends helped with their depression or anxiety. In isolation, people with anxiety and depression are probably suffering and struggling to become mentally stable again. Quarantine makes them overthink every little thing and worry, making them cling to their phones to see the latest news about COVID-19. Sleeping in for more than 10 hours could just end up depressing and you only have work to do and eat.” Alyja laments an experience many of us know too well: we know what we can do to “succeed” during this time, but the reality of living through a pandemic is exhausting, and we often fail to meet our own expectations for productivity. She’s also mindful that not everyone has a laptop and WiFi at home to work as successfully as she is. “The [students] that are suffering the most are the ones with unstable households and lack of resources available. These parties are negatively affected by this virus because some kids with unstable households used school to escape and going back is dangerous for them.” Additionally, Alyja feels that the pandemic (and the American response) will disrupt the field of education long-term, as “[p]eople are still not taking the virus seriously and are still going outside with large numbers of people, causing us to stay inside quarantine longer than we [would] need to.”

As I was working on this piece, the ground underneath me shifted again: Governor Pritzker announced that all schools in Illinois would be closed for the remainder of the year. Logically, I had known that this was coming for weeks. I’d scoffed at others on video calls who were expressing hopes of returning to our classrooms this year. Still, the headline flattened me. Ultimately, Alyja speaks for her teachers as well as her peers when she says “overall ‘coronacation’ was a good break but repeating the same thing over and over again just gets so old for us teens.”

(*Note: 10% of families were not able to be reached for this survey. This likely indicates a lack of access to resources, but this is uncertain.)

Carol-Lyn McKelvey grew up in Ohio and Pennsylvania. She is a member of AIWC Cologne and FAUSA and now lives back in Farmington Hills, Michigan. She has been an educator most of her life and is thrilled that her daughter, Laura, followed her into the profession. While not thinking about the best ways to educate kids, she loves to get involved in home renovation, spend time with her kids, Laura and Kristen, follow the Buckeyes and drink a few German beers with her husband, Steve.
If you had to do some home schooling during lockdown, what was your best subject?

“Learning to count with a 3-year old.”
Christine Funke, Heidelberg IWC, Club President

“Math, of course!”
Kathy DeBest, FAUSA, FAWCO Foundation Treasurer

“Not math, not German, not English…so probably lunch or recess.”
Angie Aebersold, AWC Bern, FAWCO Events Co-Chair

“We are working on crawling, standing and French. So far, the results are not good, but since her swimming lessons have been canceled, her version of floor swimming is going well.”
Amanda Drollinger, AWC Central Scotland, FAWCO Secretary

“I have been running online Boy Scout meetings with 11-year olds who know nothing about first aid...like herding cats.”
Liz Hemminger, AW Surrey, FAUSA

“Yoga/Sanskrit/French.”
Renuka Matthews, FAWCO Member

“Thank God I don’t have to do that, but I have enjoyed reading to my grandchildren with an app (Caribu) so we can read together and be on the same page.”
Monica Jubayli, AWC Lebanon, former FAWCO President

“Loving Chris Voss, a former hostage negotiator, teaching “The Art of Negotiations” on Master Class.”
Janet Darrow, FAUSA, AWA Vienna, former FAUSA President

“Happy Hour. What was the question?”
Mary Stange, AWC Bogotá, FAWCO Rep, FAWCO Social Media Manager

The FAWCO COVID-19 Home School 2020 Yearbook Photos

Lenny and Johann Funke
Max Stange
Amelia Stange
ANGIE: I grew up in Albany Oregon. My parents divorced when I was about 10 and we moved from a small town to a slightly larger town. I spent all of my junior high and high school life in Albany where the population was about 32,000 when I was growing up. I was a shy child, so once I made friends, they have mostly stayed my friends until today even though I have lived the last 30 years in Switzerland.

My biggest impact from childhood that sticks with me until today is not a nice story. One night when I was about 11, I was home alone and someone broke into the house and I was almost raped. The bright side to this, a few weeks before in our PE class we had a self-defense course. I was able to think and somehow get myself out of the situation. The trauma, yes there is trauma, because it was so very extremely close, remains. It took years before I could stay by myself at home at night, many years before I could go to sleep at night without a radio going and if I am home alone all of the doors have to be locked. I survived; I lived a normal life at home until I was 20, with a few quirks.

I met my husband, Tom, when he came to visit his host family one summer. We had a summer affair and when he left to go home, I had thought, “Well I will never see him again”. But we kept in contact, writing back and forth for a year to a year and a half. We decided I should visit him in Switzerland. So, off I went to visit this guy I hardly knew, totally crazy! I planned to stay for 3 months and then go home. Well, we lasted 2½ months and then after a blow-up, I ended up going home early thinking, “I will never see him again”. I was home for a week and he called apologizing and we made plans for him and his mother to come visit for a couple of weeks in summer. Then Tom came to study at Oregon State University in Corvallis for six months. After half a year he went back to Switzerland with the plan that I would be coming for the summer to Switzerland. I came for my 3-month summer vacation and ended up staying for 9 months. I went home was very sad and unhappy, and made plans to go back to Switzerland. Within 3 months I had worked long enough and made enough money to go back to Switzerland. I arrived in summer and we were married in December 1990. This year we will be celebrating our 30th wedding anniversary.

PATRICIA: I was born in Queens, New York to Swiss immigrants. After completing hotel school in Switzerland, my parents immigrated to the United States in the 60s so that my father could start his career in the US hotel industry. As my father’s career took off, we ended up in Vermont, Massachusetts, Toronto, Canada and Texas. Moving around all the time was quite difficult for my sister and me during our formative years. Just when we thought we would stay in one place for a while, we had to say goodbye to all our friends and our school and pack up to leave on our next adventure.
On occasion we would travel to Switzerland to visit my grandparents. When my grandmother passed away in 1974, my mother remained in Switzerland with us children for about six months and helped her father take care of all the things that need to be done when there is a death in the family. During our stay in Switzerland and to keep us kids busy, my mother enrolled us in the local primary school. Living and going to school in Switzerland at this time in my life (3rd grade) was probably the driving force that made me want to live in Switzerland when I got “older”.

In 1977, we moved to Austin, Texas where I completed high school, then went to the University of Texas, in Austin, where I completed my Bachelors of Business Administration, double majoring in Finance and International Business. It was at this point I decided it is now or never. In addition to a US passport, I also held a Swiss passport. I figured, what did I have to lose? I was going to do what I had always told my parents as a child that I would do. In October 1987, I packed up two suitcases and booked a one-way ticket to Switzerland. I stayed with my godmother in the Bern area until I found a job and an apartment. My thought was, if I didn’t like living in Switzerland, I could always return to the United States. Well you know how that goes. You start your life in your new surroundings, you meet a man, you marry that man, you start a family and before you know it, after 33 years, you are still in the same place with no intention of going back.

My Spanish husband and I started our own international fruit trading company in 1992, which to this day is our livelihood. I also work as a tax accountant for a small accounting firm in Solothurn, Switzerland. My daughter (21) is almost at the end of her one-year internship at Roche, a pharmaceutical company in Basel. She will start her studies in Chemistry this September. My son is in his second year of his apprenticeship at the Watchmaking School in Switzerland.

When did COVID-19 first become part of your FAWCO work and what were your first thoughts about it all? ANGIE: Patricia and I are co-chairs for FAWCO Events Planning, and had been very busy organizing the Interim Meeting in Luxembourg for many months. I am also VP Programs for the FAWCO Foundation and also had been putting the presentations together with Barbara Bühling, Foundation President, for announcing the recipients of the DGs and EAs, Foundation Night and other responsibilities that we would have at the conference.

PATRICIA: We had spent many hours organizing the event before COVID-19 came along and I was absolutely convinced that this issue would only affect us once the conference was over. I knew that things were severe in Italy and since the borders to Italy were closed. But I assumed that these measures would slow the spread of the virus to the rest of the European countries and allow us enough time to carry on with the meeting. As long as there weren’t any travel restrictions between Switzerland and Luxembourg in place, I was determined to go.

ANGIE: We had quite a few meetings with Emily van Eerten, FAWCO President, about the implications it would have on us and the Interim Meeting. My first thoughts were really it wasn’t going to affect us at all. I really have a positive nature and really thought, if it gets worse, it will be after the Interim Meeting. I just kept thinking all of the work we put into organizing the event couldn’t be for
nothing. We all know how it worked out and we all know it was a hard decision for the FAWCO Board to make, but it was the only right decision that could be made.

Tell us about a typical day “FAWCO COVID-19” day for you. PATRICIA: During the two-week period before the start of the conference, we were holding conference calls with the FAWCO Board about whether the Interim Meeting should be cancelled or not. We had been receiving emails from attendees from countries further away, letting us know that they would have to cancel due to travel advisories/restrictions in their respective countries or because they themselves belonged to the Corona virus risk group.

Shortly before the Interim Meeting would have started, European countries started issuing their own travel restrictions and closing down borders. As soon as this started happening, it was crystal clear that this meeting would never take place. After the FAWCO Board announced the cancellation of the Interim Meeting, I began refunding some 180+ registration and guest fees. Between my work schedule and family life, it took me a period of over one week to complete the refunds.

ANGIE: We had to cancel quite a few things. For example, the tours that had been planned. FAWCO took the lead with negotiating with the hotel. Patricia, as the Conference Treasurer, had the big job of refunding the registration fees. I had more clean-up that needed to be done. All of the name-tags had already been printed and the badges.

What is the most important thing you have discovered or learned about yourself, others through your COVID-19 work? PATRICIA: We are all in the same boat. It is amazing how resourceful people can be in such uncertain times. Also, people are genuinely interested in helping each other out and helping others make the best of these unchartered waters. You have to take one day at a time. This too will pass.

ANGIE: Myself, I still have a positive attitude. Others, most people are really flexible with the time and energy. If you need help, they will try to help any way that they can, even though they have to do it while social distancing.

What did you do to keep on top of your own mental health during this COVID-19 work? PATRICIA: I am fortunate that I am able to go to my office and work. Each of us has our own office so we are able to apply the social distancing concept. At the moment, my customer contact is limited to phone calls, emails or documents which are sent by post. It helps the monotonous days go by faster. I also try to refrain from going to certain grocery stores. Sometimes you get the feeling that others look at you as if you are a walking disease.

ANGIE: I do my Events Planning and my Foundation work. I have a great pride in what I do and how I do it. I also read a lot! I love to read; it is like having a movie in my mind!

What 3 things are you looking forward to doing once the pandemic subsides? PATRICIA: Travelling, entertaining friends, going shopping.

ANGIE: Going out to dinner, anywhere but home, inviting friends over for dinner and going shopping for something that is not food!
As the days went by, the news stations reported an increasing number of Corona cases in Italy, as well as China, but to be honest no one (including myself) seemed too concerned. I walked the beaches in the morning, read by the pool in the afternoon, had dinner with friends and spent evenings knitting on the lanai. I followed the news, more cases were being reported daily.

Cases started popping up in the USA but Florida had no cases and life went on as usual, bike rides in the sun, dinners at beach-side restaurants, concerts and a hockey game with friends. Miami reported a few cases of the virus, as did more cities around the USA and Europe. The WHO discussed measures to be taken to slow down the spread of the virus and some people started to get worried, but life went on as usual in Florida.

Schools around the USA started closing and families decided that as long as they could work remotely, they might as well make school closures a mini-vacation and they headed from their infected cities to Florida, as did the spring-breakers. National and international news stations reported the crowds on the Florida beaches, interviewed inebriated young people and the seniors in our area assured me they’d seen worse and couldn’t stop living (aka golfing, dining out and socializing) because of a virus.

My husband returned to Norway and when he left, we actually joked about him being turned away because he’d been in Florida and we laughed that he might be put in quarantine. Well, two days after he arrived home, he was forced into home quarantine along with all other residents who had been out of the country. The virus had arrived in Norway and within a matter of days, the country was more or less on lockdown. We spoke multiple times daily: should I change my plans and come home early, should I stay put and maybe end up having to extend my stay, was it safe to travel through multiple airports to get home? For days we went back and forth but we decided that I was safe where I was. I had plenty of food, I could walk the beaches, and keep myself busy while I practiced social distancing. The very next day, borders started closing, Norway urged all its citizens and residents vacationing abroad to return home as soon as possible.

I started trying to reach Lufthansa in order to change my ticket. I tried for three days but could not reach them by phone. Again, we concluded that I was safe where I was and that, although it would be sad to spend the Easter holiday apart, we’d manage. Hours later, COVID-19 cases were reported in our Florida county and I bought a ticket on United...
Airlines for travel in three days. I started packing down the condo, giving away food and wrapping things up. My flights got changed three times in two days as more and more travel restrictions were put in place. I spoke with my husband every other hour as beaches, restaurants and stores were being closed around me. Our condo community closed the pools, tennis courts, gym and clubhouse and my husband bought me another plane ticket home, this one through Newark on SAS. We were starting to feel a little panic.

I don’t know if I’ll ever forget my trip home. There were police officers with machine guns patrolling at the airport in Tampa and although that’s a common sight elsewhere in the world, TIA has never had them. Almost everyone travelling that day wore rubber gloves and the majority of passengers wore face masks. The flight to Newark was not full and the airline had spread us out in the aircraft. There was no service on the flight as the crew wanted to protect us and themselves.

Arriving in Newark, I saw more armed police and gloves and face masks everywhere. People seemed subdued, nervous and anxious to get home. Norwegians, who aren’t the most talkative folks when they don’t know you, offered their evacuation stories and asked about mine.

There was one meal with beverages served on our flight to Stockholm, again to avoid as much person-to-person contact as possible. It was surprising to see the shops open at Arlanda airport but Sweden has had a different policy than many other countries during this pandemic.

Luckily my flight to Oslo flew as scheduled and by that time I was relieved that there was no service of any kind on board. I arrived in Oslo, picked up my luggage and met my husband outside the airport. I too was given two weeks home quarantine. My husband worked from home during the day and we ventured out for walks in the evenings. One of our sons brought us groceries as we weren’t allowed in the stores. We watched new reports online and on Norwegian TV every evening (we still do) and the situation seems to be improving in Norway, as it worsens in the USA.

Usually I hit the ground running when I return from the States; I feel like I have a lot of catching up to do but this time there was no place to go and no one I was allowed to see. I slept as long as I needed and eased back into life, a very different life in Oslo. I do look forward to my next trip, whenever that might be allowed! For now, though I’m enjoying the simple things: daily phone calls with my mom in Montana, watching my apiary spring to life and walk after walk around my neighborhood. Stay safe everyone!

Leigh Midbøe grew up in Billings, Montana but has spent the last 30+ years in Oslo, Norway where she is a member of the American Women’s Club. After retiring from Scandinavian Airlines, she has become a beekeeper, a fabulous hobby that allows her to spend part of the winter in Florida, USA.
I was the second of four children (with two sisters and one brother) and grew up in Canada, in the smallish city of London, Ontario. My entire childhood and university days were spent in the same city, as my father had his law practice there, and as a family, we never left Canada even for vacations.

Visiting my grandparents had an impactful experience in my childhood. The two sets lived not far from each other, but not near us, so we often visited them both on the same trip. One side was well-educated (my grandfather was a scientist who had an important job in the government, grandmother who was born in late 1800s had gone to university) and they had a lovely house with elegant furnishings. From them I learned that the value of education was paramount. The other side were farmers (my grandfather had grade 3) and their simple farmhouse was heated by wood and had no running water or interior bathroom. From them I learned the importance of resilience, finding pleasure in simple things and how to be a foodie (a large garden provided fresh high-quality food and grandma was a fantastic baker). The juxtaposition of my two sets of grandparents taught me to not judge people by external trappings (my farmer grandfather was super smart – he could do my algebra homework by intuition), and that quality of life (fun for a kid) was not commensurate with wealth or trappings. I feel I got the best from two very different worlds.

I had from a very young age intended to be a geneticist (I know, strange for a 7-year-old). While in undergraduate university biology, curriculum changes rendered the program a shambles. Lots of students were changing to other universities but that wasn’t an option for me. One day a girl in my lab announced that she was going into physiotherapy and I thought: what a great idea; it will provide me an undergraduate degree with medical training and while I am in graduate school, I can have a well-paid part-time job. I loved the program (only 24 in my class) and really loved working with patients. After graduating, I did work for a year as a physio, treating head- and spinal-cord-injury patients (mostly young men in motorcycle and motor vehicle accidents), which was both challenging and rewarding. I then went to graduate school and became a scientist (although not a geneticist); I never worked part-time as a physio and I had a scholarship, but I never regretted taking that undergrad as it came in handy on many occasions.
For example, four years of direct experience with patients has given me a patient-focused view that serves me well as a researcher and my BScPT degree helped me get jobs.

