



## What We Missed In 2020

December 1, 2020

The Federalist staff and writers spent some time thinking over what we've missed in 2020: big things, little things, surprising things. What are yours?

### **Rachel Bovard**

The lockdowns didn't bother me, at first. I am a homebody who is almost never at home, so an enforced pause to the relentless pace of travel, work events, and social engagements was something of a welcome relief. I don't need to see people to "see" people, I told myself. Virtual check-ins and trivia nights with friends became a weekly occurrence. On Easter, my mom directed all of the cooking done in my house and those of my siblings from her laptop, on Zoom.

I can still tolerate less human interaction than most (introverts everywhere, unite!). But it is the sweet and carefree intangibles of co-existence that I deeply, achingly miss. Squeezing onto a barstool next to a girlfriend at a crowded bar. Picking up a dropped set of keys for my neighbor. Passing around a bottle of wine while sitting in the grass at a lazy summer picnic. Warm embraces. A firm handshake.

To the extent that any of these things still happen, they are draped in a pall of suspicion, anxiety, and judgment. We are a people in the grip of a pathological fear, which we eagerly project into condemnation. It is less that we cannot see one another; it is more that we are scared to death of one another.

The small gestures of our humanity — the ones that transform us from strangers into fellow travelers — have lost their meaning and vitality, falling away like the dead, shriveled leaves in a year-long winter. I miss them terribly.

### **Margot Cleveland**

While for most of America and the world 2020 proved exceedingly challenging, for me it has actually been easier in many ways. As a stay-at-home, homeschooling mom caring full-time for an 11-year-old with cystic fibrosis and asthma, not much changed for us following the start of the pandemic, other than watching the rest of the world adapt to our infection control protocols. However, to further safeguard our son from COVID, as a family we decided my dear husband would take over my public errands, meaning my least favorite chore of grocery shopping became his least favorite chore.

My days became easier too when the local courts moved to online hearings, allowing me to “attend” court on behalf of my pro bono client without the hassle of coordinating work schedules with my husband. I also enjoyed the benefit of having taught on Zoom for more than ten years in the evenings for graduate students, so there was no difficult transition for me, unlike other faculty members adjusting to a new format.

While the day-to-day became easier, COVID meant forgoing trips to see my elderly mother out of state, where she lives with my older brother’s family. Frankly, now as I pondered 2020, I realize I’ve been living the year in denial that I may never see her again: She’s 91, has severe dementia, and her heart is losing steam—both physically and, with my father dying last year, emotionally.

While we FaceTime regularly, the dementia makes it difficult to “connect” other than to say “I love you,” and “thanks for being such a great mom,” before she loops back to questioning what day it is and how old our son is. When I’m there, it’s different because we just “are.”

I usually just cuddle next to her on the couch with a pillow and a blanket, hold her hand, and partake in her, as she puts it, “favorite hobby”—napping. And then there are the mom hugs, which no matter how old you are, make everything right — well, unless you’re an 11-year-old boy sheltering-in-place with mom for eleven months. He apparently misses my weekends away as much as I do.

**Rich Cromwell**

With three daughters and two adults who worked outside the home, our pre-pandemic life was best defined with one word: busy. As Zoom replaced church and the office and school and soccer practice, we found ourselves at home more.

Naturally, this meant we ended up even busier than before. Work somehow became more demanding. We came to accept that homeschooling was likely never a viable option for us, unless the only subject taught was “How to Argue with Your Seven-Year-Old.” As others started to see the value in slowing down, we struggled to keep up.

We never really shut down here, though. Granted, to take the kids to the playground meant I had to take them trespassing on a local school’s playground and soccer was no-contact, but life didn’t wholly stop. In that, we started to find appreciation for the little things we’d missed.

Remote work got more reasonable and we started finding time to get together with those we’d been avoiding. Then, soccer, one of the former biggest sources of being busy, resumed and offered one of the greatest moments of normalcy we’ve experienced.

At some point during the most extreme portion of the early part of the pandemic, when basically only I was leaving the house, our middle and youngest daughters started reminiscing about something so simple, something once so easily obtained: Brisket Poutine from Q39 in Kansas City. It’s a decadent combo of French fries, smoked brisket, fried cheddar curds, brown gravy, and BBQ sauce. “Remember those fries, Dad?”

