

December 11, 2020

Dear Friends,

What a year it's been! January and February were more or less as they ever were, lots of cold lonely nights with few companions to play chess and just pass the time with.

In March, the lighter and warmer it got the fewer people we saw around. Meanwhile the tall trees woke up and there were many more birds than usual. The streets got very quiet, apart from the occasional racing car. No kids came to the playground and hid in the bushes overlooking the trash in the alley. Teenagers sometimes showed up at night to vape and scream under the glowing red and green dials of the clock tower at Michael's Church, saved from the Chicago fire by the immigrants who built it.

In April there remained many dark windows along Hudson but people started coming back, a tiny lady with a huge butter-colored irish wolfhound, and a group led by a guy in a newsboy cap and supershort red beard that walked on the tips of the iron fences.

By May the trees were in bloom, although fewer people had occasion to admire them while waiting for the Segdwick bus. The bus still went by, the driver glancing out at the park in case to see if there was someone recognizable to wave at. Someone freed the whimsical fountain from its green wooden protective cover and started it, and kids and dogs flocked. People who looked like they'd walked longer to get here showed up. A very tall man who mutters to himself moved in.

In June and July there were many birthday parties on the chess tables, with helium balloons and cake and dress-up clothes. Lights came on in some of the empty houses, and then the extrawide sidewalks where Hudson bends and the temple steps filled with casually but very stylishly dressed people who looked fit and young for their age and generally rich. And also, still, the people who seemed to come from other neighborhoods and be fewer of those things.

By August the parkour people had shorn open a few of the welds on the fences and this caused gate to the alley to rattle more, and that drove the dog who lived in one of the houses on the other side of the alley to bark through a lovely stretch of summer nights, until someone stuck a \$4 clamp on the shorn section.

People from across the alley started bringing moving blankets and lanterns to the suspicious little hill that sits next to the playground, the one with the vents. People like to say that's demo debris from the fire, but we don't remember how things were back then.

Many climbed and posed on the horses made out of old chrome car parts on the other side of the suspicious hill from the playground. Someone spent a lot of time applying sidewalk chalk to the concrete pavers that fan out behind their hooves. Someone left or lost a round rock painted to look like a blue donut on the suspicious hill. Someone else, not a child, took it home.

There was a huge storm in the middle of the day and the street glistened with felled limbs.

In September the trees started turning and even more people came, and stayed later, reading alone on the benches and temple steps as night fell and the lit horns of the Sears Tower blinked on behind the temple. The cafe tables at the corner bar were full, its doors thrown open to the



side street with the nursery school. People in harnesses swung from the trees to trim them.

In October many leaves fell, it snowed a few times, most of the birds left and the Japanese maples in the temple garden went blood red. No one climbed the suspicious hill to watch anyone run south on Sedwick street on their way to setting a world record.

We still saw the dog walkers and the people who don't mind sitting on a bench and

reading in a coat in the cold, or tell themselves they don't mind it, or tell themselves it's good for them to do it and feel cold and accept it, because there's more of that coming. It seemed like people were inside the corner bar, even though they were no longer supposed to be. Someone mended the fence. Gloves and candy wrappers and surgical masks collected around the legs of the metal benches and the retaining walls. The buses kept running empty and the drivers gave up on looking out the windows for people they knew.

In early November it got late-summer warm and one night there were streams of people holding hands and laughing and cheering, and fireworks in the street in front of the temple. Then everything went black and the Christmas lights and wreaths were up in the tall brick home overlooking the playground and suspicious hill. The October people were kept coming out to sit on the benches and lean against the retaining walls and feel time pass. They're still with us as we write.

We're truly grateful for the extra company this year, and hopeful for news of you and yours.

With love and best wishes for 2021,

The Hudson Chess Park of Chicago, Illinois