After my PhD and post-doc, I became a faculty professor at McGill University Medical School in Montreal (where I was hired because of my PT background as I taught PT/OT students). I did that for five years, and then, because life is an adventure, I resigned and accepted a position as Director of Education for the Muscular Dystrophy Association of France. I had applied for a trans-European position that required English, but the head of the French association wanted me full time (again having a PT background was desired). That period of my life showed me how tough I was – I moved to Paris and had to adjust to a very different culture, I had to learn and work in a new language and deal with some serious health issues. My job was designing education programs for doctors, scientists, our employees and the families of kids with muscular dystrophy. It was a wonderful experience, and I will always love Paris.

When I left Paris and moved back to Canada, I became a professor at the University of Ottawa as I really missed research science. My PT background was again essential – they were looking for someone with a physio undergrad, a PhD and who was French-English bilingual – I was likely the only applicant meeting those criteria.

During this phase of my academic career I founded a biotech company out of my research and after five years I quit my academic position to join the company (Coley Pharmaceutical Group) full time. Eventually Pfizer bought Coley and that is how I became an employee in the “big pharma” industry. I ran the only Pfizer research and development (R&D) site in Canada but also had a global role, where I met so many brilliant people and learned so much. After eight years, my site was closed and I moved on to a role with Seqirus, a UK-headquartered flu vaccine company that spent a lot of time talking about pandemics. After three challenging and rewarding years with Seqirus, I took a role at Johnson & Johnson in Belgium. I lead R&D efforts related to hepatitis, which allows me to use all my learning from past jobs. It is very interesting, because it is so scientifically challenging, but also very rewarding to know that we have an opportunity to impact the lives of the nearly 300 million people in the world who are chronically infected with hepatitis B, and who face stigma every day as well as serious health outcomes later in life because of that.

Today I live with my partner Mark, who is a retired fire-fighter. He has been incredibly supportive of me in my career, taking care of most day-to-day responsibilities, allowing me the time I need to devote to my job. He follows the stock market, restores and rides moto-cross bikes and was once a high-level moto-cross racer and down-hill ski racer (they say opposites attract – I am not into speed and physical danger but am much better at taking business risks). We have a 10-year old Aussie-Doodle named Oscar who has moved with us from Canada to the UK and now to Belgium. He is a high-energy but loving fellow who gives us great pleasure and keeps us busy trying to keep him busy.

**What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response?** As an infectious disease expert, I was mentally involved with COVID-19 right from my awareness of the first cases in China – I was fascinated and obsessed by what I was seeing. From my armchair position, I was predicting everything that was going to happen, and sadly I was right about most of it.
This has been the slowest train-wreck I have ever witnessed. It was frustrating to watch the lack of action on many sides, the misinformation and so many not taking it seriously enough.

The first concrete actions I personally took were (i) to stockpile food and supplies, months before any shelves were empty, and (ii) to warn family and friends to take this seriously. This required some courage, because while I used an education approach, I also purposefully generated fear to get people to take immediate action. This worked better than I expected, likely because I rarely use fear as a tool. My friends and family were forwarding my information to others, and I have since heard several people claim that I may have saved their lives – I expect this isn’t literally true, but many cancelled ill-advised trips or returned home early, and thus avoided being under lock-down in a foreign country where the pandemic shortly thereafter went out of control.

At work at J&J, I am part of the infectious diseases unit, so this is a major topic of discussion at our meetings. I wrote a document for all the J&J expat employees in Belgium to help them navigate the Belgian health care system amidst COVID-19.

Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you. Working from and staying at home means that most days are much alike, and therefore “typical”. Weekdays start with coffee in the hot tub, then I shower, dress in comfortable clothes (no makeup) and “go to work” in my home office. I have individual or group Skype or Zoom meetings throughout the day and evening (I work a lot with the US, so the workday is long). In gaps between meetings, I walk the dog, go for a bike ride or have a swim. I often help my partner Mark make lunch or dinner and the evening is spent catching up on news (probably too much COVID-19 news consumption, and am trying to reduce it). I am surprised at how few movies I am watching – somehow, I don’t have as much free time as I expected. On weekends, I try not to work but exercise, read, cook and lose myself in my hobbies – especially painting which allows my mind to empty of all else. Compared to before, much more of my time is spent contacting family and friends, especially those who I know are home-isolating alone.

What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19? Not too much has surprised me in the scientific, medical, epidemiological and public health space, as I understand infectious diseases and pandemics, and this is rolling out pretty much as I expected. However, the degree of politicization of the situation has been surprising and terribly disappointing.

What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself, and others through COVID-19? I have discovered that I can be quite content with a life that never goes beyond my neighbourhood. Before this, I was on a plane at least once a month, going to far-flung locations to meet with a variety of culturally diverse and interesting people. I expected I would be bored under these circumstances. I am not.

About others, I have discovered that a serious situation like a global pandemic polarizes people in their behaviour. On one side, the many who sacrifice for the sake of all, especially those essential workers (medical, police, grocery store clerks) who are true heroes, risking their own lives to help others. And on the other side the (thankfully) few who try to profit from the situation or take advantage of the situation to disrupt societies.
What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19? I try to exercise regularly, eat healthy and don’t make too many unnecessary demands on myself. For example, I had been taking Dutch language lessons but just put that on hold as it added too much stress for right now (I don’t learn languages easily).

What’s the most impactful “no” you’ve said recently? As the pandemic was hitting Europe, a very dear friend of more than 25 years was travelling in Spain and France and was planning to visit me a few weeks later. I told her she shouldn’t come see me, and I recommended that she return to Canada immediately, rather than complete the additional month of travel she had planned. While it is unfortunate that we couldn’t spend time together, it was the right thing to do and she is grateful that she wasn’t stuck in Spain at its worst. We FaceTime every week, and one day she’ll be able to visit me in Belgium.

5 years ago – not missing the very cold winters of Canada! Me with Oscar on a frozen river

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I moved to Belgium only one year before the pandemic started, so haven’t had enough opportunity to take advantage of this great location in the centre of Europe. I will also fly back to Canada to visit family and friends, who right now I can only see on a little screen. And I look forward to seeing my colleagues in person again – I am lucky to be part of a great team.

IN CONVERSATION WITH HEATHER

What is one weird fact or tidbit that you still remember from school? I remember trivia quite well, so I have a lot to choose from here. I remember in high school taking an advanced math class (probability) where I was the only girl. Our teacher Mr. Given came out of retirement when our regular teacher got sick, and he seemed ancient to us at the time (but likely was only about 70). During exams as he walked around the room, he would look at our exam booklets and sometimes he would lay a finger on my page and say, “are you sure about that?”. The boys were crying out how unfair this was, but he defended himself by pointing out that he wasn’t giving me any answers. As a woman in science, there have been many occasions that I experienced discrimination or challenges because of my gender, so I fondly remember the reverse discrimination of gentlemanly Mr. Given.

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I was born and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan. My maiden name was Orlikowski. My Grandpa O owned a very successful bowling alley where three of his four sons worked. We were brought up as a very tight knit family. At one time there were 10 of us attending the same small Catholic elementary school. We spent every weekend and vacations at a nearby lake house and of course bowled together. My cousins are still some of my best friends today.

I was also extremely close to my other grandparents, often staying with them for weeks at a time in Fremont, Michigan. My Grandpa was a self-educated businessman, meticulous with numbers and data, which I believe is where my interest in accounting came from. My Grandma was an exemplary independent working woman. Most memorable was the way they loved and cared for each other. They were married for 69 years. They instilled in me a deep care and concern for others.

I supported myself, paid my own way through Central Michigan University and became the first in my family to graduate from college. As an accounting major, I went to work for Touche Ross and earned my license as a CPA. I went on to work for a privately held and quickly growing automotive supplier in Holland, MI and became their first woman on the Leadership Team. And I met my husband Jeff, there.

The company that we worked for was bought out and brought about opportunities for both of us to move to the corporate headquarters across the state. We had three young girls at that point and decided something had to give. We made a conscious decision that I would stay home and raise the girls in Ann Arbor, MI. We totally believed that this was a short-term move and we’ve had the same house for 22 years now, although we lived abroad in England and Holland for a number of years while on assignment.

Our daughters are now young adults, all graduated from university and we have one 5-year-old grandson. They all live in the state of MI, Jenna back in Grand Rapids, Dana in Detroit and our oldest, RaeAnne, with grandson Landon, live just a few miles away from us in Saline. All are managing busy careers.

Jeff, after attempting to “retire” twice, was recruited by a previous business associate to launch and create a business around a newly developed raw material. With everyone working, I spend several days a week taking care of Landon.

The holidays with my husband, daughters and grandson
In addition, I hold down the fort managing two households and a rental property. We, of course, enjoy a lot of travel and I am the family travel agent.

When did COVID-19 first become part of your FAWCO work and what were your first thoughts about it all? Being on the Foundation Board, we had been heavily involved with the Interim Meeting (IM) in Luxembourg, planning Foundation Night, the Backing Women Boutique, quilt raffle, celebration of Roberta Zöllner’s 25 years of making quilts and other fundraising opportunities. As a new Treasurer I had put substantial time into looking for ways to make the payment process at the conference easier and more efficient for attendees as well as for myself. Anytime you are dealing with multiple countries and currencies, the banking process becomes quite a challenge. I was very excited to be going to Luxembourg with a new point-of-purchase payment process that I hoped would accomplish my goals. As COVID-19 began to hit hard in Italy, concern began over what this meant to the conference. A few members began dropping out but the optimist in me believed we would prevail. A couple of Board members began questioning their ability to attend but I was confident I would be fine and the conference would continue in some fashion. It was literally the day before I was to depart for Europe that the conference was cancelled and I deemed it probably not prudent to travel. Indeed I think it was just a few days later that the US began their travel restrictions.

Tell us about a typical day “FAWCO COVID-19” day for you. Cancelling the Interim Meeting brought the Foundation Board on high alert and a call to action. This is our ONE fundraiser of the year, we had grants and awards to announce, silent and live auction items collected, raffles to hold, etc, etc. Led by our fearless President, Barbara Bühling, we all quickly stepped up to find solutions and new ways of carrying out the tasks at hand. Lauren Mescon, VP of Fundraising, deserves so much credit for making a Live Auction take place virtually, only two weeks after the cancellation. She had previously driven the selling of raffle tickets and conference charms online before the conference so this was currently taking place. For me personally, my drive for payment efficiencies went out the window as I began to collect and process payments one by one, from members around the globe and through multiple payment options. It sounds simple, but my Treasurer’s role became a full-time job. I had to check multiple sources for payments, from foreign exchange processors to the mailbox and confirming the receipt of those payments. Then I had to notify those mailing charms and tea towels, preparing raffle tickets, and Auction item certificates. The depositing and transferring funds involved me recording each individual payment and reporting it, not to mention the follow up I had to...
Tell us something about yourself that not many people may know. I love the theater, I’ve seen shows in NYC, London, Vienna and Chicago. I’m absolutely obsessed with Hamilton and have seen it three times now.

What’s the most impactful “no” you’ve said recently? The hardest “no” is usually to my 5-year-old grandson.

Who is the first, non-family, person you want to see in person when the lockdown ends? Jeff McLaughlin, who is my hairstylist and uncertified life coach.

What did you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during this COVID-19 work? I stay away from the negative news and follow the virus news in very small doses. I try to get outside and stay active every day. I listen to music, meditate and have had several video-conference extended family meetups. I still spend at least a day a week with my grandson. It’s a needed break for him, his mom and me. While the Foundation work has been a lot, it has also been a very welcome distraction. I would actually be pretty happy finding a wee bit of boredom right now.

What 3 things are you looking forward to doing once the pandemic subsides? Reconnecting with friends, going to the grocery store without anxiety, and travelling. In the profound lyrics of One Republic, “I know that there’ll be better days!”

What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19? I’m not sure surprised is the right word but it has certainly highlighted the fragility of life and time. For FAWCO and the Foundation, it is another example of the resilience, resourcefulness and generosity of this group. Financially, we are going to come out of this in pretty decent shape and we’ve all found and used talents we didn’t even know we had to get there.

What is the most important thing you have discovered or learned about yourself, and others through your COVID-19 work? I am an eternal optimist. There are many that are not. I respect most of society’s willingness to do the right thing to protect themselves and others particularly under such drastic and immediate measures. I love to follow the good news stories about people helping others and the respect and kindness shown to frontliners. I am amazed by the creativity of entertainers and others to share their gifts and talents from their homes in the hopes of brightening the spirits of others. In an American environment of such divisiveness, it has been heart-warming to see the coming together of so many.
The American Women’s Club of Oslo, Norway, in FAWCO’s Region 2, celebrated its 85th anniversary last fall. Here club president (and Inspiring Women Social Media Manager) Berit Torkildsen tells us more about the club and what life is like living in Oslo:

The first American Women’s Club (AWC) meeting in Oslo was a luncheon given in September 1934 by Mrs. Thomas Bevan, wife of the American General Consul, who invited 14 American friends to hear a talk by the president of the American Women’s Association of Vienna. In February 1935, a constitution and bylaws were approved and monthly dues were adopted. The group met in each other’s homes until January 1936, when a permanent meeting location was found at Teatergata 7. A library of shared books was an important focus of the meetings, which were held regularly until the German occupation of Norway in April 1940, when the Club ceased officially to exist. The few American women remaining in Oslo met informally in their homes, sharing their limited food and offering mutual support. The library was carried to the meetings in two battered suitcases.

After liberation in May 1945, membership began to increase. The Club was reorganized and in September 1947, the Oslo Chamber of Commerce became its new headquarters. Also that year, the AWC Scholarship was established and fund-raising for a philanthropic purpose became an important aspect of club activity.

Today our membership of 140 women is composed of primarily of American women, but up to 25% of our membership can be women from other countries. Many of our long-standing members came here because they fell in love with a Norwegian and decided to live in Norway. They established families here, and many of their daughters have now joined the club as first generation Norwegian-Americans. We also have members who arrived here to further their education, and have enjoyed it so much that they too have stayed. Finally, there are those who arrive because of work.
The Club has a board composed currently, of 11 positions which are filled by a Nominating Committee that the board has appointed. Generally the positions are filled with ease; thankfully there is little begging involved! One year five members of our Bunco group decided that they would take over the board (all positions were up) and so they did! Easy peasy!

For the last 29 years, the American Coordinating Council in Norway has hosted a 4th of July celebration in Oslo’s famous Vigeland Statue Park (rumoured to be the biggest in Europe.) The AWC Oslo has previously had two tents. In the first you could find an array of homemade baked goods consisting of everything Americana: Brownies, chocolate chip cookies, Rice Krispie Treats, peanut butter cookies, you name it! (And lemonade of course!) The other tent was manned by our fantastic bookworms, aka our library committee. They would sell used books at bargain prices to raise money to buy new ones for our membership library.

Sadly, due to the COVID-19 crisis, there will be no 30th celebration in the park this year. We are hoping to be back in 2021, as the profits from the bake sale have been crucial to our Scholarship fundraising.

In 2015 we held our first annual AWC Christmas Market, where children could get their pictures taken with Santa Claus, while the grown-ups could browse tables of homemade items; ranging from knitwear, to Christmas cards, jewelry, jams, chutneys, honey and beautifully created miniature Christmas trees, to name a few! Thankfully it has grown to be such a great success that more than likely, it will make up for the loss at the park. The Christmas market has without a doubt become my favorite AWC event! I am a sucker for all things Christmas, but it’s not just that. For the last four years, I have joined other club members in being a vendor. Throughout the summer I collect fruits and berries from the forest and my garden, and freeze them until October. Then when it’s time to harvest the apples in my garden, I start making an assortment of jams, jellies and chutneys that I then sell at the market. 10% of all vendor profits goes to the club, who then donates that money to our scholarship fund. It’s the feel-good part of the year!

