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From the Editor

Whenever someone says a problem is easy, it grabs my attention. Problems are problems precisely *because* they're hard. If they were easy, somebody would've solved them already.

COVID-19 has created, in lightning fashion, a healthcare, economic, and educational perfect storm. It's killed and sickened people we love while making us fearful of what's to come. As I'm writing this, Governor Jim Justice and governors across the country are facing life-and-death decisions over how and when to open their states back up. Unlike a typical flu season, we can't just let this disease run its course. It can kill with little notice, and there's no vaccine for it. It may already be circling the world in a second wave, even before the first wave subsides. However, if businesses remain shuttered too long, we could be thrown into another Great Depression. It's not a perfect storm; it's a perfect nightmare.

At times like this, I'm glad I don't have to make many difficult decisions. I'm not a doctor or an epidemiologist or an economist or a government leader. I'm a magazine editor, historian, and sometimes-musician. So, I won't ruminate any longer on what might happen going forward. But one thing we can learn from history is that unexpected disasters, such as the 1918-20 flu pandemic, *will* occur on occasion, but we can't predict exactly when or in what form. For instance, in 1918, a second wave of the flu was much more deadly than the first—because, in part, when things reopened, the public ignored warnings about holding large gatherings and wearing masks.

The past clearly shows what *can* happen if we don't listen to the experts. Very few of us are epidemiologists, and we need to pay heed to them on this.

We've confronted crises before. As we know all too well, West Virginians have faced our share of tragedies, often in the forms of deadly floods or mine disasters. As horrific as these events have been, they come to



The fast-moving pandemic closed even our churches this spring, including this one in Lincoln County. Some churches continued their services either online or by radio. Photo by Roger May.

an end, we mourn those we've lost, and then we try to rebuild our lives the best we can. We never lose those memories, but the events themselves conclude.

COVID-19, as of now, doesn't have an end date. We're all living in limbo, hoping for news that we've finally turned the corner. Moments like these are when I'm prouder than ever to be a West Virginian. Despite our contrariness at times, when there's trouble, we rise to the call.

My parents' generation sacrificed through the Great Depression and then again to win World War II. I still keep my father's family's wartime ration book as a reminder of the sacrifices they made.

My grandparents' generation lived through the first "war to end all wars" and the 1918-20 flu epidemic, which killed more people than the war did. My grandfather Albert Thompson got the flu in Army camp. When he recovered, World War I was over, and he never made it to the battlefields of Europe. Ironically, if it weren't for my grandfather getting the flu, I might not be here today.

My generation has experienced the HIV epidemic, which, to date, has killed millions. We rallied late to the cause

Share Your Creative Responses to COVID-19

The West Virginia Folklife Program, a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council, is dedicated to documenting, preserving, presenting, and supporting West Virginia's vibrant cultural heritage and living traditions, including the lives of everyday West Virginians. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program is collecting and sharing West Virginians' songs, videos, memes, stories, writing, crafts, art, and other forms of creative expression related to their experiences during the public health crisis. You can share them (with proper crediting info) by leaving a voicemail on the program's toll-free hotline 844-618-3747, or by e-mailing hilliard@wvhumanities.org. Thank you! Please share widely, take good care, and as Mothman says, "Wash your hands!" –By Emily Hilliard



As the crisis unfolded, socially distant press conferences became a much-followed daily event. (Left-right) sign-language interpreter Julie Turley; Adjutant General Major General James Hoyer; Dr. Cathy Slemp, commissioner of the Bureau for Public Health; Bill Crouch, secretary of the Department of Health & Human Resources; Governor Jim Justice; Erica Mani, chief executive officer, American Red Cross; and Attorney General Patrick Morrissey. Photo by Steven Rotsch.

because, frankly, it was seen scornfully as a “homosexual disease.” Over time, we’ve become somewhat less homophobic as a society (with a long way to go) and understand the many different ways HIV can be transmitted. Scientists believe HIV may date back to the 1920s but wasn’t identified as a contagious disease until the 1980s. While HIV treatments have come far, there’s still no cure, and too many people still die from AIDS—in 2018, it took the lives of more than ¾-million people worldwide.

With COVID-19, we must be united, not turn against one another as some did in the early days of the HIV crisis. Like the Great Depression and World War II generations, we must stand together, not apart. It’s us against this disease. It cannot be us-versus-us versus the disease.

In our Winter 2019 issue, Cynthia Mullens wrote about Clarksburg nurse Lucinda Rose, who died from the flu in 1918 while serving our country in the Red Cross. I urge all of you to read Cynthia’s article, which parallels our current crisis in many ways, such as closing schools and public places. As the *Beckley Raleigh Register* advised more than a century ago, “The most promising way to deal with the possibility of recurrence of the influenza epidemic is, in a single word, ‘Preparedness.’”

But we weren’t prepared for COVID-19 in any way, shape, or form. Now that it’s here, we need to be prepared if it comes back in waves as the flu epidemic did 100 years ago. John Feal, a first-responder from 9/11, observed recently, “Doctors and nurses aren’t the frontline of defense. They’re the last line. The frontline of defense is the American people.”

Speaking of doctors and nurses, whenever you see them—and other hospital staff and emergency responders—please thank them for everything they do. They literally risk their lives every day for us. A kind word of “thanks” means a lot in a time like this.

