

Hello, Joy.

My annual order of wildflower seeds arrived in the mail, and I've never been so eager to start something new — something beautiful and immune to the virus taking so much away.

I love reading aloud the names of the flowers that, in theory, will thrive here in northeast Ohio.

Purple and gray-headed coneflowers, and clasping ones, too. Scarlet flax and Shasta daisy. Purple prairie clover and black-eyed Susan. Ox-Eye sunflower and gayfeather. Prairie Aster, evening primrose and lavender hyssop. And cosmos, always cosmos, because they bloom into bountiful bouquets until the first frost. One of my favorite photos of my husband is from three years ago, his grin wide as he walked through the kitchen door holding two dozen cosmos fanning out in every direction, two weeks before Halloween.

I've been eager to plant, but I have to wait. It snowed here last week, in not-so-early May. I grew up in Ohio's snow-belt and have lived more than 30 years an hour away, in Cleveland, where the words "lake effect" explain the reason and lay the blame. I'm used to snow, but I can't find anyone who remembers getting it this late. Our two dogs left paw prints from the back fence to the length of our porch, but that felt normal in the way things do when life is abruptly so strange.

A part of me worries that you're thinking, why is she writing about wildflowers and paw prints when so many people have died? The less insecure part of me thinks you know exactly why. We have to remember to breathe.

One of my oldest friends died last week in a hospital 900 miles away. She didn't have the coronavirus, but the coronavirus kept me away just the same. After almost 40 years of friendship, I couldn't kiss her forehead or whisper in her ear.

I need to believe that soon I'll be able to look out my kitchen window and see those wildflowers waving at me. They'll remind me of my friend, who liked manicured gardens and used to tease that she never saw anyone make more excuses for flowering weeds than me. Even typing that, I see her smile.

Lately, I've been forced to think about my own mortality because it seems to be the new hobby of virtually everyone around me. I'm 62, which, in the age of the

coronavirus, is the new 90 to both the CDC and people who love me most. I never saw that alliance coming.

My children, whom I raised to believe that they would never have to take care of me, have become the adults in my life who want to know why I'm not answering on the first ring. They love me, and I'm lucky for that. So far, so good, I tell them, but then I cried during my son's Mother's Day call. I don't know which of us was more alarmed by this development. With their tender notes and multiplying calls, my son and daughter have been as grown-up as I've ever known them to be. I feel I've turned a corner with my kids, and there will be no returning to where I used to be.

I study my husband's face when he's not watching, and more than I used to. I assure myself that I should have been paying this kind of attention all along. We've always said we married too late to reach that golden anniversary, but neither of us has ever wanted to believe this could come to an end.

Sometimes, I feel guilty in moments of happiness. But I try to remind myself that no good comes from squandering what remains. Life still brings us joy, and what a waste of a heart to deny its entry. We must rely on the researchers to find the cure for this virus, but we can do our part to limit its destruction.

This morning I discovered two birds building a nest in the crevices of our front porch light, just to the right of the door that opens and closes all day long.

What an act of optimism.

I will plant my wildflowers. One day, they will wave.

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