The AWC Oslo supports the Oslo Crisis Center, and has done for many years; however our main focus is on our scholarship. It began in 1947 when Josephine Bay, wife of US Ambassador Charles Ulrich Bay, suggested that the American Women’s Club (then primarily a social club) begin to raise funds for a scholarship to be awarded to a Norwegian student for advanced studies in the United States. She supported the fund-raising activities and generously matched the amount raised that year. The first AWC Scholarship of $1,000 was granted in 1949 to Erland Frisvold for study in International Relations.

We have now changed our requirements to suit the current Norwegian demographic, meaning the recipient can be of any nationality; however they must live and work in Norway. The club began to award the scholarship every two years (100,000NOK) and a scholarship committee was formed to publicize the scholarship, receive applications, screen and interview candidates, conduct all correspondence, and award the grants. The preferred fields of study have changed over time but are now: women’s health, children’s health, geriatric care, preventative medicine,
and education for children/youth with special needs. The AWC Oslo is very proud of its scholarship program. It strengthens our ties with our host country and contributes to the well-being of children and adults who benefit from the specific training the professionals receive in America.

Like many FAWCO clubs, our membership meets once a month for our general meeting; where we may differ is our special interest groups! Our GMs are held at the same location whereas the special interest groups meet at a member’s home, swapping each time. Currently our most active groups are Documentary Group, Wine Group and Book Lovers. Documentary Group has for the past 7 years organized a road trip to the Gothenburg International Film Festival, which is hosted every year in January. It has become tradition that we meet up with some of the AWC Gothenburg ladies for dinner on the Saturday night; you could call it a “mini-Regional”! For anyone wanting a getaway during the dead of winter, with great company and riveting cinema, you are encouraged to join us!

Tell us a little about your city and country and its culture in general. Oslo’s topography is quite unique. The Oslo Fjord takes the main stage, surrounded by mountains, forests and lakes. A short train ride up to Frognereseter Café near the Holmenkollen skijump offers you a breathtaking panorama view of Oslo, the fjord and its islands, whilst enjoying a great cup of coffee (or a chilled glass of wine if you prefer). In the last 14 years since I arrived in Norway there has been an explosion of construction. The city has built a world class Opera House right near the fjord, a multi-purpose row of high-rises called Barcode which houses, amongst other things, hip restaurants and cafés. Oslo also built a new city library and when the books were due to be moved, the city decided to enlist the school children of Oslo to help! 1000 children, equipped with brightly colored backpacks provided by the library, paraded through town with 7000 books to their new home. It was a quite literally a “moving” sight to see!

A hot tip for those visiting Oslo for the first time – when you purchase a ticket for public transportation, not only does it include the subway, buses and trams, it also covers the boats that go out to the five main islands in the fjord! It’s only a short boat ride, but once you are out there, it’s as if you are thousands of miles away from the city. On one of the islands called Gressholmen is my favorite “undiscovered” gem, Gressholmen Kro (Inn). The Inn that stands today dates back to 1930, and was originally used as a clubhouse for the shooting range that was established on the island in 1865. In 1990 the city decided that it might not be ideal to have people shooting guns near sunbathers and swimmers and closed down the range. The clubhouse was turned into a café and is now run by fellow American and AWC friend, Ann Sung-an Lee.

Being in the outdoors is culturally valued in Norway. “There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing!” Allmansretten (the right to roam) gives people the right to walk almost anywhere and to pitch a tent for up to two nights as long as you’re at least 150 meters away from the nearest inhabited dwelling including cabins and RV’s. Oslo is quite large geographically. Much of this land is protected forest, which people can access easily, including by public transportation. This love of nature and abundance of land has helped ease many of Norway’s inhabitants during the COVID-19 crisis.

Norwegians can appear to be cold and distant, but they are in fact respecting your “space”. They are, on the whole, warm and friendly people once you get to know them. This “peculiar” trait seems to have come in handy during the new social distancing restrictions!
You know you’ve been in isolation too long when the highlight of your day is:

“Planning the next fun challenge, like the one where you dress up to take out the garbage on Garbage Day!”
Monica Jubayli, AWC Lebanon, former FAWCO President (photo left)

“Winning against the AARP bot when playing online Backgammon.”
Michele Hendrikse Dubois, FAUSA, former FAWCO Foundation President

“Binging on Netflix after breakfast.”
My Linh Kunst, AWC Berlin, former FAWCO President, Co-chair FAWCO Youth Program

“Cleaning the toaster.”
Melissa Mash, AW Surrey, former FAWCO Foundation President

“Dressing up for the dog park and even putting lipstick on for who? ... The other dogs?”
Karen O’Shaughnessy, AWC Hamburg, FAUSA, FAWCO U40 Chair

“Going to the Vegetable Automat.”
Rozanne Van Rie, AWC Antwerp, FAWCO 2nd VP (photo right)

“Hurrying outside to chat with a neighbor walking their dog.”
Liz Hemminger, AW Surrey, FAUSA

“Wheel of Fortune.”
Louise Greeley-Copley, FAUSA, FAWCO Foundation Secretary

“Taking out the trash!”
Renuka Matthews, FAWCO Member

“Watching my grandson, on FaceTime, watch the water drip from a Brita Filter.”
Suzanne Wheeler, AWE, former FAWCO Foundation President (photo left)

“Learning what the Cake of the Week is going to be.”
Amanda Drollinger, AWC of Central Scotland, FAWCO Secretary

“Finding an Amazon box at my door.”
Ellie Badanes, AW of Surrey, former FAWCO Foundation President

“Going to Costco for gas. Yay! Different scenery (it’s about 20 miles away).”
Lee Sorenson, FAUSA, AWA Rome, former FAWCO Foundation President
My childhood was definitely not average! I was born in Switzerland to a Swedish mom and a Swiss Dad. My mother was never happy with my father but couldn’t get a divorce without my father’s permission, so when I was ten my mother ran off to South America with a Latin lover and me in tow. We landed in Medellin, Colombia, the city they call the city of eternal spring. I remember we were very poor and for a long time had only two beds, a table and three chairs in our small rented home in the suburbs. But what I remember more than anything from that time is the day I first came face to face with the injustices in the world. My mom and I had taken the bus to go downtown to do some shopping, when I saw a young girl, maybe three or four years younger than I, wearing tattered clothing, all alone, begging in the street. I couldn’t understand how it could be that she seemed to be living in the street. I couldn’t sleep for days, and always look back on that afternoon as the day that inspired my passion to help create a more just world.

By the time I was in my teens, I had already lived in five countries and spoke four languages! The last port of call was Canada, where I stayed through University. I studied journalism at Carleton University in the nation’s capital, Ottawa, and then moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, where I became a rookie reporter and TV anchor.

My professional life has been incredibly full and fulfilling; I graduated from being a reporter and anchor in Canada to being a filmmaker for Britain’s BBC and others. I have been so lucky that I’ve been able to make documentaries around the globe for decades; documentaries that have succeeded in changing not only hearts and minds, but laws too.

Many of my films have focused on the human rights of women and children. I’ve traveled to more than 100 countries with my work, and I suspect it won’t be a surprise to anyone that I never had children. It wouldn’t have been fair to them. I often call my films “my babies”; many of the documentaries continue to be influential in making change, even years, sometimes decades, after they were first made.

Somewhere in all of this, I reunited with my childhood sweetheart, Chris Browne, and moved back to Canada. Since then, I made In the Name of Your Daughter. It’s a film that gives a voice to the inspiring Tanzanian girls whose

The next TARGET PROJECT was announced at the recent FAWCO Interim Meeting: S.A.F.E. (Safe Alternatives for FGM Elimination). You can click the link to read more from FAWCO on the project.

The award winning film documentary maker, Giselle Portenier, has made a film about the girls at S.A.F.E. In The Name of Your Daughter. She kindly took time out of her busy schedule to tell us more about her life, the film and how it came about:

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voices have not been heard in thousands of years; girls who are at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) and have decided to risk everything, including their lives and family, to run away from home and save themselves. It’s also a film about Rhobi Samwelly, the incredible woman who helps save them from harm.

These are crazy times. Life in the time of Corona is very different in so many ways; having said that, my goal since In the Name of Your Daughter premiered in Copenhagen, has been to make impact and inspire change in the fight to end female genital mutilation. And that still goes on. In fact, it’s been somewhat all-consuming; I made the film right from the start with the idea that it could be a tool for change and a call to take action. And that has happened. In the Name of Your Daughter has been seen all around the world in film festivals, on television, even in some of the world’s parliaments—Britain, The Netherlands and Australia. And together with three other women, I have co-founded the End FGM Canada Network. We believe there are over 100,000 survivors in Canada and, according to government documents, thousands of girls at risk. Yet almost nothing is being done in Canada which is why we founded the network. We are working hard to attract media attention and government action on FGM in the Canadian context.

Tell us about the main work of the S.A.F.E organization. Rhobi Samwelly’s organization, Hope for Girls and Women Tanzania, works to save girls from female genital mutilation. This is both important and inspiring; she is not just saving girls from FGM, she is also creating an army of young warriors who will carry on making change in their community. Rhobi’s goal is to make FGM history in her community, and she has all the passion, determination, and chutzpah to make her dream come true. FAWCO’s support for her mission will be invaluable.

I am so thrilled that FAWCO has chosen Rhobi Samwelly’s S.A.F.E. as the FAWCO 2019-2022 Target Project. Rhobi and her girls are among the most amazing people I have ever met. Together, they are working and succeeding in making positive change in their community. Most people know little about female genital mutilation, but it is in fact the worst systematic human rights abuse in the world today. And it’s happening on a grand scale. Every ten seconds another girl is cut somewhere. FGM/C is happening in 92 countries and on every continent except Antarctica. We need many many more Rhobi Samwellys to end this cycle of violence, but Rhobi is doing an amazing job and her influence is now reaching beyond Tanzania.
What was the first step you took to get involved in S.A.F.E.? I had always wanted to make a film about female genital mutilation, which I consider to be the most egregious human rights abuse committed against girls and women in the world today. It’s a fact of life in 92 countries and counting, which few people know. When I heard about Rhobi’s refuge saving girls during the chillingly named “cutting season,” I knew I’d found a way into the story. It was an important opportunity to highlight the voices of girls whose voices had not been heard in thousands of years. And it was a chance to help focus the FGM conversation around the human rights of girls. FGM is child abuse, sexual abuse, and torture, plain and simple. It’s time we framed the conversation in those terms.

Tell us something about the documentary you have made. I consider In the Name of Your Daughter to be the most important film of my career; I hope it’s a real contribution towards the creation of a better world. It’s educating Western audiences worldwide, and it’s also being used in communities where female genital mutilation is prevalent. There continue to be village screenings not just in Tanzania, but also in Nigeria and Kenya. Just imagine, the day after the first village screening in Tanzania, three 9 and 10-year-old girls who had seen the film showed up at Rhobi’s Safe House. One was brought by her own brother. That’s change in the making, and that’s wonderful, and shows Rhobi’s work is important.

Together with an entirely Tanzanian team led by cinematographer Samson Kapinga, I spent two months documenting life at Rhobi’s Safe House during the “cutting season.” We filmed as girls as young as eight arrived there after having fled from their homes to avoid being forced to go through female genital mutilation by the very people who are supposed to protect them. It was both inspiring and heart-breaking. Imagine, these girls have to make a decision that no child should ever have to make: agree to be cut, or risk their lives and run away from home, not knowing if they will ever see their families again. The most memorable day was going with Rhobi and little Rosie to Rosie’s home and film the reconciliation attempt with her mother. Rosie’s mom completely denied that she had ever intended to cut her, and yet 10-year-old Rosie said that her own cousin, who was even younger than her, had already been cut.

My heart was in my throat, as I watched Rhobi talking with Rosie’s mom, and saw Rosie’s pain, her fear. I will never forget the words Rosie spoke to her mother: “Mama, I don’t reject you, I just reject the cutting,” tears streaming down her face. I was so afraid Rhobi would leave Rosie there, and that she might still be cut. I should have known better! Rhobi took Rosie back to the Safe House to protect her. Filmmakers are supposed to be the window on the world, and not intervene in events. That day, with almost paralyzing fear for Rosie, I found that very, very hard.

What has surprised you most about life dealing with these issues and the girls? The most surprising thing is the clarity with which the girls see female genital mutilation – they have no problem understanding that this is fundamentally wrong, even if it has been going on for generations; even if their parents say it’s important. And yet their parents hang on to these tortuous traditions, unable to embrace change. And of course, the girls’ courage is unbelievable--many of them literally risked their lives, running through areas inhabited by wild animals, including lions, to get to the Safe House. Not to mention the emotional courage of leaving their own families behind.
What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself and others through this work? The most important thing I’ve discovered through decades of documenting human rights abuses around the globe, is that there are people everywhere who have the clarity of vision to understand right from wrong; people who have the courage to act when others do not; people who are prepared to stand up for what they believe in, even at great risk to themselves. And that’s not related to levels of education; I’ve seen that clarity, that conviction, that determination, that courage, in humble villagers as well as international statesmen. And it’s this that has allowed me to continue to remain optimistic, in spite of all the pain and injustice that I’ve witnessed. And there has been a lot.

IN CONVERSATION WITH GISELLE

Tell us something about yourself that not many people may NOT know. My husband and soulmate is my actual childhood sweetheart. We were each other’s first love in High School; at the time I felt too young to settle down, so we broke up, but then we were reunited three decades later and now cherish every minute we have with one another.

What fictional character would you be best friends with in real life? Without a shred of doubt, I would be best friends with Pippi Longstocking; she is fiercely independent, terribly strong, and won’t take no for an answer. She knows instinctively that it’s better to take action now, and ask for forgiveness later. She knows that being a sheep brings few meaningful rewards, and that while being a rebel may make you some enemies, being true to yourself is more important than being popular. Really, what’s not to love?!

Despite the world health crisis, tell us about a new habit you’ve acquired. I’ve taken this opportunity to learn Italian online. It’s a language I love the sound of. And I’ve started to bake and cook a little bit, something I never had the patience for or interest in. And I’ve been reminded that taking care of those you love is one of the most important things you can do. That last one is big.

Who is the first, non-family, person you want to see in person when the lockdown ends? I’m afraid I have to be completely honest, as shallow as that may be. My hairdresser is the first person I want to see when this is all over. Bar none. No question.
Earlier today, I attended my mother-in-law’s funeral. Right now, I’m sitting in a Louisville airport lounge waiting to board my Delta flight to Atlanta, connecting to Charleston. Bloody Mary or ginger-ale? I’ve got a concert to play in Charleston in a few days, and jet lag has slapped me silly.

Yesterday’s fifteen-hour flight odyssey from Germany to Kentucky culminated in an overnight stay at a Louisville hotel overlooking the viscous water flooding the banks of the Ohio River and a perilous Uber ride with Chuck the driver to the Southern Baptist church where my mother-in-law’s service took place. Visitation, open casket, a spray of pink flowers to match her suit jacket—a classic Baptist funeral befitting a preacher’s wife, with all the bells and whistles.

Due to my husband’s recent illness and inability to handle a transatlantic flight at this point in his recovery, I volunteered to show up at the church as the Designated Mourner on his behalf. I’ve read about Chinese funeral rituals where strangers are hired to sit in the second pew and sob loudly, but that wasn’t my gig today. I played the Pachelbel Canon in D, a piece I’ve performed in just about every venue imaginable. My mother-in-law once referred to the Pachelbel Canon as the Taco Bell Canon. I was honored to play it one more time, for her.

She slipped away the way most of us would prefer to exit this world—in her sleep. At the funeral, we sang her favorite hymns, listened to glossy stories about her century of exemplary life choices, and recited some prayers, the faded words of which seemed both appropriate and sad.

Note: All songs in the Baptist hymnal are written in keys for male singers.

The preacher invited each of us to stand and say a few words, so I did, because, as Designated Mourner, I thought my husband would want me to do so. I thanked her for raising a son who had become a loving husband, engaged father, a man who knows how to respect women. His mother might have happily played the part of the southern belle, but her accidental feminist edge occasionally revealed itself.

She first met Julia, our daughter, when Julia was thirteen months old. We had taken the long flight from Germany to Kentucky to present our precious child to her grandmother. I was distracted when we got out of the car because our four-year-old son, cranky and hungry after the long trip, had just called his baby sister an asshole. He couldn’t pronounce it properly and said “sasshole,” but it was clear enough what he meant. Not exactly a good way to make a positive impression on one’s prim and proper Baptist grandmother.