One Saturday, there were league games, a double-header, in Kansas City. The second match wasn’t over until about 5 p.m. I didn’t want to drive home afterward, so I started checking availability. I could get a reasonable hotel, plus Q39 had tables available. So we went, my daughter’s club won both, and we took our seats at the restaurant.

Those were the most delicious fries we’ve ever had. Finally, something trivial, but something that had been taken away, was back. We ate too much, savoring every bite. Life may still be busy for us, but it’s slowed down.

More important, we've remembered what Ferris Bueller was trying to teach us when he said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." Even if what you're missing is an unattended playground or fresh order of brisket poutine.

### **Libby Emmons**

I miss my datebook.

Every year I buy a Hobonichi Techo Weekly Planner. The paper is nearly translucent. It's smooth to write on with my favorite pilot pens, Hi-Tec-C 0.4 in blue or black ink. I open it in the evening to see what the next day has in store. I open to have a look at what the future holds.

My 2020 planner has barely cracked the spine. Most of the time I don't know what day it is. And I never open it to look now because the blank expanse of nothing done and nothing to do sinks like a plum line in my chest.

Every day is the same, and we make no plans for the future. We started out saying things to each other like "when the pandemic is over," but it doesn't have the feeling of a thing that will end. It has instead the feeling of something that will crush our spirits long before we are able to rise from the shadows of these spike proteins and reclaim our civilization and our lives.

Before the world was closed off, I made plans, and I wrote them down in my datebook. I made plans to travel, see friends, go to family weddings, attend parties and events. I logged flight numbers and hotel reservations. I made plans of things I'd like to do if I had the money and the time and I looked up airfares just for fun. I made dates to see movies, I bought theatre tickets, I made notes of new restaurants to try. I planned to see exhibits at museums with my kid, and arranged to go apple picking.

Whatever it was, I looked forward to it. I wrote it down in my datebook.

Now I barely know what day it is. My son asks me what day it is, and I say, "Do you want to know the real day or can I just say Vlarfday?" He says, "The real day," and I go look it up. But I check my phone, not my datebook. My datebook sits at the edge of my desk, a relic from a past era when life happened.

I miss looking forward to things.

### **Mollie Hemingway**

I've adjusted to the weirdness of coronavirus times fairly well. Most of my income has continued unabated and my church still meets weekly. I already prefer the company of my own family to other people, so the additional time spent at home has been heavenly. I've had more time for walks and time with my children. But man, do I miss live music in front of a huge crowd.

A few months into the coronavirus pandemic, I was overcome with the desire to be at a concert with a throng of sweaty people. I couldn't get the desire out of my head. I just wanted to be in a mass of people, all experiencing the music together. I've always loved concerts and attended many each year, even after having children. Still, I didn't appreciate them as much as I should have.

And I have it better, in terms of live music, than many people. My church meets weekly and our music is incredible. We have an excellent cantor and organist and plenty of special musicians. Some places in the country forbid or discourage singing at church, and I can't imagine how difficult that would be.

Back in September, my church had a special service to install one of our pastors. A pastoral installation is always a joyous festival, and this was no exception. The congregation chanted the liturgy and sang hymns. Special musical sections featured not just the organ but other instruments. The choir sang as well.

Some of the visitors from out of state began crying. The reason? They had been banned from singing since the beginning of the coronavirus. Hearing the music made them cry.

Charles Mingus once wrote, "Let my children have music! Let them hear live music!" That's my wish for my children, too.

### **Sumantra Maitra**

What I was looking forward to the most, and naturally missed in this neverending war, was Affogato. It's a soft, icecream-filled Italian coffee drink that was a staple breakfast for me when I

was in Washington DC last July. Unfortunately, it is a very American drink, not found in British Starbucks.

I defended my PhD thesis this year and have a job offer waiting to move to DC, but am still stuck in England for the time being, due to this stupid virus, and stranger flight and visa rules. But help is on the way in the form of vaccines, thanks to American capitalism, British brains, and Indian manufacturing prowess. So I am looking forward to joining my job next year, and enjoying the fruits of capitalism in the form of this delicious syncretism of the old and new world.

