March 2021: Anniversaries

An offering to New Mexicans from the faculty and students of the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education at the University of New Mexico.
Anniversaries can be joyous, like a wedding anniversary or Independence Day; they can be bittersweet, like a loved one’s birthday after they’ve passed away; or they can be grim, like the date of a car accident or 9/11. As we mark one year since COVID-19 changed so much for us and around us, we consider what kind of anniversary that is. More broadly, we also consider how we can mark any anniversary so it contributes to our wellbeing.
The passage of time has always been a preoccupation for human beings. Whether it be a question of satisfying basic needs such as when to eat or sleep, the importance of seasons for migratory and agricultural purposes, or a more sophisticated measuring of time into defined periods of weeks, days and hours. The basic unit of time is naturally enough the day, which is a unit of time determined by the amount of sunlight reaching the earth as it rotates on its axis. In early human history, the only changes that seemed to repeat themselves evenly were the movements of objects in the sky. The most easily seen result of these movements was the difference between light and darkness.

The earliest method of measuring time was through observation of the celestial bodies – the sun, moon, stars and the five planets known in antiquity. The rising and setting of the sun, the solstices, phases of the moon, and the position of particular stars and constellations have been used in all ancient civilizations to demarcate particular activities. In our world, as we track time, changes never stop. Some changes happen only once in a while, like an eclipse of the moon. Others happen repeatedly, like the rising and setting of the sun. Humans always have noted natural events that repeat themselves. When people began to count such events, they began to measure time.

The measurement of time began with the invention of sundials in ancient Egypt some time prior to 1500 B.C. The need for a way to measure time independently of the sun eventually gave rise to various devices, most notably sandglasses, sundials, waterclocks, and candles. The importance of precise time-keeping cannot be underestimated. Applications dependent upon it include telecommunications, which require networks to be synchronized precisely; Global Positioning System (GPS) satellite navigation systems, which rely on time stamped signals to provide us with a precise location of a GPS receiver, and time-stamping of financial transactions in the banking sector.

Earth zooms around the sun at 110,000 kph, with gravity keeping us attached, and all the while we are able to actually notice when a year has gone by. Our ability to observe the passage of time while actually moving unfathomably rapidly is a miracle. Anniversaries are automatically built into our human rhythms. The earth keeps its own track of anniversaries by its revolution on a daily basis and on a yearly basis as it orbits the sun. If you are five, you have been around the sun 5 times. A snake shedding its skin, a rotation around the medicine wheel, the tree whose rings tell the story of time, the blooming of the first daffodils – all anniversaries. Marking time and celebrating passages are ancient rituals.

In India, mandalas, or rangolis, are a powerful spiritual symbol used in ceremonial rituals, worship, sacred art, and meditation. They are typically made by Hindu women, every morning. The reason a rangoli is drawn at the entrance of a house each day is because of its calming effect on a visitor who is just about to enter into the house. It manifests into vibrations (brainwaves), putting visitors at ease and bringing them joy. Recurrence, proportion, balance, and liveliness are a few of the principles of this form of art. Different figures and arrangements within the design are associated with different aspects of human life. Circular designs within the diagrams evoke a sense of eternity of time and the unfolding of life. Rangoli is made during events such as weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and festivals such as Diwali, Sankranti, Navaratra, Nagapancami, Tulsi Vrata, and Sravan Sukla Pancami. The designs vary for everyday practice and special occasions. They can be plain and small for daily practice, and colorful and elaborate for festive events.

In my faith, Judaism, we follow a lunar calendar. The rhythm of Jewish time is based on both the lunar and the solar cycles. Months are measured by one cycle of the moon around the earth. According to the Talmud, one complete cycle of the moon around the earth takes...
29.53059 days (Masechet Rosh Hashana). This value is very close to the average value measured by NASA: 29.530588. Since the average value is about 29.5 days, months alternate between 29 and 30 days in the Hebrew calendar. By the Jewish calendar, the year is 5781 (תש"א). All Jewish holidays begin the evening before the date specified. A “day” begins and ends at sunset, rather than at midnight. All holidays are celebrated on the same day of the Hebrew calendar every year. However, the question arises as to how to define the exact moment when one day ends and the next begins. In Yeshivas (religious study houses) this has been debated for ages. If we didn’t have clocks and watches, we would never be able to determine at what moment one day ends and the next one begins. In the Torah (the Old Testament), Genesis 1 includes the refrain “it was evening and it was morning” in order to sum up each day’s creative work. This is incredibly unspecific!