“Why,” my mom-in-law said, in her charming Louisville accent, ignoring the sasshole comment and its perpetrator. “Julia looks just like me.”

“Oh, yes, I guess she does,” I replied. “Bless your heart.”
“But look, Robin, she does have your feet.”

At the funeral service I played a decent improvisation of the Canon in D on a freshly tuned Steinway with a squeaky pedal and exited stage left. I picked up my suitcase and drove in a procession with our niece and nephew to Cave Hill Cemetery.

Our nephew helped carry the casket to the grave and I wept, not as the Designated Mourner, but as myself. I wept for the trajectory of age and the oblivious way we march into the chasm of finality. One day you’re making French toast for your family, your kid is calling everyone a sasshole, and the future—with its endless opportunities to make good trouble—stretches out before you like an interminable game of hide and seek. Then the next day, it’s a spray of pink roses, a couple of hymns that no woman with a normal voice can sing, and a hundred resonating farewells.

The air felt cold enough to break me in two, but the defiant sun shone fiercely on the end of an era.

People hover in the airport lounge. Boarding begins for the privileged few. The rest of us stand patiently and listen to the over-worked gate attendant recite his endless list of elite pre-boarders—first class, business class, active military (thank you for your service), families with small children, disabled, economy premium, non-active military (thank you for your service,) platinum card, gold card, silver card, bronze card, and more military (thank you for your service).

No one, and I mean no one, boards the plane in any of these categories.

“All other passengers may now board the plane.”

Finally. Like a pack of defeated, economy-class sassholes, we, the other passengers—also the only passengers—drag our weary selves onto the plane. No one thanks us for our service.

It’s February. In a few weeks all flights will be cancelled due to COVID-19. We settle in, naively assuming that the perks and privileges of our peripatetic lives will go on forever, uninterrupted by disease, death, and the destruction of our planet.

The canned music on the plane drones on for a few moments before I realize I’m hearing the Canon in D. Not my recording, but a soulless midi-string interpretation intended to soothe our nerves as we prepare for flight. I hear the sound of a fake cello and drift off to sleep, right before the plane lifts into the air.

Robin Meloy Goldsby’s solo piano career has taken her from Pittsburgh to posh New York City venues and exclusive resorts, and on to the European castles and concert stages where she now performs. Robin, a Steinway Artist, has seven recordings to her name and has appeared in the USA on National Public Radio’s All Things Considered and Piano Jazz with Marian McPartland. She is the author of Piano Girl; Rhythm; Waltz of the Asparagus People; and Manhattan Road Trip.

Currently, Robin is the featured pianist at the Excelsior Hotel Ernst in Cologne, Germany. Her newest recording is called Piano del Sol and you can listen to it here: Piano Del Sol

You can also visit Robin’s web page at www.goldsby.de.
I grew up in Bogotá, Colombia, as the older sister of two brothers. During my childhood I enjoyed dancing, which I used to practice for hours alone in my living room. I was also a girl scout, which I deeply enjoyed because I had the chance to go camping, make fires and build tents – and, last but not least, because I loved to help others.

When I was 19 years old my family moved to Costa Rica. I stayed in Colombia to finish my studies in international relations. I worked for the university as a teaching assistant for different professors, and on Saturdays I was an art teacher for a children’s English language institute. During that time, I was taking care of my own expenses, and when I graduated from university, I began to work to take care of my student loans.

All my jobs have let me explore the world in different ways. I began to travel to the US when I was 24 years old as an international events coordinator. Over a period of 13 years, I had the opportunity to lead the sales, marketing, communications and curation teams of the biggest ICT (Information and communication technologies), telecommunications and international paid TV events in Colombia and Central America, which led to me travelling all over the world. In each of my trips I made the effort to connect locally with the perspective reality of the places and peoples that I was visiting.

At 24 I met my husband, who came into my life to make it beautiful, funny, daring and full of love. Giancarlo is a hardworking Colombian-Italian man who travels even more than I do. He exports and imports coffee all around the world, and we share constant stories and reflections about what he experiences on his work trips.

In September 2011, we welcomed Rebecca (now 8 years old) into our lives, and in April 2013 came Luca (now 7). Being a mom is one of the best gifts I have received in life. I enjoy every second of it, even if there are hard times. Rebecca and Luca study in a bilingual school. We love watching them grow in open spaces and surrounded by different cultures. We deeply value family times and the opportunities we have to experience life together.

In 2016, I resigned to my corporate job and set up an independent consultancy firm advising companies on complex sales management and strategic marketing. I was lucky to have good clients when I began, but there was something missing.
In January 2017, I received an invitation from Georgetown University to attend a two-day program called Search Inside Yourself (SIY). In that moment I realized that I was longing to have a pause in my life to connect with myself. So, I decided to attend and what happened next was the beginning of my “purpose-full” life.

The experience was so powerful that when I came back to Colombia I decided to share the mindfulness and compassion practices I learned with as many people as I could. At the end of 2017 I applied to become an SIY certified teacher, which I am now, and decided to develop a mobile app to share human wisdom for everyday actions: Mindful Synchrony.

SIY is a mindfulness and neuroscience-based leadership program developed in 2007 by one of the first Google engineers, who wanted to share meditation practices and their benefits with his teammates. Now more than 35,000 employees at Google have been trained in this program, and since 2012 it has been shared in more than 150 cities and with more than 50,000 people around the world. I am the first Colombian to have been granted a teacher certification.

My Mindful Synchrony app brings together human wisdom from life experiences to inspire everyday actions and broaden our perspective and interpretation of life. I can say that I am the first Colombian woman to lead a technology driven company – in the same category as apps such as Calm, Headspace or Insight Timer.

**What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response?** At the end of January, I had the chance to attend a Dr. Joe Dispenza program in Bogotá, and that day I was invited to give a mindfulness workshop to a group of executive women in Cartagena in February. What was amazing about those days in Cartagena was that as part of the agenda, we were invited to visit a very poor neighborhood in which the JuanFe Foundation works with vulnerable adolescent mothers. At that time, the virus was already in motion in Wuhan, but we didn’t expect what would happen next. The experience was very humbling in the sense that those girls were surviving every day to live and feed their babies with hope and bravery based on love.

Two weeks later, I was back in my home making decisions on how we were going to face the upcoming weeks now that the quarantine was announced in many countries. But my heart was resonating with those girls because my challenge was not to survive. I had food. I had work. I was with my family. These girls were facing the fear of being stuck at home without being able to work or attend the foundation facilities to eat and receive training. They were facing the danger of being emotionally and physically abused, the uncertainty of not having food to feed their children and the prospect of losing hope.

So I decided to do what I could to help. With my husband, who is the co-founder of the app, we decided to make all the app content free up until August 31 to be able to support as many people as possible during these difficult and uncertain times.

**Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you.** I get up at 5:00 in the morning to meditate and write. At 6:00 a.m. I take a 6k run. At 7:30 a.m. our children are ready to take virtual classes. Once they are engaged with their studies, I begin to work on the app, creating content, inviting new mentors, promoting the app on social networks. I am also accompanying teams in
different companies to cope with the changing and challenging situations using mindfulness and emotional intelligence practices. We eat lunch together as a family, and in the afternoon I continue working on the app and providing workshops and conversational sessions with teams. At 5:00 in the afternoon we gather again as a family, play games and eat dinner. We don’t watch the news. We don’t listen to the news. We only read it. This way there is our own voice telling us what is happening. We talk, we reflect, we contemplate the moment as it is.

What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19? Our human nature and our capacity to adapt. This is a time when our vulnerability emerges opening, the door to our hearts and our most primitive instincts. This is a moment in which the best and the worst of us is awakened. Mentoring people and dealing with my own emotions and thoughts as well as my family’s has made me notice and appreciate the abundance of life and love around me. At the same time, the fear and the anger that push us to react and disengage from the present moment.

If anyone reading this is interested, I would be happy to offer a pro bono online mindfulness session to anyone who could benefit from it in this moment. You can contact me at: carolina@mindfulsynchrony.com. The Mindful Synchrony website is: www.mindfulsynchrony.com You can download the app here: Mindful Synchrony App (Apple) or Mindful Synchrony App (Google).

Throw Yourself a Little Pajama Parade!

All the accolades go to you for choosing these luxurious pajamas made of Peruvian Pima cotton for softness with a touch of Modal and Elastane for a comfortable fit. From The Cat’s Pajamas.

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Ellie Badanes, AW Surrey and FAUSA Member and The Pajama Company Founder
“An apple a day keeps the doctor away…”

While a 2015 study by researchers from Dartmouth and the University of Michigan found no evidence that this old Welsh proverb was true – adult consumers of one small apple per day had the same number of physician visits as those who did not eat apples – better nutrition can be the key to better health, particularly in the area of non-communicable diseases. Food can often play a role in both disease prevention and disease treatment.

What is the role of food in our lives? From a purely health and well-being standpoint, food is used to maintain our health, prevent disease, allow our body to function and provide our cells with information. We all know that a healthy diet is recommended – but most of us don’t always follow that recommendation. Why not? Researchers at the University of Minnesota suggest two possible reasons – 1) we focus on what to avoid, not what to eat; and 2) we know what to do, but choose not to act.

Eating the wrong diet has made us sick – sicker than many even realize. Poor diet causes more than half a million deaths per year in the US; it is the leading cause of mortality. However, it’s not just the US that has a problem. Cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, cancers, and diabetes are responsible for 71% of global deaths (41 million) each year (World Health Organization, World Health Statistics 2018.) Malnutrition is considered a major risk factor in the development of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as these. While malnutrition can be defined by a lack of sufficient energy or nutrients, it can also be characterized by excessive and imbalanced intake of nutrients. Nearly one in three people worldwide are currently considered malnourished. This number is expected to rise to two out of three by 2025 if current trends continue. Children affected by either form are at a greater risk of developing NCDs as adults.

What happened to our diets and health? Over the last 50 years or so, the food and farming industry focus has been on efficiency – to increase the amount of available, inexpensive, and high calorie foods to feed the hungry. Unfortunately, this has often decreased the diversity of foods available – as well as displacing the typically healthier local diet. Foods high in salt, sugars, saturated fats and trans fats have become more widely available, while availability of fresh produce, legumes, nuts and pulses has not always improved as much.

According to researchers at the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, nearly half of all deaths in the US each year from heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes can be attributed to 10 foods – whether by eating too little or too much of them.
Could changing our diet really make that much of a difference? We’ve seen taxes levied on sugar-sweetened beverages, with some modest decrease in consumption. Unfortunately, they are just a fraction of the problem. Maybe we need to also concentrate more on what we should eat, rather than what we shouldn’t be eating. Just as weight loss programs that restrict certain foods never seem to work out in the end, could implementing a diet full of foods that are good for us on a more consistent basis be better than simply removing certain items that we shouldn’t be eating? In addition, could this diet really stave off NCDs and lower health care costs? We know health care is expensive – and the US spends more per person on health than comparable countries. If “prescribing” fruits, vegetables, nuts and fish could lower insurance premiums and keep people healthy, shouldn’t we give it a try?

Likewise, how does better nutrition help in the time of COVID-19? Most of us are well aware that those with underlying medical conditions are at greater risk of complications from the virus – and these conditions are often a result of poor nutrition, as discussed above. Likewise, the malnourished are generally at a greater risk of catching, and then not being able to successfully fighting the virus. What about the rest of us? Could better nutrition improve our chances? Research has shown that higher intakes of certain nutrients seem to boost the immune system – and a stronger immune system can help to fight off the virus, or keep it at bay. These may include micronutrients such as zinc, selenium, iron, and vitamins A, C, D, E, B-6, and folate: as well as whole foods like goji berry, broccoli, green tea, and turmeric. While the exact effects of these and other nutrients on COVID-19 have yet to be determined, they have shown promise in fighting the common cold, flu, and other respiratory infections. Why not add healthy foods such as citrus, berries, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, red bell peppers, sweet potatoes, beans, shellfish, almonds, hazelnuts, peanut butter, turmeric and tea to your “WFH” diet?


But now, let’s reconsider that apple. Researchers at Tufts University compared people who took vitamin supplements with others who consumed the same nutrients via food. They tracked
intake of vitamins A and K, magnesium, and zinc. When these nutrients occurred naturally in people’s diets, they were less likely to die of heart attacks and other diseases. While vitamin supplements are synthesized to be the exact replica of what you’d get naturally in certain foods, they are missing out on other benefits. Minimally processed foods often deliver more fiber, which slows the absorption of sugar and feeds our microbes. The microbes they contain themselves are also a benefit. Maintaining a healthy and diverse biome is vital to digestion, metabolic health and the functioning of our immune systems. A July 2019 study from “Frontiers in Microbiology” found that the average apple contained about 100 million bacteria—a more diverse range than any supplement. These bacteria were rarely dangerous; most are innocuous or even beneficial. Researchers suggest that they interact with the microbes already in our guts and are helpful in maintaining the diversity in our gut biomes. When considering the apple, it turns out most—90%—of these bacteria are contained in the core. So maybe the old saying just needs to be updated a bit…a whole apple a day, may keep the doctor away!

*The aphorism, “An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” originated in Wales, first appearing in a publication in 1866 in a different rhyming format: “Eat an apple on going to bed and you’ll keep the doctor from earning his bread.” The saying reappeared in 1913 in its current form. Medical practice in the 19th and 20th centuries was crude, and the public sensibly sought to keep physicians (and other health practitioners) away—a sentiment that may not be out of place in the 21st century. Through the ages, the apple has come to symbolize health and healthy habits, and has been used by government and private health organizations to symbolize lifestyle choices that lead to health and wellness. [1]

(Notes: The original version of this article—including sources—was published on the FAWCO Health Team website page in December 2019. It has been edited for use here.)

Lisa O’Hearn was born and raised in suburban Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She and her family of five left WI in 2001 for Tokyo, Japan, repatriating to New Jersey in 2004. In 2012 they moved to Zurich, Switzerland, followed by Munich, Germany in 2018. What goes around comes around...they are now “safer at home” in Door County, Wisconsin having repatriated at the end of March. She’s a current member of the Munich International Women’s Club and a former member of the American Women’s Club of Zurich. Once things calm down, they plan on splitting time between Wisconsin and an apartment currently (but not currently) under renovation in NYC.
Emma Bonjer, daughter of AWC Amsterdam member Martha Canning, was a FAWCO Youth Cultural Volunteer in 2015. After traveling to Mumbai with the Youth Program she decided to study medicine as she wanted to develop skills to be able to make a difference for people in need. For now her studies have moved online due to the virus and she has decided to do her part in fighting against the pandemic by volunteering. The Inspiring Women team asked her about her experiences assisting with sourcing supplies needed during the COVID-19 crisis and this is what she said:

**What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response?** I signed up to do volunteer work through an online form for medical students. A few days later, I was called to work on a project. I was pleased to be a part of a team working to combat this new virus, and to be able to contribute in some way.

**What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19?** How well we can work together virtually, and how much we can achieve online. I have found working online in this situation to be very productive and an easy way to communicate with colleagues.

**What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself and others through COVID-19?** During COVID-19 I have noticed how creative people are in solving problems. I have also been reminded of the goodness of my fellow human beings. I have witnessed enormous amounts of goodwill during this period, which have reaffirmed my faith in people.

**What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19?** It might sound strange, but I have found this time to be more interesting than stressful. To take care of myself and make sure that I’m on top of things, I take time to exercise. I like to go outside for a run or walk, or do a home workout.

**What 3 things are you looking forward to doing once the pandemic subsides?** Once the current crisis subsides, I want to resume my studies in person, meet up with friends and go back to the gym. I’ve found that it’s surprising how much you can miss the little things in life. To be able to meet friends for coffee or dinner, or to go to a film or concert: these are the things for which I’ve developed a new appreciation.
What Comfort Food Have You Eaten?