### **William McMorris**

I miss him — the minty breathed ex-con, the retired Ironworker, the fattest Knight of Columbus, whoever it was who grew out his beard for the privilege of listening to bratty children at their most materialistic. I always figured the mall Santa would disappear along with the big department stores, even as he survived through fraternal organizations and other civic groups. Coronavirus has sped up the former’s demise and lawmakers have ensured that the latter will not be able to take its place.

I never thought I’d miss the endless lines or the corralling that went into snapping a photo of a shrieking toddler on the lap of a suspect St. Nick, but then I spent eight hours trying to get coronavirus tests for my family in the days before Thanksgiving. We got the shrieking toddlers; there were no candy canes.

### **Stella Morabito**

I miss reality. I miss feeling like I can have a real life in a real society. Control freaks seem to be serving us a lot of fake substitutes, using the Wuhan virus as an excuse. In the past, power elites *pretended* they weren’t trying to isolate and control us. Ironically, those masks came off in 2020. So I miss what’s real and human. Here’s a short list.

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<b>Real</b>	<b>Fake Substitute</b>
Baseball, with fans in the stadium	Politicized sports and cardboard “fans”
Standing for the right to kneel	Pressuring everyone to kneel

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American flag	Antifa/BLM/Slavery
Faces	Masks
Exchanging smiles	Exchanging misery with covered faces
Real conversation	Blatant censorship
Social trust	Snitch culture
Common humanity	Identity politics
Asking a begged question	Being called a conspiracy theorist
Freedom of movement	Virtual solitary confinement
Real news about real events	24/7 propaganda
Real-life classroom exchanges	Online “learning”
Mom and pop shops	Corporate chains and box stores
Interacting face to face	Zoom
Meeting family and friends	State regulation of relationships
Dining in	Take-out ONLY

In short, human beings are not interchangeable parts meant to interact in a sterile vacuum. I miss a consensus on that reality.

### **William Newton**

Part of my job here in the salt mines is to try to visit those art exhibitions that I can, based on my availability. Even in a non-pandemic year, of course, I can’t see everything that I’d like to see; no art critic possibly could. Nevertheless, my Federalist calendar from March through the end of 2020 was to include reviews of a number of shows, both in the United States and abroad.

When COVID-19 canceled all of my plans, at first I was irritated that I wouldn’t be able to see family, friends, and colleagues in many of the places I had planned to visit. Later, that feeling was compounded by frustration at not being able to simply walk into any museum or gallery I chose, not even one in my own neighborhood, in order to admire and learn from beautiful, interesting things.

Yet it turns out I've missed something else just as much as I've missed the art, and the socializing that usually accompanies seeing it. Surprisingly, what struck me when I finally traveled again, after many months of barely leaving my ZIP code, was how much I missed travel itself, including all of its annoyances.

I missed the badly dressed passengers brandishing their body parts like tokens of prestige while wearing crude advertising billboards disguised as apparel. I missed turning up the music on my earbuds just a bit more so that I wouldn't have to overhear the inane, profanity-laden conversation taking place just across the aisle. I missed the bumptious security guards, the exasperated ticket personnel, the perennially dirty bathrooms, and the repetitive food choices designed to encourage the onset of morbid obesity. And I missed how all of these things made me reflect on myself.

Just as when you find yourself in front of a magnificent painting, sculpture, building, or the like, travel serves as a reminder that, in the scheme of things, you're really not all that important. Indeed, trapped as we all have been for so many months in gilded cages filled with comforts and conveniences, many of us may well be in danger of forgetting that we aren't, in fact, the center of the universe.

The annoying, frustrating, and insalubrious aspects of travel, on the other hand, turn out to be a great equalizer — and that includes trying to be more charitable toward and more patient with the self and with others. It's something that I certainly have missed, but didn't know it.

### **Madeline Osburn**

"I'm going to show the doctor what I've found," an ultrasound technician said to me before leaving the room, where I sat alone. That simple, innocent statement sent my heart racing and my mind reeling with worst-case scenarios, imagining how I could possibly call my husband and coherently explain to him any bad news I received about our baby.

The doctor returned and told me the baby was fine, but I remained angry my husband couldn't be there to hear the good news either. My heart ached for women and babies who are not healthy, imagining being delivered a frightening diagnosis alone.