As a society, we take much for granted. I very much put myself in this category. In our Fall 2018 issue about the Farmington Mine Disaster, I wrote about this attitude in terms of coal miners and how we assume



Concerns over COVID-19 remind some of the race for a cure to the polio epidemic in the first half of the 20th century. Polio killed or paralyzed thousands before Jonas Salk’s vaccine was introduced in 1955. In this photo, Dr. M. H. Maxwell administers the Salk vaccine in Hardy County, April 1955. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, *Moorefield Examiner* Collection.

our electricity just magically works, without considering the risks miners have taken to give us this luxury. In our modern world, we presume good healthcare will always be there, until something goes wrong. Then, for a few minutes, days, or weeks, we think about the sacrifices people make for us before going back to our typical thinking. The year 2020 will be etched in our minds and history books as a reminder never to take *anything* for granted again.

If something good can come from this pandemic, hopefully, it will encourage more young people to pursue careers in science and medicine. This crisis has demonstrated how understaffed, and undersupplied, we are nationally in the healthcare field. We need our best and brightest for times like these. The risks our healthcare workers have taken over the last few months have been nothing less than heroic.

We should also thank a few others who are often taken for granted (apologies to all I leave out). For one, those who work at our 911 call centers. Who knows how many lives they’ve helped save over the years? For



Craig Hammond overlooks a food pantry's stock in Bluefield, preparing to feed those hurt economically by the pandemic. Photo by Emily Allen, courtesy of West Virginia Public Broadcasting.

another, journalists. Weekly, it seems, another newspaper goes out of business or lays off a major part of its workforce. Journalists have been our eyes and ears during this crisis. Thanks to the media, we've been able to follow this pandemic in real-time. We don't have to wait days or weeks as we did in 1918. And they've asked tough but fair questions to help us better understand what's happening. Journalists and good reporting make a positive difference in our world.

This year, when schools closed down—as they did in 1918—we were able to keep the learning process moving forward as a result of technologies that weren't available 100 years ago. But schools are much more than learning centers. One-fourth of all West Virginia children live in poverty, and that rate is drastically higher in some counties. Many West Virginia children rely on schools for their breakfasts and lunches. During the shutdown, school staff helped prepare daily lunches, which were then delivered by our school bus drivers. I personally know teachers who've checked in on families just to see if they're doing OK.

Thanks to the work of the West Virginia National Guard, our state ramped-up testing more quickly than other states did, flew in test kits from Italy, and, based on a design from Shepherd University, molded much-needed protective masks. Likewise, food banks and kitchens have stepped up to help ensure that no West Virginian goes hungry during what has become a health *and* economic crisis. And most non-essential businesses complied with the governor's request to shut down to reduce community spread of the virus. Essential jobs—everyone from food-industry workers, to police, to garbage collectors, to plumbers—have put themselves in harm's way every day so the rest of us could stay socially distant. As we move forward, please go out of your way to support West Virginia-owned businesses, which need your patronage now more than ever.

While they aren't in the life-saving business, the musicians, writers, and artists of our state have made good use of their time, if social media is any indication. West Virginia musicians have been cranking out new songs and paying homage to musicians

who've inspired them. Artists have taken advantage of our gorgeous scenery to bring us brilliant artwork and photography. And please check out the West Virginia Humanities Council's Facebook page. The council initiated "Poetry During a Time of Crisis," a platform for our state's poets to read their works online.

Many West Virginians also have gotten back to their Appalachian roots. The prime season for ramps and morel mushrooms hit in the middle of this, giving us a good reason to get outdoors while making up new recipes for these seasonal delights. The pandemic has interrupted some food-supply chains, prompting some to start planting vegetable gardens again. Many people used their downtime to try old-fashioned bread making (often realizing it's not as easy as our grandmothers made it look). A friend of mine sat at home one Saturday night and listened to the Grand Ole Opry with her father. And we know West Virginia has some of the best textile/quilt makers in the country. Many have put their talents to great use by making masks and other protective wear. These are the types of things that lift our souls and spirits at a time when they're in dire need of a boost.

Just like those who lived through the 1918-20 epidemic, Great Depression, and World War II, we can't see the end of the tunnel yet. But here's one thing we know for certain: West Virginians help one another in times of need. That's what we do. We're the first ones there when someone's hurting, often carrying a platter of fried chicken and a pound cake as tokens of our friendship. As (nearly) 92-year-old Philmore Kelley says in this issue, "The more you do for other people, the better it makes you feel." And just in case you need one, "neighbor Aileen's pound cake" recipe on p. 39 will certainly help.

Right now, some of us can't be there in person for those we love. But please check in on them in some way, especially the elderly

Hope is a black-winged bird

By Erin Beck

Hope is a black-winged bird
And I
Wrote the names of the ones who almost
killed it
In the black under my eyelids
So I don't sleep, my eyes just flutter
Hope is each time I close them anyway.
Hope is a black-winged bird,
And I
hear her sing as we cycle from shadow into light
During mourning
No, hope is not a shining star in the night sky
Hope, dear, is in the darkness
In the shadow of black wings that still fly

ERIC BECK is an author and journalist. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

and those with pre-existing conditions. Find a way to be there for them even if you can't be there physically. And keep wearing those masks and gloves and practicing good hygiene, even when we get back to a somewhat "more normal" existence. Remember the big lesson of 1918: preparedness. History doesn't predict the future, but it gives us a pretty good roadmap.

Every single one of us has at least one thing we do well (some are blessed with many). Whatever your "good thing" is, we need it now more than ever. If each one of us checks in on just one person every day, we'll make sure our fellow West Virginians are cared about, chicken and pound cake or not. Trust your heart and your common sense. I—perhaps more than anyone ever—lack common sense, but I do have a heart and so do all West Virginians. It's time for us all to think of our fellow brothers and sisters. In other words, it's time for us all to be West Virginians! —Stan Bumgardner