“Eating? Drinking!”
Alisa Cook-Roehs, AIWC Dusseldorf, FAWCO Treasurer

“Italian Sausage and Grapes.”
Jane Indreland, FAUSA, AWC of London, former FAUSA President

“Mashed potatoes and ice cream - not simultaneously!”
Tracy Moede, AWC Hamburg, FAWCO Foundation VP Communications (photo right, with daughter, Allison)

“Chicken Curry - unfortunately Chapatis aren’t always available (the guy at the deli counter saw my list and said, “Sorry madam, we haven’t had those in a while.”)
Judy Furukawa, AWC Brussels

“I seldom ate ice cream before this, but I have discovered Private Selection Sea Salt Caramel Truffle. I’m doomed.”
Janet Darrow, FAUSA and AWA Vienna member, former FAUSA President

“Tapioca pudding.”
Rick Chizmadia, FAUSA, FAUSA President

“Home baked goodies I kept making”.
Kristina Soleymanlou, AWG Paris, Vice-President, AWG Gives (photo left, preparing food for homeless in Paris)

“A lot of plain chocolate Easter eggs”
Angie Aebersold, AWC Bern, Co-Chair FAWCO Events. (photo below)

“Porridge -for lunch and sometimes dinner!”
Patti Meek, AWC Dublin, former FAWCO Foundation President

“One piece of cake daily. Years ago, a sports instructor told me she would rather I eat a whole cake every day than drink a bottle of wine. So, I am just following instructions.”
Celeste Brown, AWC The Hague, former FAWCO President

“…and popcorn, of course. Who isn’t comforted by popcorn and a good movie on TV?”
Lee Sorenson, FAUSA, AWA Rome, former FAWCO Foundation President

“I’ve crossed into the danger zone and have learned how to make real fried French fries. I don’t mean to sound dramatic, but it is literally my greatest accomplishment.”
Mary Stange, AWC Bogotá, FAWCO Rep, FAWCO Social Media Manager
Why overseas voting matters
Overseas Americans often complain that US law ignores or unintentionally harms us. While voter turnout in the US is much worse than that in many developed countries (around 65% seems to be cause for celebration), however, turnout for overseas Americans voters is only 4%. If we do not bother to speak, why should lawmakers listen to our concerns?

Our country needs to hear our voices – not just in the choice of President and Vice President, and senators and representatives in Congress, but in state and local offices. Living in daily contact with the world outside the US and functioning as informal ambassadors for our country, we can offer unique insights. And now that many political races are decided by small margins, we have a better chance to be heard than ever before. Seize this chance: vote in every year in which elections are held, and help other overseas Americans to do so.

WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT
FAWCO wants every overseas American to do three things. Further details are available in this virtual workshop on voter registration and assistance posted on FAWCO’s YouTube channel.

1. Register/Request a ballot
Register to vote/request a ballot for the 2020 election right away, if you have not already done so. This means going to the website of the US Vote Foundation or the Federal Voter Assistance Program (FVAP) and:
   a. clicking on the links for overseas civilian voters and your state;
   b. entering the information required by your state;
   c. generating a PDF; and
   d. printing, signing and dating it.

Then send the registration form/ballot request to your local election official (LEO) according to the instructions included in the PDF, preferably by electronic means (e.g. email) if your state permits that. FVAP’s Voting Assistance Guide (VAG) and the US Vote Foundation website have updated information on how you can return the form and, later, your ballot. To email (or fax) the form/request to the LEO, scan the signed and dated PDF and send it to the email address (or fax number) given in the PDF. Also check in with your LEO – or Can I Vote, site of the National Association of Secretaries of State – a few weeks after you register, in order to check your status.

2. Vote
Receive and complete your ballot. The instructions enclosed with your blank ballot will say how you can return it: by mail, email, fax or carriers like DHL or FedEx – check them carefully, or go back to the US Vote Foundation or FVAP websites – and scan and return your ballot electronically if possible. The rules for ballots may differ from those for registration forms. You can also ask your LEO about this.

If your ballot does not arrive by October 3, 2020 (one month before November 3), send a federal write-in absentee ballot (FWAB). To get one, go back to the US Vote Foundation or FVAP...
(see link on the right side of this page). If your regular ballot arrives after you have sent off your FWAB, vote and send it, too, and let the local election official decide which one to count.

3. Promote voting by all overseas Americans
From now until Election Day, but as soon as possible, use every network and connection you have to share this information with other Americans and urge them to register and vote. You can work through your FAWCO club, social media accounts, church, school, business, etc. etc. Click here for links to outreach materials from the US Vote Foundation and FVAP.

FAWCO resources
FAWCO’s US Voting Committee encourages and assists US overseas citizens to vote by providing a dedicated website and information and training to volunteers in FAWCO member clubs, and helping with publicity. The Committee also works to reduce the barriers to voting from overseas imposed by federal and state legislation, through such means as Overseas Americans Week and work with partners such as the US Vote Foundation and FVAP. It publishes monthly articles on the FAWCO website, and summarizes and links to them in News in Brief and the US Liaison Bulletin. Email the FAWCO US Voting Committee (voting@fawco.org) with questions or suggestions, or requests to join.

Reason #45
Janet Darrow gives back to her clients: lockdown survival kits, safe home showings, virtual tours and up to date knowledge of the current market.

Contact Janet Now
JanetDarrow@kw.com
DRE#01977602
I am a member of AWC Antwerp, a freelancer and the mother of two wonderful daughters that I have raised alone since they turned 7 years old. I have worked in different fields to make ends meet and moved to another continent to be able to do that. We got lost, we got found, we laughed and cried, but as long as we can stand back up with power and love, we will not give up on life itself.

I contribute with my images, bringing a sparkle of laughter or fun into someone’s life. Art is irreplaceable in times of grief and challenges. It should be considered valuable that people, the dreamers, are a presence in this world that can show the hope we all want to touch.

A photo for me is a moment in time that will last for generations to come, even when I am not here.
When I heard Belgium was going on lockdown, I was curious and excited at the same time. This is a time for photography to write history.

I had to go to Antwerp by bus from where I live to pick up my daughter from the train station. This gave me a good reason to go out with my camera and experience the state of the city first hand. I walked for some time through the empty streets – totally confused and lost. The expensive stores seemed so unnecessary in comparison to the health of the people. The musician in the street was still playing his accordion. While he didn’t have an audience, he played beautifully, and it sounded even better than it does when the streets are full. I gave him the coins in my pocket. And later, I saw a bar selling coffee from an open window – this was still at the very beginning when everything felt slightly unreal. I never felt unsafe, as busses were all very clean; sometimes I was the only passenger on the bus and I was always wearing a mask and plastic gloves. But I always felt happy to get back home.

When my daughter and I arrived home, I had the idea of taking pictures of people at home behind their windows. I asked my daughter to pose for me as I pointed up at her with my camera.
from outside. As my neighbors were watching, I turned my camera onto them as well.

I’ve been met with so much enthusiasm with this project. I would simply ring the doorbell and wait to see who was willing to stand behind their window and in front of my lens. My subjects described the experience as a fun part of their day, and it provided a moment of joy in otherwise somewhat bleak times.

What I do love in this time is that we finely have given our planet a break, that we experience blue skies and that I have my daughter living with me through it. In these challenging times where we have to focus on a new world, I feel a relief, a moment of ... finally... maybe not appropriate for many, but for me, the life we lived in did not make any sense anymore. I saw the world pass by with tears in my eyes, with hopeless moments. Wherever I looked I saw the pain, the impossible situations in politics, in the financial and emotional worlds. Without hope, we have nothing.

Brigitte Meuwissen
Photographer
www brigittemeuwissen be
I grew up mostly in Branson, Missouri. I was a late surprise in my family (11 years after my four sisters), and my dad retired from the foreign service. He wanted to come back to family (he had grown up in St. Louis) but didn’t want to be in the big city. I think they thought a small town would provide me with an idyllic childhood. However, because I was born in Washington, DC, and had already lived abroad (in Asunción, Paraguay) for three years, I actually found small town life a bit stifling. I ended up doing a semester abroad in Paraguay (my sister lived there and still does) and then went to boarding school (Memphis, TN) because I was eager to get out there into the world.

I attended university in New Orleans (Tulane) and then moved to San Francisco because it was a city that had always fascinated me. I worked there for just over a year, and then due to my mom’s illness, decided to move back to Missouri, this time St. Louis. I lived there until I met my husband, David. He was in Cleveland and we were trying to get together, into the same city. We ended up on a jaunt back to South America. He covered the Mercosur as his territory and took an “extended business trip” to Paraguay where we lived for 11 months. It was a great way to start our relationship together.

Because of living abroad as a child, and because my husband traveled all over the world for his work, we were both interested in living abroad ourselves. Our kids were young and we were eager to show them other parts of the world, have them learn about another culture and learn a second language. David was traveling often to Switzerland, and so when the opportunity came up for us to move here, we did.

We’ve now been in Basel for over 11 years. We rented an apartment just outside of town for much of that time, but recently bought a small apartment right in the heart of the city. My husband works for Bayer now, and his office is five minutes away. Our kids are studying and working in town. I teach yoga so being in town is much more convenient for me, plus we are all enjoying the ease of shopping, restaurants, and almost everything we need being within walking distance.
What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response? I am a yoga and mindfulness teacher. After COVID-19 arrived, at first I resisted moving things online, but then had many requests. I had considered video classes off and on for years, but hadn’t done it. Zoom classes didn’t sound great, but I decided to give it a try. I think I had to get over worrying about how I would look online. It took years before I got used to my recorded voice (helpful for podcasting) and now this was another step. I bought a good microphone, and then working with my tech specialist who luckily is my husband, we figured out how to turn our tiny sunroom into my “studio.”

Now I teach various classes, all online: yoga at the local sports center, a group mindfulness class and HAPPY HOUR YOGA, which is a Friday evening class offered on a donation basis. I am also working with my private clients, all online. To get my Friday evenings back, I had stopped that class a few years ago. Now that it is online, former students of mine from all over the world attend! I have people in the UK, USA, Serbia, and of course Switzerland joining. After class some of us stay on, grab a cocktail and talk about life. And I still have my Friday evenings “at home” so it’s a win/win. It’s been such an unexpected pleasure to teach online.

Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you. My days are more relaxed even though I am working more. I am letting myself get the rest I need, so depending on how my sleep goes, my waking times vary. That’s quite different from before and really feels nourishing. In my mindfulness classes I teach about the importance of caring for yourself so you can do the same for others. Next, I meditate and make my coffee and read (not necessarily in that order). Then I get on with my day.

Most days I’m doing a Zoom yoga or mindfulness class about twice a day, either 1-2-1 or as a group. Apart from this I manage the business end and spend more time reading both for pleasure because it feeds me so, or for work (I love reading those books too). I sprinkle my weeks with yoga for me and watching Netflix or YouTube while I crochet (love to watch something and crochet!), and that feeds me too.

I’ve also been cooking more, which is lovely. I was always interested in cooking, but when we moved to Basel I took some time to delve in deeper. Then I got busier with other things and now am back to making no-knead bread more often, and getting creative cooking from the larder. I love doing that - connects to the pioneer girl within!

What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19? I’m surprised at how much I am enjoying the slower pace. It’s like I gave myself permission to “be” more. I’ve always known that spending time being present and doing what I want was important to me. But I always let the little voice within me have some influence, telling me that SHOULD DO SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE, DAMN IT!

The more time I spend being the more easily the doing flows, and from an inspired place. It actually works. I think before I was afraid to really go deeply with experimenting with life in that way. COVID-19 has given me the excuse!
IN CONVERSATION WITH RYLLA
What advice would you offer to yourself five years ago? One year ago? Trust yourself more! Your intuition is spot on, and yes, you can do it differently. Go ahead and not only will you be happier; you’ll be an inspiration to others who are wanting to do it differently as well.

I’d also tell myself to appreciate herself more. I look back now at a picture of me in a bikini in my early 40s and remember thinking maybe I was getting on a bit to wear a two piece. I see that picture now, and think, damn, you looked amazing! Strong and beautiful! Now instead of looking at my 50-something year old self and thinking of what’s changed, I try to see myself looking back as a 70-year-old, appreciating what her life was in her 50s.

What’s the most impactful “no” you’ve said recently? It may sound small, but it’s been saying no to chain letters. Since COVID-19 I’ve received chain letters about sharing recipes, poems, etc. I very gently but strongly said that while I appreciated being included, and I liked the idea of sharing, I don’t like chain letters and had given myself permission to never participate in one again. It felt so good to be strong, clear, and, say yes to myself.

Who is the first, non-family, person you want to see in person when the lockdown ends? My sister who lives in the US. I don’t know when she’ll be able to travel again, but we are already dreaming and scheming for her trip here. Meanwhile I talk with her almost every day, and often we cook together over FaceTime. Nice, but not the same! We are so close. I’ve learned much from her and she has always, since I was little, seen me, recognized and appreciated me. She still does, and I her. Consequently we have a blast together!

What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself and others through COVID-19? I am fine without so much social life outside. I was always ready to meet for a coffee, a glass of wine, and quite eager to explore new restaurants. I used to get into a bit of an anxious place, stuck in my doing-ness (which involved the inner critic telling me I was never doing enough) and then I would travel to get back on course. What I realize now is that I can do that without leaving home.

What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19? I make sure to do yoga, meditate gently, and spend at least a few moments outside each day, no matter the weather. When I say meditate gently, that is sometimes I do a more formal practice, and other days I take time to savor making my coffee, spend time just watching the birds play in the yard and fly overhead.
I don’t know about you, but this is my first pandemic. I’ll admit when I first heard about the Coronavirus I thought it was related to the beverage. I had always enjoyed a cold Corona beer with a lime wedged in the bottleneck on a hot summer day. But as the days continued to pass, the reality became clear. They are going to have to rebrand.

But by the time I was headed back to Sweden on February 29, no one could deny that something strange was happening. I had two N95 masks sealed in their package that I ordered for $12. At airport security, the agents laughed at me saying, “those aren’t going to help. The virus is airborne and can get in through your eyes and nose”. The woman behind me joined in and guffawed adding, “there was even something on the news saying they may do more harm than good”. I chuckled along telling myself I was laughing with them not at me as they were. As I struggled with my packed-to-the-rim carry-on, not the real carry-on, but the purse that doesn’t count as a carry-on, I decided to leave the masks, unopened in their pristine packaging at the airport in a restaurant.

It was within a week of my return that I learned how valuable those masks were and a friend comforted me saying a frontline airport worker probably picked them up. I felt better hoping I made a donation. For me, the worst part of the pandemic is not knowing when I will be back with my nuclear family. I’m stuck in Europe with my family here, and while that ain’t bad, there is no place like home even on a good day. So how am I coping? Actually, quite well most days. The daily phone calls or messages home have taken on new meaning. The once routine reports from the home front are now consumed and appreciated as if they were reports from Mars. I have weekly English lessons with my Danish/German goddaughter and her sister. Before we never made time to have video calls.

My senior executive cousin who was always on the run now has time for video chats and it is as if we’re girls growing up together again. I call people who I have never spoken to before but have been part of my network for years. I didn’t even call when one gave me inauguration tickets in 2008 but I called last month to check-in. My Aunt, who doesn’t have email, joined Facebook. I’m almost too busy now. I have been working from home for ages but when I look at my calendar to add in a meditation class or seminar I see that I’m already booked for a baking class with a master baker, that I missed a scheduled laughing session and that I forgot to register for mandatory training for certification for working with people with PTSD.
Today’s morning Yoga got nixed when I talked to my lovely IT friend who helped me install a wireless mouse so I can right-click again, and then talked with a friend in California as she was tucked into bed after her day ended as mine began. I open email and see that I missed an offer for free meditation and ghosted a conference call the night before. I’m almost too busy when ending Yoga class 15 minutes early means that I can join my husband on our back deck just when the sun is at its best and with the right drink and sunglasses, I can pretend I am somewhere tropical instead of on Sweden’s west coast. I can almost forget that I begged my husband not to go on that business trip to Spain in March and then got him home just before one of the airports he used closed. The Danes had closed their borders but the police let him board the train over the bridge since he is Swedish.

I’m so busy I forget to grieve that I don’t know when I’ll be able to hug family and friends again. In short, I am coping by staying busy. I am practicing self-care at a pace I didn’t think was possible and give thanks daily, even hourly. Happy hour over the bushes with the neighbors helps too. Oh, and Amazon Prime helps a lot. The music of my life is there and the movies I wouldn’t normally take the time to watch are also there. And Kindle books!

Adrienne George Lind is a proud Washington, DC native who has lived in England, Belgium, and now Sweden. She is the Immediate Past President of the AWC in Stockholm and is a member of the AWCs in Gothenburg and Malmö, Sweden. She will join the AWC Gothenburg Board once the current pandemic situation allows it. She has been a fashion buyer, music industry executive, worked in the non-profit sector, and is the author of a multi-award winning blog.

