*Only Yesterday* – The Spring of our Discontent

When I was in college, I read a book entitled *Only Yesterday*. It was written around 1932 and described the conditions and life in the Roaring Twenties before the stock market crash in 1929. It was a cogent description of how life had changed in the United States drastically over a relatively short time. Then there were the recent events of March 2020, where life changed even more drastically over a much shorter time. Life, as we know it, came to an abrupt change. Although a common attitude among optimistic people is that things will get back to “normal” soon, I can not support that point of view. The relative value of life is much higher today than it was during the H1N1 virus epidemic of 1918. Variants of that virus seem to recur every fall since then, but there is the annual flu shot. With the current COVID-19 epidemic, there is no current medical prevention assistance, and people who are older are much more adversely affected.

Until there is a vaccine that protects the population against this disease, there is unlikely to be a change in the current lifestyle situation. Laboratories are stating that it takes years to develop a new vaccine with the regulations and protections that are present. Even with the relevant wartime level emphasis on COV-19, science does not have the capability to provide the world with a solution in a short time frame. So, in my opinion, this is my list of what is not going to happen any time in the coming year and potentially much longer:

1. Ocean cruise ships. There was a huge expansion of this business in recent years. Ships have been getting larger and several new cruise lines have entered what used to be a very profitable business. Such crowded conditions have been incubation areas for diseases for at least the last 30 years. Even in December 2019, on the Pacific Princess, precautions such as Purell before every meal and a large emphasis on sanitation were applied to everyone. After our trip, that ship embarked on a 111-day round-the-world trip. The risks of disease on ships has been very bad news for the last month and even before then. Cruising, after a long period of expansion, looks to shrink as people are no longer willing to be trapped in such situations. One web site listed 40 older cruise ships that are for sale before the current pandemic.
2. Ship maintenance. I would expect many cruise ships to be scrapped in the current environment since maintenance expenses are very high. Many cities were interested in using one of the eight United States Navy Forrestal class carriers as maritime museums, but they were all refused since the maintenance and refurbishment costs of such large ships were much higher than anticipated. These ships were not designed as museums for the public, and they are all scheduled to be scrapped. This is unfortunate since the expansive hangar deck provides an excellent display area for aircraft, and the crew areas show many aspects of military life.
3. Airline travel. Boeing made a huge safety error in marketing the 737 Max as a revision of an existing aircraft. In reality, it should have been called a new design and met the criteria and training requirements for a new aircraft type. On March 10, 2019, this aircraft type was banned from commercial flight and, a year later, it is still not back in commercial service. The airlines survived by using their existing aircraft types. With coronavirus, an airplane (with limited ventilation and close proximity seating) is not a good place. Airports are crowded and full of closely packed seats and lines for boarding, disembarking, and luggage. Air travel used to be an ordinary part of many lives, now it is avoided as a unacceptable risk. It does not help that many countries such as Japan are quarantining all new arrivals to the country for two weeks. We had a trip to Japan scheduled for April 2020. That has been cancelled and deferred to some time. When will that time be?
4. Tourism. Many areas of this country are dependent upon tourists. They provide a large share of the income and jobs for such places as Las Vegas, New Orleans, and Florida. There are many small countries in the world, especially in the Caribbean, where tourism provides the majority of the entire economy for the country. My personal delight is in visiting new countries and experiencing their scenery, culture, and traditions. I have now been to 92 different countries according the Traveler’s Century Club list. I wonder if I will make it to the 100 countries needed.
5. Restaurants. People in California are supposed to stay home. Take-out is available, but last week I attempted to find someplace that would provide dinner. I had to go to seven different places, all of which I used to patronize, before I found a Thai restaurant that was available for take-out. This means there is now a lot of unemployment in this industry. The variety of foods that used to be available has shrunk, and eating out has lost its entertainment value.
6. Ski and sports clubs. We are members of the Conejo Valley Ski and Sports Club. Every club event has been cancelled. This includes the March Mammoth Ski Trip, New Orleans trip, club meetings, parties, hikes, pickleball, volleyball, contract bridge, and elections. Anyway, all ski areas closed.
7. Fitness gyms. Do people really get dressed up to go to a fitness location and twist their bodies on strange apparatus that looks like a scene out of a horror movie. What kind of torture is this? Fortunately, I do not participate in such group actions. I do feel sorry for people who view this as an essential part of their life.
8. Religious organizations. The most dangerous action that I have heard about was a choir practice in Skagit Valley, Washington state. Of the 60 attendees, 45 came down with the coronavirus and several died. Going to church is a group activity with limited space seating for the most part. Other church activities tend to involve close contact with other people. Since when, in this country, have most group religious activities been abolished temporarily.
9. Senior citizen centers. I used to go to activities at the Agoura Civic Center. They were a really nice group of people with activities such as mah-jongg, bridge, yoga, local bus trips, teen activities, and the like. That center is now closed with no reopen date scheduled.
10. Cultural performances. Any place with live theater or art museums is closed. They are in violation of social distancing criteria. I have had much reluctance to pay an exorbitant price to occupy a seat for several hours especially since I can not understand what is being said. My parents, being deaf, did not attend performances unless interpreted or performed in sign language. Such forms of activity were not a large part of my life growing up or even now.
11. Attending a sports event. These have the same problem with proximity. Why would I want to pay money to view an event from an impossibly far distance when television offers multiple cameras, excellent viewing angles, zoom lenses, and replays? Speaking of absurdity, why would anyone want to cheer a sports event that is on television. That can have no possible effect on the outcome.