Yahrzeit is a Yiddish word meaning anniversary of a death. It is the yearly anniversary of a loved one’s death (traditionally the anniversary of the Hebrew date, not the Gregorian date). Jews observe yahrzeit at home by lighting a special long-burning candle in memory of the deceased. Yahrzeit candles are also known as yizkor candles, because they are also lit on behalf of loved ones on the four Jewish holidays (Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, Passover and Shavuot) that include a Yizkor, or Jewish memorial, service. It is customary to light the yahrzeit candle at sundown on the Hebrew anniversary.

On Friday nights, the beginning of Shabbat, families also celebrate by special prayers, lighting candles, and eating a braided bread called Challah. We also say good-bye to Shabbat by saying prayers and lighting a braided candle which is extinguished in a glass of wine. Havdalah, which in Hebrew means “separation,” refers to the verbal declaration made at the end of Shabbat or a Jewish holiday, in which the holy day is separated from the mundane period that follows. Since Jewish days begin and end with nightfall, havdala may be said only once darkness has fallen on Saturday night. During the period of the Jewish new year, we eat a traditional Rosh Hashanah meal, which includes apples and honey: sweet foods to welcome the sweetness of the year ahead. We eat pomegranate seeds, and a round challah bread (the circle reflecting the eternity of life). You can also expect to hear exhortations to have “l’shanah tovah,” or “good year!”

Contemplating evolutionary humanism has enabled me to see this strange spinning planet on to which we are born as a proper object both of awe, wondering, and gratitude for natural cycles. More, it has made me realize that both wonder and curiosity can be of significance and value in our fantastical universe. In the concept of increased realization of possibilities, it provides a common measuring rod for all kinds of directional processes, from the development of personal ethics to large-scale social change, and gives solid ground for maintaining an affirmative attitude. It brings intellectual speculation and spiritual aspiration out of the abstract and isolated spheres they once seemed to me to inhabit, to a meaningful place in concrete reality; and so has restored my sense of unity.

Daily rituals and practices can help us achieve some of our spiritual goals, attune with nature, offer us healing, improve our mental health, offer us grounding, and help us deepen our practice and our connection to core work. Daily rituals that are established may help us when we have times of challenge or instability (hello, pandemic!) and offer support. Our daily anniversary lives in the collective consciousness. You might think of daily rituals similar to how a musician practices scales. The more we do our practices, the deeper we connect with them and the more they build both meaning and power over time.
Anniversaries are a valuable part of aliveness. They remind us of important events, both personal and cultural. Whether we’re marking a birthday, a wedding or civil partnership, a momentous event, or the death of a loved one, an anniversary puts a pin on the calendar to remind us of something that matters to us. It’s a chance reflect on a relationship or a cultural identity, to come together to remember a person who’s died, or to celebrate a joyous event. Whatever the sacred action celebrating a full cycle may be, it gives us a chance to look back at the event we’re marking and reflect on how it has shaped us. Remembering the past can be an important part of understanding who we are; so, too, as we go deeper into the exploration of our cyclical celebrations, we create a landscape woven into our bodies and souls. These landscapes become like a beautiful garment that we wear, a covering that comes with us wherever we go. Bridging the gap between the calendar and direct experience is part of connecting and reconnecting, making a stronger spirit.