The FAWCO Cookbook!

In April, FAWCO President Emily van Eerten posted on Facebook, “Many of our member clubs are hosting virtual cooking classes and sharing recipes on social media during the COVID-19 crisis. FAWCO thinks it would be a wonderful idea to share your favorite recipes that are helping you get through this time of confinement”. FAWCO members enthusiastically responded and the “affaire gastronomie” was launched.

The recipes are now being compiled in a recipe book, “The FAWCO Collections — Recipes from Confinement” which members will be able download from the FAWCO website. The book will be available online June 15. There will be no charge to download it, but you may make a donation to the Target project, S.A.F.E (Safe Alternatives for Female Genital Mutilation)a project of Hope for Girls and Women Tanzania, to say thanks.

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When I was three years old, my father was relocated from Germany to Charleston, SC, where we lived for seven years before moving to Bamberg, a beautiful medieval city in Bavaria. Charleston would always be our home, and my sisters and I were GRITS (Girls raised in the South). This feeling is still the same today, even after so many years, and eventually both of my sisters and I would return to live in the USA. Despite some of the challenges that third culture kids experience, this made me who I am today, and I am always very grateful for the childhood and life I have had so far. This experience would also influence my decision to work at an international school.

When I was younger, I wanted to become a marine biologist. I was fascinated by manatees in Florida (I still have a heavy stone figure of one at home), whales and dolphins, and I was determined to protect this species when I was grown up. When I moved to Boston, whale watching was always a highlight for me, and I made sure to go regularly. I wear a necklace with a whale fluke pendant every day.

After having studied history, English and politics at the Universities of Mannheim and Würzburg, I completed my 2-year student teaching training in Bavaria. I had always been interested in teaching at an international school and was extremely excited when I got the position as Head of the Department of Humanities at the German International School in Boston, a city that had always fascinated me since reading my first book about the American Revolution in grade 2. It was meant to be, especially since I am a huge Kennedy fan.

Before moving to Berlin, I spent four absolutely amazing years in Boston, MA, teaching. These were, without doubt the best years of my life (so far). But the distance from my family was tough. I knew it was time to return home. I decided that teaching in an international school setting was the right fit for me. So today I’m a teacher of history, geography and Head of the Department of Humanities with a great passion for the Sustainable Development Goals at an international school in Berlin. I am also a TeachSDGs Ambassador.

Most of my life revolves around school, and I often do not come home until late...
in the evening (so being able to spend time in my apartment in daylight is actually quite nice right now). Maintaining a work-life balance has always been a challenge for me, but I love to go to museums and different events related to the UN and the Sustainable Development Goals hosted by the many organizations in Berlin. I am single and live by myself. Being used to being surrounded by so many students and people on a daily basis and then shifting to this new situation was definitely challenging. I always look forward to seeing my family in Bavaria, especially my three nephews, during school breaks.

**What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response?** Due to my job, I was automatically involved in starting remote learning or “quaranteaching.” Our IT Team at school had set up everything we needed weeks before the schools closed, so we were very fortunate. However, there was still a lot to learn about all the possibilities our programs and platforms had to offer. I signed up for many educational webinars regarding distance learning and experimented a lot with the online platforms my school uses to be able to ensure quality teaching from home.

**Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you.** For my own well-being, I start every day, rain or shine with a 10km run through the park before school “starts” in the morning. To keep some sense of normality, I am very excited that I am still able to get my morning iced quad latte at Starbucks on my way home. I have regular check-ins and online lessons with my students in each subject – next to the academics, pastoral care has been more important than ever: e.g., in reassuring the students, being positive and being there for them, and calming them down especially with the uncertainty of what the consequences of their cancelled IB and IGCSE exams are.

I spend a lot of my day answering student emails and I usually have at least two or three online meetings each day and then do my lesson preparations, which are far more time-consuming than before. Finding the right balance of workload for the students, creating a balance of screen time and non-screen time, ensuring that instructions are clear, breaking the lessons into manageable bits and predicting the rate of engagement and diligence while taking into account the students’ personal circumstances and guaranteeing that each and every student has the same access (e.g., internet) to the learning going on is very challenging and takes a lot of time. While some students are thriving during remote learning, many students are struggling to adapt to the new ways.

**What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19?** I am very proud of how I have been able to be alone without being lonely. I miss my students and my colleagues very much, but I am very grateful for the possibilities we have today – for example, WhatsApp video calls – to make the situation more tolerable.

I was also overwhelmed by how quickly things change and how flexible you have to become to whatever is thrown at you. We have been struggling with cancelled IB and IGCSE exams and the consequences and following constantly changing instructions from local authorities and the government with very little support and guidance. Our current challenge is to figure out how to combine online lessons with in-school lessons. Our grade 10s have just returned for two days a week; next week Grade 9 and 11 will follow, while making sure that there are never more than two grade levels in the building at the same time. It is also unbelievable how quickly time passes – each day and week.
What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself and others through COVID-19? I have come to realize even more how privileged we are in terms of the freedom and the luxuries we have, and how quickly that can all disappear. Our world is far less equal than any of us may think. While some kids are thriving, many students do not have a laptop or have to share one with their siblings, which makes setting tasks or video lessons more complicated. This proves that there is a much greater social divide even within schools and our own country and illustrates how these socioeconomic aspects affect learning and can leave some children behind if we’re not careful.

I’ve also learned how community has never been more important than it is now. The compassion toward one another has been overwhelming in the last months. All the efforts, support and services that have been springing up since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis show that hard times really do bring out the best in all of us. We are all in this together; the emotions that many people are going through are the same as what many others are experiencing as well. We should all be willing to do our part for the greater good of the public.

I recently read an article that said “Beating this virus is not just about survival – it must surely be about creating a better world.” This is an important point that highlights the opportunities we also have through this crisis to make the world a better place.

What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19? It is so much more difficult to separate work and life now. We use Microsoft Teams for our classes, and we seem to have become even more accessible and reachable than before. I receive messages 24/7, even during vacations. I really have to remind myself to set boundaries for my own well-being.

So, since schools closed in mid-March, I have been going for a 10 km run every morning before school starts, rain or shine. The Tiergarten in Berlin is so peaceful in the morning and is especially beautiful with all the flowers blooming at the moment. Running clears my mind to prepare for the day ahead.

I have also found that it is important for me to maintain communication with my family and friends. Zoom video calls with friends or my family’s daily video call in the evening including Bamberg, Berlin and Houston have become an essential part of my life.

I have also tried to take more time for myself to work on a big cross-stitching project – a favorite pastime, that I, unfortunately do not usually have a lot of time for. My Corona project is a beautifully detailed cross stitch design from Charleston, South Carolina, where I grew up.

I especially miss Boston in the Spring when the magnolias are in full bloom.
IN CONVERSATION WITH KATJA
Tell us something about yourself that not many people may know. I play the saxophone.

If you could go back in time, where and what year/decade would you go to? I truly believe that I lived in the 1960s in a previous life – I have always felt a special connection to this decade and all the social and political changes and events that took place. I loved reading biographies when I was a young student, and our library had a huge collection. I remember reading about John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy – that’s how my fascination for all things revolving around the Kennedys and the 1960s began. Even today as a teacher I can’t hide my passion for the 1960s. If I had to pick a year, I think perhaps 1963, when John F. Kennedy came to Berlin to experience the hope and idealism he conveyed to the world.

What is one weird tidbit that you still remember from school? Every time I hear “We built this city” by Starship, it reminds me of kindergarten. We would sing that song playing with our building blocks.

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Jamila Bouzidi, a member of the AIWC Casablanca and her son, Otmame, invite you to visit! For rates and reservations: www.lafermegrenadine.com

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I have discovered that I can actually live without:

“Hair color (letting the grey win).”
Melissa Mash, AW Surrey, former FAWCO Foundation President

“Shoes.”
Tracy Moede, AWC Hamburg, FAWCO Foundation VP Communications

“A lot of running around all day.”
My Linh Kunst, AWC Berlin, former FAWCO President, Co-Chair, FAWCO Youth. (photo right)

“Alcohol!”
Suzanne Wheeler, AAWE, former FAWCO Foundation President

“There’s actually nothing I miss. As an introvert, it’s a surprise to find how much I miss personal contacts though.”
Roberta Zöllner, Munich IWC, former FAWCO Foundation President

“Wine. Haven’t had a drop since March 7.”
Celeste Brown, AWC The Hague, former FAWCO President (photo left)

“Buying crap at Joann’s or Michael’s.”
Karen O’Shaughnessy, AWC Hamburg, FAUSA

“Going to the mall on a regular basis.”
Rick Chizmadia, FAUSA current FAUSA President

“The excessive amount of hand washing now required in daily life.”
Christine Funke Heidelberg IWC, Club President, FAWCO Under 40 Chair

“Make-up!”
Jane Indreland, FAUSA, AWC London, former FAUSA President

“Large groups of people.”
Lauren Mescon, AWC Amsterdam, FAWCO Foundation VP Fundraising,

Photo, right: Karen O’Shaughnessy and her dog, Missy, on a COVID-19 safe road trip.
Adaptability is the key concept, when facing the unpredictable. I learnt that quickly as a young, military wife. It has proved paramount in all phases of life.

We all love it when the sun shines. We can truthfully say our trip to New Zealand (NZ) has exceeded our expectations. Retirement means fewer deadlines. We have loved connecting with family and friends as we journeyed through both Australia and NZ.

We had stopovers planned on our way home; then Australia closed its borders, forcing us to rebook direct flights home for March 25. However, with countries grappling with COVID-19, losing only three days of our planned time in NZ did not seem too bad! In anticipation of more changes, we decided to return to Christchurch two days before our flight. Two nights in the Novotel sounded idyllic after a week in our ‘boneshaker’ motorhome. It was sobering to see how many other motorhomes had returned that morning and this continued throughout the day. Settled in our hotel, we caught up with events on local media. Expecting the worst, hubby tried calling the Consulate and Emirates... No Joy! No updates!

Then, on the first day back in Christchurch, the UAE Government announced the cancellation of all passenger flights through Dubai from March 25. We walked to the airport terminal to talk to someone. No help desk! What now?

The New Zealand PM announced that afternoon that Level 4 Lockdown was commencing March 25 at 2359 hours.

The reality of being stuck with no car hire, hotel closures, and only limited domestic flights for essential travel only, was truly real! Family and friends were also monitoring the advice from the UK Foreign Office. This was a global problem for all tourists stranded abroad.

We considered flying to Auckland, the main hub for international flights, but discovered our nephew had family guests and finding alternative accommodation was difficult. Clutching at straws, I had emailed a friend in our local church who has contacts in NZ and, we were given a contact in Christchurch. The family had an AirBnB to rent. Unfortunately, no vacancies as students snapped up their offer. Second option, we were given the contact number of Warren and Roseanna in Cass Bay. Independently, our daughter posted an SOS to friends with contacts in NZ. Karen and Neil were quick to respond, but their room was unavailable! Wanting to help, Karen forwarded the exact same telephone number naming Warren and Roseanna! We had just called to accept their offer but still needed to extend our hotel booking for two nights as occupants were leaving on Friday.

Off to bed after a glass or two of red wine, we felt we had a plan. Maybe?

Off to bed after a glass or two of red wine, we felt we had a plan. Maybe?

Morning arrived and we decided it would be prudent to make sure any medication required during lockdown should be
acquired ASAP. A complimentary bus ride took us to the proximity of a medical centre and we purchased what we needed. Phew!

Back at the hotel, we were watching the NZ Government update at 1500 hrs and then the PM announced “where you were that night was where you would have to stay!” We needed to get out of the hotel now!

We called Warren, who had already tried to contact us, and discovered the apartment was now free and he recommended to move immediately. A flurry of activity ensued; packing, checking out of the hotel and hailing a taxi, all transpired in less than half an hour. Roseanna was still cleaning and briefing us as we tried to process the sequence of events on arrival. We were so relieved to have a place to stay. However, we were now trapped on South Island, as the only international departure airport was Auckland on North Island! Oh well, at least we were safe.

Cass Bay was a magical, mainly residential area situated along the rim of an extinct volcano. Not for those with mobility issues! Surrounded by hills, there are cliff paths and one wide twisty road. The nearest town was Lyttleton, the gateway for road and rail transportation to Christchurch. We consciously varied our walks, daily activities and educated ourselves on the local history. Truly, the sunshine lifted our spirits as we contemplated the myriad views around us.

Technology was our saviour. WhatsApp linked us to family. Patience has been the most important word as we watched nations deal with the tourism issues. The consulate, working with the FCO in the UK, had to balance helping tourists in more difficult circumstances in other countries - so no repatriation flights for UK tourists in NZ, despite the example of Germany and other European nations! UK FCO advice was strongly to return on commercial flights. The light at the end of the tunnel emerged when NZ eventually allowed Air NZ domestic flights to Auckland airport as an essential service if an international flight within 24 hours was booked. So we booked Malaysian Airlines from Auckland on Monday April 13. RESULT: Safely home after 25 hours in the air!

New Zealand will never be a distant memory. We learned to never underestimate the power of communication, the strength of friendship and the generosity of strangers! Eternally grateful to be healthy, fit and gifted with my husband, lover and friend on this journey.

Margaret Hilditch has been a member of Munich IWC since 2003 and was club president from 2006-2009. She lived in Germany for 16 years spending her time as a substitute teacher of Mathematics in the Bavarian International School as well as finding camaraderie with the ladies of Munich IWC. Margaret represented Munich IWC, as a guest, at the Biennial FAWCO conference in Vilnius in 2009 and was inspired to encourage the club to join FAWCO. In 2012, Margaret was appointed secretary to The FAWCO Foundation and served until 2015. During her time as secretary, one of her tasks was sorting and facilitating the digitisation of the FAWCO Foundation archives. She is still part of this team.

Until March 2016, Margaret continued to work as a Mathematics tutor and used her musical skills as a pianist and director at a local church, arranging music for the youth orchestra and inspiring others by offering private piano lessons. Now retired and living in the UK, her music skills continued to be required as church organist, and she also supports her family and connects with friends as she travels. She visits Munich IWC when spending time in their Bavarian home.
Dr. Lucy Andrews

Life before COVID-19 seems somehow distant, but here is what my life looked like before shelter in place. I am a California girl born and raised there, lived in a few different places but always came back to California. My family and grandchildren are there, my business is in part there, and until France my heart was always there. Now my heart shares two homes, California and France. In 2017 after traveling to France and Europe for several years we found, through our wonderful friends in Saint Cyprien (Dordogne region) the perfect home for us! My work as a Doctoral prepared Dementia Care Specialist has taken me to many places and I look forward to continuing my work in this area in France.

By virtue of my role in our state’s Home Care and Hospice Association I coordinate across the state and on a national level or our home care response to COVID-19. In addition, I own a home care agency. Our staff go to patients’ homes to help them with activities of daily living, companionship and daily tasks. We care for some of the most vulnerable people, so when the virus came, we had to change our processes for care to ensure that our professional care staff were safe and that our patients were safe too. We ramped up immediately and we have been able to pivot when needed to provide the safest care that we can.

My days consist of at least 4 hours a day on the phone or conference calls; Zoom is my friend. I coordinate between the State Home Care Association and the state and federal governmental agencies that oversee and regulate our part for the health care industry. We create educational materials for my staff and others to use to improve safety in the home. I also work with other home care providers to ensure that they too have the tools they need to navigate this new world of COVID-19.

All of this is a balancing act! I am at higher risk, I have a granddaughter at higher risk, my patients are at higher risk, so for me I looked for what I could do best to participate in the crisis and keep my patients, family and myself safe. I spend my time doing a lot of education coordination and implementing strategies to keep all the aforementioned groups safe.

Joannie Guy

I was working as interim director of surgery in a hospital in Los Angeles, a hard and complex role when days are often 12 or more hours involving one challenge or another. COVID-19 came and challenges rose to a completely different norm.

Each day entailed new information. I would share information with the 150 staff members and then have to backtrack and update them when we got new updates once, sometimes twice a
day. Having trust and staying ahead of the staff information was daunting, especially given that the different bodies sending us advice often disagreed amongst themselves. There were days when I swore to staff that the virus was spread by droplets only to be corrected the next day that it was airborne. It was a constant sharing of new information such as don’t re-use masks, only to suggest the following day to re-use masks.

