



A Sign of the Times

by MaryPat Campbell

Bubbles

Two small blond children on their scooters, mum walking behind them shouting, “bubble, bubble.”

The children automatically and obediently swerve out in a semi-circle, to avoid getting too close to me and other adults walking in their direction along the same pavement. It seems to be a given, something unremarkable for these children at least. Will they remember it later?

Elbows

Elbow bumping, we all look a bit awkward doing it as we peer over our masks at our fellow elbow bumper at their eyes over their mask, while they peer at us with quizzical raised eyebrows. We are trying to meet each other. It’s not easy, it’s hard to hear what they say & seems faintly ridiculous.

Shopping

The groceries are delivered every Saturday morning. Carried up all four flights of stairs in plastic bags by a delivery man who wears a mask and is either friendly and chatty, or dour and resentful. I apologise for all the stairs. The friendly ones laugh and say it's no bother, keeps them fit. Sometimes the less fit ones pant and stagger up the final flight of stairs sweating profusely and I worry about heart attacks. Sometimes there are substitutions when they've run out of supplies, and they give me a different kind of tinned tuna than the one I ordered, or a different tube of toothpaste, and even if it's more expensive, they charge me the price of the lower brand.

Time

It takes no time to get to the next meeting. I finish a work meeting at five to four and start the next one five minutes later. We come from all over the country or even all over the world. Meetings like this have never happened before, we didn't know we could hear each other think out loud across time zones and continents. No time to think about what's happened, no time to reflect on why my colleague sounded fed up and argumentative. Instead it's straight into yet another meeting, this time one to one between me and someone I'm supervising. We greet each other and I listen to him check his notes, see him look up and out to the side concentrating to remember what was said and not said, in order to think about what has happened during the last week's work. It's called zoom and it's inventor is Eric Yuan, now a billionaire and living in Silicon Valley. He works eighteen hours a day building his empire bigger and bigger and bigger. He started it to be able to talk to his long distance girlfriend who lived ten hours away in another city. Now he works so hard he never sees her although they live in the same house.

Venice

Dolphins were spotted in the lagoon in the centre of the great floating city, except later we heard it was a hoax. Air quality was purer than it's ever been since measuring began. Bees and other insects returned to their habitats and multiplied. Even I joined the Bee Society and am learning how to recognise the difference between a red tailed and a white tailed bumble bee on screen and where and how they live.