

There are the anxieties all of us have concerning this Covid 19. We worry about the health of our families and friends, we have to think ahead to have food on hand, we cancel plans for special events made months ago. Many of us have to become adjusted, as well, to life without as many or as close social contacts.

Then, there are the little inconveniences that vary from person to person. I know someone who is agonizing over putting off a scheduled haircut. Someone else I talked to is concerned that a favorite kind of candy is getting low in the sack. And, then there is my little problem—libraries are closed for the time being.

I was careful in reading the new books I'd checked out a few weeks ago. I didn't read as usual, devouring volumes nearly daily. Instead, I'd read a few pages and then put the book aside for several hours. I made my new books last this way.

Finally, though, my supply was exhausted. And that led me to something I occasionally do anyway, but this time, for a protracted period and with few other options. I began to re-read some of my favorite books.

These aren't all literary masterpieces. There are biographies, thrillers, books of essays, poetry, novels, and my old history textbooks from college years. And, I find, as I browse through our little home library, that many of the books I read years ago bring about different personal reactions than they did on first reading them in past decades. Others are just renewals of old friendships with authors I've enjoyed for a long time.

I pulled Carrie Young's *Nothing to Do but Stay* off the shelf last night. The book contains a series of stories about the author's Norwegian immigrant mother who, as a young single woman, had homesteaded in North Dakota in 1904, later marrying a young homesteader who had come from the same area in Norway. An interesting side note was about language. Though both spoke English to their children and to others who were not Norwegian, they never spoke a word of anything but Hallingdal Norwegian to each other. Carrie Young's stories of pioneering days on the northern prairie are testaments to the resourcefulness and tenacity of those early settlers, even if, in retrospect, the prairie would have been better left unbroken by the plow.

I also have read pieces of Jessamyn West's stories of Jess and Eliza Birdwell, fictional Quakers of 19th century Indiana. One story in particular I have read aloud many times. Jess, a nurseryman who sold orchard stock, each fall made a trip south into Kentucky to take orders for trees and bushes. He was driving a beautiful sorrel horse named Red Rover. The horse had a classy, high-stepping look, but unfortunately, when challenged on the road going to First Day Meeting, the Methodist minister's Black Prince could pass him at ease. Then, the minister would slow down in front of the Birdwells so that they had to "eat his dust." Eliza Birdwell was a Quaker minister, one who was modest and quiet. She implored Jess to get rid of the "racy-looking" Red Rover.

On his Kentucky trip, Jess happened to stay overnight at the farm of a widow woman with four daughters, all big, strapping young women like their

mother, all of them powerful smokers, their clay pipes making the air blue. On a drive to look at the widow's new forty where she was planning an orchard, she drove her Lady horse. Lady was ungainly, ugly, and looked like she must have been crossed, Jess thought, with a moose or some other animal. But, on the main road, someone came up behind them, and Lady would not be passed. Her mistress tried to hold her back, and as she later explained to Jess, her girls couldn't find husbands, because men didn't like having girls driving horses that were faster than their own.

So, of course, a trade was made, and Jess drove away with the unusually put together Lady, while the widow and her daughters now had a stylish—but slow—buggy horse. The subsequent “brush” between the Methodist minister and the Quakers left the minister exhorting his Black Prince with words one might have heard at a Methodist camp meeting, but not used in quite the same way. To no avail, since Lady bested Black Prince.

Stories like these, that make us chuckle, that produce admiration for the way others live and have lived, that show the resilience and spirit of the human race—these are useful tales in troubling times. Though we spend plenty of our reading time on books that are intent on teaching us skills we need and about subjects that are important in our lives, a little pure entertainment can be the antidote to isolation and despair.