The surprising thing was how much these amazing hospital staff trusted me and stayed with me in my directives. I often felt like their mother/father/captain/general and friend. Most of the time, I too, was navigating very new waters.

Having kept a small group of operating room staff back to do the few urgent surgeries we had left, I had to ask the remaining staff to move to help take care of COVID-19 patients. Most of these staff had not been out of the operating room since they left nursing school. But they went. They went, and risked their health to take care of COVID-19 patients.

Once we got through the bulk of the COVID-19 care, I started to notice our surgery staff feeling proud that they were a part of the team caring for COVID-19 patients. They made videos to music as the group dressed up in PPE gear and went to turn patients in ICU. I was so proud of them for going out of their comfort zones, and seeing the teamwork and morale rise daily. After many weeks, the multitude of code blues and overfilled ICUs slowed down. We went through a repeated up and down volume as COVID-19 would crowd our emergency room and then lighten up.

As the time came for my departure as interim director, I had to get ready for the transition. Intentionally I let staff know only a few days before my departure, that I was going. On my last day, the staff made me a video with many staff thanking me, blowing kisses and sending me deeply felt words of kindness. I couldn’t watch the video without tears. Looking back, I realize, not only did I lead my staff through the day to day challenges. I led them through a national disaster to which we all were scared and sad and determined. It was such an honor to work with such a group of nurses at such a time in history.

Dawn Parker

I am the Director of Nursing for the National Guard Health Affairs in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. It is a large well-known hospital that is well regarded within the Kingdom. Our flagship hospital in Riyadh was originally set up by Humana Corp. from the US.

Several years ago, we had struggled with the Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) which is also a Corona virus and we learned numerous lessons from that experience. Nationwide we really had a good plan for respiratory screening, and also supplies and equipment was NOT an issue at all. The mortality rate for MERS was around 33%. This new virus COVID-19 is a puzzling one. The rapid spread is like nothing I’ve seen before.

My main purpose here is also to help train and develop future Saudi nurse leaders, so what great experience to be able to teach them how to cope with a pandemic. The one big surprise to me is the amount of paperwork. I guess I never thought of all those beautiful graphs and numbers we so anxiously await every day are having to be done by someone. There are 3 reports that
have to be done daily from anything about available beds, negative pressure beds available, status of PPE, numbers of staff available as well as beds and on what level can you cover. How many critical care beds do you have? Also, there is a vast amount of logistics to deal with regarding quarantine: how to get food to them, how do you check on patients and staff that are being quarantined at home or in a hotel.

A day usually starts at 6:15 a.m. for me and first thing I look at is the isolation ward that we had to create. How many patients are there? Then check how many swabs are outstanding and what the results are. Covering the hospital with staff when we are down 50% of staff because they live in an area that is high risk so their entire area has been locked down. It is a high wire act for sure. Also, you have to be flexible, as things change on an hourly basis in some cases.

I make rounds in the ward to see how the staff are coping and what needs do I have to address there. As we have a large number of expats they are also struggling being thousands of miles away from their own families during this crisis. As for myself, my only son Patrick lives and works in NYC with his girlfriend and, of course, I worry about them tremendously.

The isolation has been probably the worst, we are stuck on the hospital grounds and Saudi did a very wise thing by restricting movement immediately but that also means no taxis, UBER or private drivers can take you anywhere, even to get groceries. I have the privilege of being in two FAWCO clubs: AWEP in Saudi Arabia and AW Aquitaine, both of which have been a huge support. Maggie from the Aquitaine is a great cheerleader to have on your team and I cannot wait to get to France as soon as possible. My AWEP friends in Saudi have been unbelievable, sending masks to my staff, coming by with Easter dinner. They are long draining days but I always feel at the end of the day that we made a difference.

Take time to thank those around you. The world has been saved by healthcare workers, environmental workers, transportation people, first responders; the guy stocking the grocery shelves may be my new hero! We lived our lives a bit better thanking those that improved our lives and not one of them was a billionaire CEO or an athlete. You learn a lot in a crisis.
CORONAVIRUS – COVID-19 – PANDEMIC ...

CONFINEMENT on MARCH 15 ... FOR HOW LONG? As a member of the AAWE in Paris, I wondered what could be done through the club to help reassure members and stay in touch during this disquieting period. In the past, we made use of a Telephone Tree as a means of keeping members up-to-date about changes in meeting times and/or dates. Why not make use of the telephone to contact current members during the pandemic. With the AAWE President Clara Siverson’s blessing and Membership Mentor Beth Austin’s calling skills and organizational prowess, the CONFINEMENT TELEPHONE TREE began.

With the help of several volunteer callers, we started connecting with our membership, both in France and internationally, over 500 AAWErs, just after the confinement began. The calls were easy to make, and the number of volunteer callers increased to include thirty of us. Some callers chose to call members they knew, others chose to call seniors as often as possible, and some purposefully chose members they didn’t know at all in order to create new connections. In all cases, the chats served to brighten the receiver’s day; they were important in keeping spirits high and raising morale.

One member told her caller, “It’s so wonderful you and the club are out there spreading human warmth and comfort. Such things are our defenses, and I appreciate them very much.” Another member confided, “We are doing ok with the confinement. I think for all of us we have good days and harder days. I most likely had the virus right when the lockdown started but luckily it was not so severe that I had to go to the hospital nor was I tested. If there is anything I or we can do for you or anyone else, please let me know. If it would helpful if I called someone from AAWE, please let me know. I would be happy to check in on someone.”

In addition, there was the harried mother of three who was contacted by a senior member and happily discovered that, unbeknownst to her, she had an AAWE link right in her own neighborhood. Or, there was the mother of two who confessed to her caller, “It’s just a little hectic taking care of my three-year-old daughter and my five-month-old son while my husband continues to work from his office. We are hanging in there! Thanks for checking up on us.” An 81-year-old member said, “It is nice to be remembered at a time like this. My husband is gone and my children are far, so I appreciate the attention.”

One of the callers reported, “It made my heart smile hearing their smile and pleasure in their voices that we actually took out time to reach out and simply say, ‘How are you?’” When asked how the calling was going, another caller admitted, “I started phoning but haven’t finished yet because it takes time and is too enjoyable to rush. I have had some wonderful visits with friends I haven’t spoken to in a long time and other conversations with members I barely knew and really enjoyed.”

When phone calls ended with an answering machine, we left messages, sent e-mails and made callbacks until we had a response. One international member wrote, “I really appreciate your message. This is just another reason I love the AAWE. It’s a group of exceptional women whose creativity and energy are always put to work seeking to provide club members with meaningful support and opportunities to grow.” How many times did we hear, “Thank you so much for getting in touch. I really appreciate it.” Or “What a wonderful initiative!”

As our confinement continues, it is important for all of us to know that the AAWE Community is active, reaching out to and supportive of all of its members.
Deployment is a word that gets thrown around a lot by people who have never deployed and are fond of handing out “thank you for your service"s. The word deployment is meant to symbolize military service to one’s country by going to war; being sent as an asset. You go somewhere to do a job for six (or nine or twelve) months that you’ve been training years to do. You are deployed as a tool by your country’s leaders the way a carpenter deploys a hammer. Which isn’t to say it’s a bad thing, it’s just what it is. As a service member, deployment is just a part of life. You’re either working up towards it, on it, or coming down off it waiting for the next cycle to do it again.

I have deployed twice with the US Navy, both times on board an aircraft carrier while assigned to the Garudas of Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 134. If that doesn’t mean anything to you, that’s ok. I’m not here to tout my experience and fill it with big words to impress. I left the Navy in 2015 to live a diplomatic life with my young family and things were going pretty good for a while.

And then we all learned a new phrase: Novel Coronavirus Disease. My kids began coming home from school singing handwashing ditties and asking if we were all going to get sick. Our lives were quickly locked down. Schools were closed, trips were canceled, and suddenly we found ourselves stuck in the same small apartment space with limited contact with those on the outside. After a week, my also-veteran husband and I looked at each other and said… “wow… this is just like deployment.”

So I put together a lighthearted comparison of deployment and quarantine. Of course, this is my own experience and I don’t pretend to speak for those who are currently deployed on Navy ships. My views are made with humor and no disrespect for those actually quarantined and deployed at the same time. I can’t imagine what they’re going through right now.

1. You’re around the same people constantly. In both situations, you’re hanging around people who act like toddlers. Except that in 2020, they actually are toddlers.

2. You’re separated from those you love and are used to seeing. It goes without saying that while deployed you have very little contact with friends and family. As expats, many of us are now used to this as a lifestyle, one that is made significantly more palatable with technology.
3. You move from day to day doing the same thing. Can I tell you a secret? Deployment is just a whole lot of monotony. And if you don’t consciously make it monotony, you’ll burn out pretty fast. You’re forced to adopt an operational routine: sleep, watch, brief, flight, gym, repeat. Sometimes you pick up a new skill and sometimes you just watch a whole lot of TV. One day blends into the next and time seems to lose meaning. You’re focused on the situation at hand. Sound familiar?

4. Disease spreads like wildfire. It happens every deployment. There is always “the bug” that goes around. Typically it’s nothing more serious than a norovirus, incapacitating its host for about 48 hours. Handrails, doorknobs, and coffee pot handles are just swimming with disease, which is cause for much hand washing and sanitizing. And trust me, never ever touch your face.

But as soon as I feel like I’m getting into the deployment-quarantine rhythm, something changes and my head slips underwater. The trauma of what we are collectively experiencing is much deeper than what can be cured with routines and patience which in fact only minimize the daily frustrations we feel.

Deployments, of course, have definite end dates. You know that someday it will end. You know that you’ll be home by summer, or that the holidays will be spent with family. Yes, of course, sometimes they get extended and plans need to be changed. But during COVID-19 quarantine, we find ourselves on indefinite lockdown with an indefinite end date. The isolation orders set by state and country leaders are, in fact, arbitrary. Because this crisis will not actually end in two weeks. It won’t end in two months. Heck, it probably won’t even end in two years. Our lives are being changed forever, and not having an endpoint to look to can play tricks with the mind.

In a way, we are all deployed at this moment and we don’t know what the world will look like when it’s all over. Whenever “over” is, what will be the new normal? When will my kids be able to go back to school? What will their classes be like? What will traveling through an airport be like? Will all of my friends and family still be around to hug? The uncertainty is maddening.

Right now, we are being asked to sacrifice our time and freedom in service not to our country but rather to humanity as a whole. As a US veteran, I want to wholeheartedly (and not a bit ironically) thank you for your service. Not only to the brilliant healthcare workers who are putting their lives on the line each day, but to everyone who is staying home out of their sense of duty to their fellow humans. We will get through this together.

Mary Stange is from Florida. After college she was commissioned into the US Navy as an aviator to fly the EA-6B Prowler and completed two deployments on the USS Carl Vinson. After her service concluded, Mary’s family joined the US State Department’s Foreign Service, completing tours in Yerevan, Armenia and Bogotá, Colombia with her two small children, Max and Amelia. They are currently in transition to move to their third post in Nicosia, Cyprus. Mary is a member of the American Women’s Club of Bogotá.
I grew up in a suburb of Lansing, Michigan, called Holt. I spent a lot of time on the weekends with my grandparents. One set lived on a lake near Grand Rapids and the other lived a ten-minute drive away through the agricultural farms of Michigan State University. I have many fond memories of going to touring Broadway shows and ballets at the arts center on campus. I spent most of my summers “up north” at Glen Lake near Traverse City, and I also attended summer dance programs and camps at Interlochen Center for the Arts. My parents were amicably divorced when I was ten years old. They were both supportive, loving and encouraging of international travel. By the time I was seventeen, I had been to China, Mongolia, Russia, Denmark, Germany, Austria, France and England. In fact, February of 1998 saw my first ever trip to London. My sister was on a semester abroad program and I stayed at her apartment over by Baker Street.

After graduating from high school in 1998, I went to Lake Forest College, a small liberal arts school outside of Chicago. I received a BA in Fine Art with a focus on photography and minors in both Art and Music History. When I studied abroad in the fall of 2001, I chose Florence, Italy. Following graduation, I moved to Chicago and worked at a bookstore company. In 2005, the opportunity to work in independent film crossed my path. I worked on several productions and completed the dream of producing a movie that aired on the Independent Film Channel (IFC).

In September 2006, I met the man who is now my husband. He’s English and from London. He was on holiday, and we met through six degrees of separation! We dated long distance for two years and were married in Chicago in October 2008. In 2009, my career shifted to another love, theatre. I’ve worked on both off-Broadway and West End shows as well as on development projects with directors Hal Prince and Susan Stroman. In April 2010, we were in London for the West End opening night of the musical Hair. The next morning, the Iceland volcano erupted and trapped us here for two weeks. The irony for us was that we were planning to officially move to London in December 2010.

More recently my husband and I have fallen into property development; I contribute to the marketing. But I still keep up with my theatre work, travelling to New York to work on various projects. After my first year of living in London, I found the American Women’s Club. For the past few years, I’ve been in the position to dedicate my working hours to volunteering; much of this includes my time working with the AWC London.
What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response? The first steps to prepare for a potentially long term of self-isolation involved the AWCL board swinging into action to help cancel, postpone or move activities and events to virtual meetups. Over the last few weeks our activity leaders have stepped up to the challenge and have hosted countless online activities, including weekly coffees, trivia, crafting, wine nights and more.

Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you. The first three weeks were a bit of a blur of emotions with no real schedule. The passing of time felt somewhat like that cosmic vortex between Christmas and New Year’s Eve, only replace the excitement and joy with bewilderment and anxious uncertainty. Becoming club President more recently has given me the focus and drive to find solutions to the current challenges. My body clock has set to an unwanted 5:30 a.m. wake-up call. I tend to get up for a couple of hours to get some work done or work out. I’ll take a nap, if needed. I’ll do some chores or organize one space in our home, such as a drawer, bookshelf or cupboard. I usually have an online activity/meetup, as well as club business and social phone calls.

What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19? What has surprised me most is how little I am reading and how I cannot do any creative writing. I am in a weekly writing critique group that has gone on hold since the lockdown. We tried to do an online meetup, but everyone is finding it hard to write at this time. Another surprise is how much more connected I am with friends and family overseas and nearby. We are all checking in with each other much more now – not just scrolling through social media, but with calls and online hangouts.

What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself and others through COVID-19? The most important thing I’ve discovered about myself is that I am stronger than I thought. The introvert in me can handle this. The extrovert is planning virtual meetups and future events. The most important thing I’ve discovered about others is how much we rely on our fellow expat community, wherever we are based. I cannot thank our members and Board enough for their strength and support during this crisis.

What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19? The first step I took to keep on top of my own mental health and stress was to move sessions with my therapist to video calls. I’ve started to get back into a fitness routine and am learning to play the ukulele. I also like doing digital puzzles on my iPad and listening to podcasts or audiobooks when I’m doing housework. I listen to BBC Radio One while I work, and I love to find online outlets for theatre and music too.
IN CONVERSATION WITH WHITNEY

If you could go back in time, where and what year/decade would you go to? If I could go back in time, I would go to the 1920s, purely for an authentic “Gatsby” experience.

What fictional character would you be best friends with in real life? I would like the tenth Doctor Who (Editors Note: Doctor Who is a classic UK TV show) to be my best friend. I’d love to be a companion for a little bit of time.

Who is the first, non-family, person you want to see in person when the lockdown ends? The first non-family member I want to see in person is my friend’s Weimaraner, Max. (Editors note: For those who don’t know, like me, a Weimaraner is a breed of dog!)

At the Rugby 7s in 2015

Update from Bangladesh

Priscilla Heffelfinger, member of AWC of the Philippines, was profiled by Inspiring Women in our Fall 2018 issue (click the link to read it). Here she gives us a brief update of what is happening post the arrival of COVID-19.

Our schools are closed; our hearts are wide open. Together, we are building on hope!

Both Bangladesh and the Philippines are on lockdown, as is much of the world. All thirteen Bangladesh schools, with over 2400 children, are closed for the foreseeable future. Since school meals represent a child’s guaranteed meal for the day, the food Thrive is able to provide them is a nutritional stop-gap.

Without Thrive, food insecurity escalates. The children and their families need Thrive’s support more than ever. Their parents are the first to lose their daily income as rickshaw pullers and household help. They live in dense communities where COVID-19 has the potential to spread 200 times faster than in a typical US neighborhood. Their needs are unparalleled.