Because I found out I was pregnant about a month into COVID lockdowns, my husband has yet to be allowed to attend a single doctor appointment with me. “No visitors,” reads a sign on the waiting room door. “No video recording” reads another sign underneath the screen in the sonogram room.

We’ve missed many of the celebrations and milestones that come with pregnancy, losing traditional baby showers, babymoons, and even the simple joy of telling friends and family about a new life in-person. But nothing compares to the loss by my child’s father, who nearly nine months in, has yet to hear her heartbeat.

### **Ilya Shapiro**

I miss being able to go knock on my colleagues’ doors and start a conversation about a thorny legal or policy issue. I had plenty of flexibility in my schedule and going into the office was sometimes a pain — getting dressed (not just pants, but a tie!), the commute, not being able to see my kids all day — but when it ceased being an option, I realized what phone calls and emails (and Teams, and Slack) weren’t substitutes for. The rhythms of DC life, the lunches and receptions, catch-up drinks and conferences: we took them for granted and at times they were a drag, but boy will I relish that nametag and Open Table app when they again become useful.

For that matter, it would be nice to have a reason to dress up beyond the bare minimum: shorts and flip-flops in warm weather, sweats in cold, with a button-down at the ready for a Zoom and a jacket for going on TV. I miss thinking about what to wear beyond whether a particular T-shirt has gotten too ripe. Conversely, I miss going places without a second thought, whether down the street or across the country. In the few trips I’ve had during the pandemic, I repurposed that old Borscht Belt line to friends and strangers alike: “It’s good to be here. These days, it’s good to be anywhere.”

Fundamentally, I miss being irritable for a reason and not just as a background condition. For me, Thanksgiving, not New Year’s, is the time I reflect on the year past and set goals or make personal adjustments for the year to come. This year, I miss being able to make such plans without an unreasonable number of unknown unknowns.

## **Joy Pullmann**

I miss the American way of life. I miss not having every microinteraction, every thought, subjected to politics — “Am I too close to this old person?” “Are they glad to see a smile or mad I’m not wearing a mask?” “Should I invite over that family who is new to town?” “Will the friends who decided that COVID means we should all hide indefinitely hate me forever now?” I don’t believe the state should have the power to interfere with our private lives this way, to decide how and where I may breathe.

I miss being able to take my children anywhere but the grocery store and parks. I always have a baby and toddler and preschooler, and they all — and I — used to regularly get out of the house to maintain sanity. We can’t go to the library, the zoo, or the indoor gardens where we bought memberships last Christmas, either because they are closed or they demand masks, and masks suck. I’m not wearing a symbol of mindless, anti-science humiliation, and neither are my children. As punishment for our independence, we are on house arrest — as far as government and their spies and snoops know.

The destruction of public places is yet another government taking that will never be compensated by debt other people have decided my children and grandchildren will have to pay off after having been robbed of the American way of life in their childhoods, too. They will learn soon enough when they come of age and all the bills come due on their tabs, just like millennials discovered too late boomers’ shocking, unrecoverable profligacy and subsequently opted for socialism in revenge.

## **Holly Scheer**

Like many families, 2020 has been a hard year for us. We haven’t seen my family in exactly a year now. The last time we were all together was a family wedding, shortly before the COVID outbreak and travel restrictions. My children have now gone a full year without seeing their grandmother and grandfather, their aunt and uncle, and all of the rest of my family. This time happened gradually. At first, we thought this was just a brief separation while the virus was brought under control. Then when it was apparent that there was nothing brief or ordinary about this, we tried to plan ways to come together and were unsuccessful.

As a mother, so much of what I will remember as things missed from 2020 are also things my children missed. School dances, important end of the year field trips, class parties. The trip we'd planned over summer vacation. 2020 changed all of the various things we'd intended to do, and instead brought our family focus back to the home. We made our memories and special moments in our immediate community and home this year, showing us all of the things we'd previously overlooked right here in our own backyard.

2020 stole many things from us, absolutely. Plans and hopes, dreams and time with extended family. We missed time with loved ones. But we also drew back closer in as a family, with a renewed focus on a quiet, slow paced life lived together.