12. Family gatherings. Weddings. Birthdays. Funerals. I admit to being a Scrooge. I avoid such events like the plague (an unfortunate term), even my own. For many groups, these are quite important, and businesses that help in making these events happen are now in trouble. I have heard that even spouses are not allowed to attend the birth of new family members. I suppose the family dinner has disappeared. People affected have my sympathy. I would even like to invite my own children and their families to visit, but even that seems risky.
13. Cards and board games. These activities can be replaced by online semi-equivalents. I used to play contract bridge at the local 750 club. They have 7 duplicate sessions a week in the local church recreation center with 20-60 people attending. This involves 4 people at the card table with pairs moving around to play other pairs. They then sit less than a meter apart for 20 minutes and move to the next table. That is not going to work; it fails the social distancing criteria. Fortunately for bridge addicts, there are computer programs like *Bridge Base Online* that allow a similar activity to take place from remote locations. I find this unsatisfactory since I like the social contact aspects of contract bridge. However, the church may need the rental funds to support their programs and may choose to rent the space for other activities. My Friday/Saturday night board game groups have either disbanded temporarily or gone to online gaming. Many friends are in isolation status.
14. Political events. Do you really think that any candidate is go around shaking hands and kissing babies? The Democratic and Republican conventions in 2020 are likely to be online and not in-person events. Future campaigning is likely to be a computer or television experience instead of a town hall meeting. As a side issue, I would really hope that the custom of shaking hands in many cultures should be abolished. Such practices spread disease, and is sometimes painful. I never know how hard to squeeze and declining a proffered hand is considered anti-social. The whole concept is archaic. A small bow or putting hands together in front of you from a safe distance is much preferred. I still do not understand why all people do not vote early by mail.
15. Fishing trips. Chris belongs to two fishing groups. A typical trip meets at the ship around midnight; the 12-25 passengers go to sleep in a crowded bunk area; in the morning, they then go fishing on the deck close to each other and the deckhands on the ship. The trip leader noted that the ship will have no income in the near future, so as a civilized person, he arranged for advance payment to the captain for a future trip. Everyone in the fishing club promptly sent him the trip contribution. After all, without any income in the near future, the fishing business may be out of business.
16. Visiting the doctor. My dermatologist posted a sign in the window that the office is closed until further notice. As he is over 70, and dermatologists frequently have close contact with the patient, the sensible decision on his part was to suspend the practice. Fortunately, most medical actions regarding skin issues can be deferred for some period of time. Several other types of medical visits can be deferred until a later date or even performed remotely.
17. Factory workers. I do not know much about how factories operate, but people might be working closely. Certainly, the salary level is low for most jobs so people do not have much spare income. The lack of a paycheck on a weekly basis could cause severe economic distress. Can some small businesses survive non-operation for a period of time? There has been some discussion of the status of the only Tesla auto plant. Is it an essential business? How long a shutdown can the plant tolerate without going out of business? How long a shutdown can the factory workers survive without moving on to some other employment? Do the political leaders care? Right now, my understanding is that substantial aid is going to some large corporations and not individuals.
18. Business trips. Employment interviews. Chris has already had business trips to meet with other company leaders cancelled. Conferences and interviews are scheduled online with Skype and other Internet tools. I wonder what is happening with the Society of Women Engineers convention that is supposed to be November 2020 in New Orleans. We were planning to attend.
19. Fruit sales to wholesale. Hooverville orchards near Sacramento started around 1930 so the local farmer could market fruit directly to the consumer as wholesale fruit prices were inadequate. They grow a large selection of apples and pears and are proud to explain their history to their local visitors. The tradition of direct sales has continued in many orchards near urban areas to the current date. I recommend Francisco’s Fruit Stand on Highway 126 east of Fillmore, California. I have also noted that the *Ocean Spray* cranberry cooperative started in 1930. I drink a lot of their products. I also belong to the *Sunkist* co-operative for oranges. Vitamin C is healthy; drink more fresh squeezed California orange juice.
20. Going for a drive. This violates the current political thinking to stay home. Besides, where are you supposed to go? Even outdoor places such as Descanso Gardens, Arboretum, Beaches, Parks and the like are all closed. Why does driving potentially cause a police action in some areas? I would like to see the scenery from the Angeles Crest Highway or the ocean along Highway 1. Do I have to suffer from 4-wall-itis for the rest of the month? year? lifetime?
21. Yahoo Finance News from April 4, 2020: The coronavirus outbreak, or COVID-19, is pushing the U.S. economy further into historic territory. The economy saw an unprecedented [6.648 million](https://www.yahoo.com/finance/news/coronavirus-covid-weekly-initial-jobless-claims-march-28-165758189.html) people applying for unemployment claims for the week ending March 28 when initial jobless claims came out on Thursday. On Friday the March jobs reports showed that [the economy shed 701,000 jobs](https://www.yahoo.com/finance/news/march-2020-jobs-report-nonfarm-payrolls-coronavirus-unemployment-201234973.html) when economists were expecting a decline of 100,000.“The monthly payroll jobs report has been upstaged by the last two weeks of unemployment claims applications totaling nearly ten million,” Chris Rupkey, MUFG managing director and chief financial economist, wrote in a note on Friday. “The 701 thousand lost payroll jobs is just a down payment on the immense losses that are already here and have yet to be counted. What is next month's figure going to be? Down 9 million? Down 15 million... The country is literally shutting down.” Markets ended down on Friday, with the Dow down 1.69%, the S&P 500 down 1.51% and the Nasdaq 1.53%.
22. Suggested reading. *The Great Influenza*, the story of the deadliest pandemic in history. John M Barry. Currently the book is out of stock on Amazon.
23. As they say in the movies: To be continued…