The Thrive community is now boiling 1000 eggs each week for the homeless, nursing home residents and children living in orphanages. Our volunteers are delivering essential food packs to the Thrive families ($15 or 1300 Bangladeshi taka feeds a family), and we are partnering to strategically place hygiene stations throughout the Dhaka slums. We are rebuilding hope, and we’re beyond grateful for it all.
Over the last few weeks the world has turned upside down. COVID-19 has impacted all of our lives, but has also reminded us how interconnected we are. Many of us, accustomed to responding to a crisis by going “out there” to assist, are now advised that the best way to help is by staying in. Yet at this difficult time, we must support each other. Below are some ideas for ways to contribute in this new reality. All recommendations are subject to restrictions in effect in your area and your own safety concerns. Above all please stay safe.

If you are not living with someone in a high risk category, or are not one yourself, consider doing the following, but be sure to follow AARP’s tips for safe delivery:

1. Volunteer with a food distribution program in your community.
2. Offer to help an elderly or at-risk neighbor or family member.
3. Check with your local assisted living/elderly home to see if you could provide adult coloring books, word puzzles and other activities for shut-ins.
4. Check to see if your local animal shelter needs emergency foster homes for the animals in their care.
5. Donate blood, but call first, as donor appointments are scheduled to comply with social distancing.

If you are self-isolating, you can still take many actions from home to help with the pandemic:

1. Donate to a cause that assists those most impacted, e.g. your local food bank.
2. If you can, consider paying your hair stylist, barber, nail technician, housekeeper, etc., as if they were providing you the service that you are forgoing for now. Tape an envelope enclosing a small amount of cash to your trashcan with “thanks” written on it for your trash collector.
3. Use platforms like Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts or FaceTime to read to children (giving their parents some relief), visit with people shut into their homes and stay connected with friends.
4. Reach out by phone, text, email, Skype, FaceTime or letter to community members you may not usually visit in this way.
5. Find ways to support those on the front lines of the crisis, such as medical professionals, first responders and grocery store workers.
6. Check with your local Homeland Security and Emergency Management and Public Health offices to determine their needs for donated supplies. [Examples and ideas.]
8. Suggest that people in your community put stuffed bears in their windows, so kids can walk or drive around the neighborhood and “go on a bear hunt.”

9. If you know someone who is looking for work, share an article from the Krazy Coupon Lady on companies that are hiring.

Mutual aid organizations have popped up all over to help people at higher risk of COVID-19 and workers who have been laid off due to the pandemic. Find or register such groups through AARP’s Community Connections searchable directory. Or do a search for “mutual aid” in your city or county.

**If you are stuck at home with extra time on your hands, it’s an excellent time for some virtual volunteering. Consider these ideas:**

**Book Share** Scan or edit scanned books for people with reading disabilities.

**Translators Without Borders** If you are fluent in at least one language other than your native tongue, volunteer to translate texts into different languages for NGOs and nonprofits.

**Amnesty International** If you are interested in global human rights, you can use your computer or phone to review pictures, information and documents for human rights violations.

**More Love Letters** Write letters to pre-selected people in need.

**Zooniverse** People of all ages and backgrounds can participate in real scientific research through over 50 online activities.

**Carry the Future** Make blankets, hats, sweaters or dolls for refugee children through the Me2You program.

You can find other ideas for virtual volunteering in this article and on the Points of Light website.

And remember we are all feeling a great deal of stress right now. Don’t underestimate the value of small random acts of kindness. Find inspiration here.
Finally, is there any part of your sheltering at home experience that you will continue?

“Our nightly bourbon tasting by the fire pit. Bourbon = a new simple pleasure.”
Ellie Bandanes, AW Surrey, FAUSA, former FAWCO Foundation President

“Organizing my shopping list better because ‘popping back to the store’ when I’ve forgotten something seems like a luxury these days…”
Judy Furukawa, AWC Brussels

“Hopefully my more regular yoga routine.”
Michele Hendrikse Dubois, FAUSA, former FAWCO Foundation President

“I will continue to keep connected to as many people as possible. If I can make a difference in some way to put a smile on people’s faces or make them laugh to lighten their day, I want to continue because when I have my share of bad news (my mother has cancer, she is alone in CA while I am here in Paris, stuck!) having friends share a video to put a smile on my face would actually end up making my day.”
Kristina Soleymanlou, AWG Paris, Club VP For AWG (photo, right)

“No more food waste. In order to avoid grocery store/markets we use up everything we have. I feel so much better not wasting food like we did before.”
Lauren Mescon, AWC Amsterdam, FAWCO Foundation VP Fundraising (photo, left)

“Writing letters to my husband and, possibly, cutting his hair.”
Rozanne Van Rie, AWC Antwerp, FAWCO 2nd VP

“Reading fiction in the middle of the day!”
Patti Meek, AWC Dublin, former Foundation President

“Having more meetings on Zoom.”
Alisa Cook-Roehs, AIWC Dusseldorf, FAWCO Treasurer

“Downsizing and making bread.”
Louise Greeley-Copley FAUSA, FAWCO Foundation Secretary

“Continued focus on healthy choices. Less eating out, more exercise.”
Kathy DeBest, FAUSA and FAWCO Foundation Treasurer

“News Flash! For all who are still in the workforce: this is much like retirement. So, if your apartment is too small now, or your partner drives you nuts, now is the time to plan ahead!”
Roberta Zöllner, Munich IWC, former FAWCO Foundation President.

Photo, left: This year’s Anniversary cake for Renuka and Steve Matthews
Danielle was featured in the Fall 2018 issue of Inspiring Women. We asked her to give us a quick update on her life with COVID-19 in it.

Until February 2020, I was planning that our expat assignment would be ending by the early summer and we would be moving back to the States. I was stepping back from my roles in our AWO Moscow club, finishing up my other work here locally, and had a ticket for April 13 to head to the States for one month for my granddaughter Maya’s arrival into the world.

By March, all of those plans were put on hold indefinitely. I chose to stay in Moscow with my husband, knowing that the Russian borders would be closed, and if I left, I would not be able to return for a long time. This was a hard choice to make. Choosing an expat life sometimes has consequences we are not ready for.

What was the first step you took to get involved in the COVID-19 response? I am naturally a doer and a fixer of problems, so in the beginning of COVID-19 here, it was easy to help out because technology provided all the resources to share. As the local kids were transitioning home from school, I shared online homeschool resources for parents who were making a colossal shift in their daily routines. We have been able to do a FB Live with an English-speaking doctor, shared information on English Telehealth resources and the AWO board continues using the FB platform as a way to encourage and inform our members daily. We are keeping up with our monthly newsletter. Also, I have started a Happiness group with women using the free Science of Well-Being course offered by Yale. This has been an excellent way to connect women together globally around a theme we can all relate to and need personally.

Since COVID-19 started, tell us about a typical day for you. I am up at 5:00 a.m. most days. Teeth, potty, get dressed! Then on to texts - I am managing my handicapped son from here as he has online schoolwork to do. He is with my daughter, Sasha, so I am not concerned for his safety. I am, however, concerned that his behavior issues could become a burden for her, so being up early and managing texts, emails, etc. is the first item of the day. My mother’s health is failing, and so these past two weeks I have been discussing with my brother how we will navigate during this crisis time. I answer texts and emails first so that my mind is free to move on. Each day, I have a time of reading and prayer; I walk around my apartment building to hit 10k steps and do 30 minutes of exercise.
Pilates. Cooking is quick for two people, so that doesn’t take up too much time. Twice a week I clean and do laundry. I have several projects I am working on and I have a few courses to work through while we are all having a break from our typical daily life. Generally, I work about 6-8 hours per day on those items. Then we talk with family, I read or watch a little TV with my husband before bed. Alex is teaching me cribbage as well, so we play a game of that or several rounds of backgammon each day right after dinner.

**What has surprised you most about life dealing with COVID-19?** For most of my life, I have been a “what if?” worrier. For the last five years, as I have focused on changing my mindset for living, I have noticed that the more I accept reality as it is and grieve what feels like loss, the easier my life has become. This is serving me well right now, and I am at peace.

**What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself and others through COVID-19?** I have discovered that the only certainty I have is that change is all around us. All the time. It is what we value and believe in that remain constant, provided we have done the work to sort that out in non-crisis times. I am drawing on those resources right now in a profound way. In the West, it seems to me that we have long enjoyed the stability and provision of the generations gone before. COVID-19 has shaken that foundation for many, and it will require a different skill set to adjust to a new normal. I am hopeful that we all will be able to retool quickly. My experience of living alongside Russians has taught me that being comfortable doesn’t always equate with being happy. People can still find joy in hard circumstances once they see how many internal resources they have to respond to the crisis at hand.

**What do you do to keep on top of your own stress and mental health during COVID-19?** There are several ways I manage my stress. First, I keep a schedule as that helps me feel the start and stop of life daily. Second, I exercise, even though right now it feels and is a sluggish process. Finally, I pray daily and ask God to help us all. Sharing my burdens with God helps me turn over all that is out of my control. I wish the time I practiced this trust exercise trickled over into my exercise routine and created six-pack abs!

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**IN CONVERSATION WITH DANIELLE**

Tell us something about yourself that not many people may know: I may have falsely stated on my application to the Russian Summer Student Exchange Program that I was a practicing hairdresser in the United States (I mean, I had intently watched my mom do elderly ladies’ hair each Saturday while growing up, as I sat under the dryer eating M&Ms they brought me). I also may have never clarified that detail when, after acceptance and arrival in Moscow in 1990, I was allowed to officially work at a men’s hair salon. On my FIRST day, I gave the FIRST man ever my FIRST go at a FIRST haircut for the FIRST time using clippers.

What fictional character would you be best friends with in real life? Hands down, I would be friends with Anne of Green Gables. We would be kindred spirits.

What is one weird fact or tidbit that you still remember from school? I brought a yellow umbrella with me to kindergarten on a sunny day, and it went missing.

What advice would you offer to yourself five years ago? Step by step. The best is yet to come. One year ago? In life, no pain goes to waste if you are willing to let go, forgive, and receive the gift each small morsel of suffering offers you.
In mid January 2020 Rob and I left our hometown near Cologne in search of winter sun in Spain and Portugal. When we hit the first campsite in Spain, we got caught up in Storm Gloria. Being stuck in a caravan with a dog when it is bucketing down for days is no fun. Thankfully, the heating worked. We arrived at the second campsite several days later; it had been inundated with water the night before and had to be partly evacuated as the campers were standing up to their knees in water. The beautiful beach had been washed away and was covered in large pebbles. Amazingly, crews were already out on Day Two cleaning up the mess. North of Barcelona, loads of trees were down, cars smashed and rivers flooded, but as we travelled further south the sun came out, and we had a lovely time travelling down the east coast of Spain. We reached the furthest southerly point Gabo de Gato and then drove along the south coast till we reached the Algarve, stopping at old and new places along the way.

Little did we know all this would come to an abrupt end. When the coronavirus hit, we were at a campsite near São Marcos da Serra, in the Algarve mountains. It was about as remote as you can get, down a 5 km dirt track. Initially, we didn’t worry too much as the COVID-19 cases in Portugal were few in comparison to Italy and Spain. We had internet, but no mobile phone reception from the campsite. WhatsApp calls saved our day. As restrictions were slowly imposed, everything started closing from restaurants to cafés. We managed to get one last lunch - fish with all the trimmings, starters and salad for €10 each! The supermarkets began to work on a one out/one in basis and some things were in short supply (although we did manage to find toilet paper!!). Eventually the campsite locked their gates; we were suddenly on enforced isolation and could only go out for essentials.

On March 18 Portugal declared a state of emergency. I booked my flight home but ended up staying as Rob was worried that if he got sick, there would be no one for Barney, the dog!! We were still in a relatively safe place surrounded by Dutch, French, German and British campers, but every cough and sneeze put you on red alert. We were told that although the borders in Spain and France were open, allowing motorhomes and caravans to go home, we needed forms to get through both countries. Information was scarce, and there were a lot of
conflicting reports. People were beginning to “make a run for it” through Spain and France. We heard reports that single motorhomes and caravans had been targeted by bandits in Spain. What to do?

On March 23 we decided to head home in a convoy of four caravans, three Dutch and ourselves heading to Germany. A caravan site was booked in Spain, but at 8:00 p.m. we were told the Spanish borders were closed and not to travel. We delayed; however, a German motorhome decided to leave and report back to us. As they got through with no problem, we left with our convoy the next day. We called ourselves “The Survivors”. At the border we were met by Spanish police with machine guns (encouraging), who handed us a form giving us permission to travel. We stayed overnight outside the campsite in Salamanca and heard from a British motorhomer that the campsite in Luz, where we had previously stayed, had closed their doors and with two days notice, everyone was forced to leave. The next day we were waved through the French border but stayed just north of Bordeaux at a different motorway service station after hearing that the Germans, who had left before us, had been broken into during the night and their money was gone.

On Day Three of our journey, The Survivors split up. The Dutch caravanners left early and got home late that evening; we went a different way and drove on completely empty motorways, staying again in France near Sens. We didn’t feel quite so safe without our convoy. The following morning the gendamerie knocked on our caravan, asked where we were going and told us to move on ASAP. Thankfully, on Day Four we got through Luxembourg with no checks and after showing our German ID cards at the border (they come in useful sometimes), we finally arrived home.

Mission accomplished and all Survivors survived to hopefully tell another tale next year, when we hope to meet up again.

Audrey Thomas grew up in and around London, UK and currently lives near Cologne, Germany. Originally, she came to Germany for two years but now, 40 years plus later, she is still here. She is a long time member of the AIWCO of Cologne, serving as their Treasurer for many years, Secretary and Activities Chair. She has now retired after doing the accounts for a company in the aerospace field and has also given up her Club responsibilities in the hope of travelling more in the near future. She also enjoys meeting up with Club members, reading and gardening.
Inspiring You

Founded in 1931, FAWCO is a global women’s NGO (non-governmental organization), an international network of independent volunteer clubs and associations comprising 60 member clubs in 31 countries worldwide, with a total membership of around 10,000 women and men. FAWCO serves as a resource and a voice for its members; seeks to improve the lives of women and girls worldwide, especially in the areas of human rights, health, education and the environment; advocates for the rights of US citizens overseas; and contributes to the global community through its Global Issues Teams and The FAWCO Foundation, which provides development grants and education awards. Since 1997, FAWCO has held special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council.

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FAWCO is an international federation of independent organizations whose mission is:

• to build strong support networks for its American and international membership;
• to improve the lives of women and girls worldwide;
• to advocate for the rights of US citizens overseas; and
• to mobilize the skills of its membership in support of global initiatives for education, the environment, health and human rights.

MAGAZINE FEEDBACK

We want this magazine to be interesting for all FAWCO members. In an effort to provide articles of interest to all of our readers, we have created an online feedback questionnaire. It should only take a few minutes of your time to complete and will be a great help to us!

Please click on the link or paste it into your browser to complete the survey.

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For more information about this magazine, please contact a member of the Inspiring Women team:
Editor in Chief, Liz MacNiven at inspiringwomen.editor@fawco.org.
Advertising and Sponsorship Manager, Elsie Bose at advertising@fawco.org.
Distribution Manager, Karen Boeker at iwdistribution@fawco.org
Social Media Manager, Berit Torkildsen at iwsocialmedia@fawco.org

The Inspiring Women Team

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Our Most Exciting Issue Yet

“Visualizing a Point of View”

For the Fall 2020 issue, the Inspiring Women team wants to explore the lives and stories of FAWCO members who have chosen the lens of a camera to do their talking. Whether as an expression of art or to reveal the truth, we believe that their pictures are the best way to illustrate their achievements and passions. In this issue, we will share their stories through their photos.

To send in a name of a nominee to be profiled in the summer issue, the process is simple. Send the name of the candidate, her club affiliation, her email address and a BRIEF description of why she would be an interesting person for us to profile, to Liz MacNiven: inspiringwomen.editor@fawco.org by June 23, 2020.

Do you have an image you think would be perfect for the cover of this issue? Send it to Liz MacNiven: inspiringwomen.editor@fawco.org by July 1, 2020. All images must be PORTRAIT orientation and taken by a FAWCO member with details of where and when the photo was taken. (N.B. Accreditation will be given but no payment is possible)