Current brain research tells us that when you succeed at creating a result, no matter what it is, your brain is flooded with dopamine, that feel-good chemical that actually helps motivate you. Whether or not you’re aware of your increased happiness, the hit of dopamine you get after marking an anniversary, no matter how small, will influence you toward similar behavior. In our time of Covid, we have had to get more creative when it comes to how we celebrate. The good news is that creativity reduces anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as aids in processing trauma. Studies have found that creativity helps people manage their negative emotions in a productive way, and playing, painting or drawing helps people express trauma or experiences that they find too difficult to put into words.

Within this dramatic external shift that we have undergone is a lot of shock and feeling of being out of our bodies at times. The rug has been pulled out from under our feet. Billions of people are in lockdown, unable to visit one another, unable go to work, unable to attend school, unable to meet one another in public places. People around the world are struggling at home, in nursing homes and intensive care units, dying of the same cause, separated from their loved ones. At times of existential danger, we instinctively desire to be close to our family and friends, hold their hands and embrace them – but now we are forbidden to do so, for every act of physical contact – every expression of physical loving-kindness and compassion – could bring illness and death. We are confronted with the true uncertainty of human existence and the true vulnerability of human life. How often have so many of us believed that we are masters of the world around us?

In most of our endeavors, we are interdependent. One individual cannot succeed without the cooperation of others. We cooperate on many different levels – local, regional and national. The Covid-19 pandemic highlights the danger of ignoring our interdependence and the importance of global cooperation. It shows us with crystal clarity that all of humanity is in the same boat. Since the virus can be defeated somewhere only when it is defeated everywhere, it shows us the terrible folly of pretending that we can achieve security in isolation, within the borders of our nation, culture, class or religion.

Take time to acknowledge all of your positive growth and change in the last year. All I can do is take life one moment at a time, placing deep faith in trusting in the unknown. An important aspect of tethering ourselves are our anniversaries and celebrations, no matter what they look like. To bring joy is an imperative practice. One of my favorite authors describes a child knowing that they had completed one more journey around the sun:

“She woke up very early because she always did on her birthday, and all the fears of the night before were gone and instead she had the lovely birthday feeling of anticipation and happiness and excitement and mixed up with it a new feeling as though she was going to make a marvelous discovery.” – Madeline L’Engle, Moments of Tenderness

Here is to more marvelous discoveries of resilience and triumph as we look forward, together!
Simple Pleasures

These are our latest finds for relatively quick, easy, often healthy, things you can do during COVID-19 restrictions.

- New Mexicans are sharing their stories of resilience. Share yours, too.
- Share #TheMoment when you knew COVID-19 was changing your life.
- COVID is even changing language! What new COVID words have you used?
- Puzzled by a different bird at your feeder? Check out this bird identification app from Cornell University.
Keep on Keeping On
In my journey in relationship with others,

As a family member, friend, therapist, colleague, and bystander; I have seen incredible and beautiful examples of resiliency. Resiliency is this ability to keep going in the face of difficulty. We oftentimes talk about resiliency as being something elusive or something only certain people have, but I guess that depends on one’s definition. It may not feel like we are being resilient in the moment, or we may not see someone as navigating a situation “with resiliency” but I believe we are all doing the best we can with what we have at the time; therefore, resiliency looks different for everyone depending on timing and situation. As I reflect on this year of the pandemic, we have all experienced a collective trauma. Sure, there will be research on the resilient traits that may have helped us get through, but honestly, if you are here then you are resilient! We are all resilient! We have all been doing the best we can with what we have in this situation and time. This includes the times that we have been emotional. This includes the times that we didn’t get out of bed, or perhaps shower for the day. This includes the times when we had a negative reaction or a negative coping strategy to something. We study traits and although the research to understand resiliency factors is important, I think it’s worth focusing on the small things that happen each day that keep someone going and thus seeing us all through the lens of being a resilient people.

Resiliency sets the context for posttraumatic growth, which is what one experiences when a positive change is prompted after a crisis or traumatic event (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). Posttraumatic growth is the mechanism by which we make meaning out of a traumatic event. Posttraumatic growth is both a process and an outcome (Tedeschi & Chalhoun, 2004). This process is different and individual for everyone and not something to be imposed by anyone. Research in the area of post-traumatic growth has found that there are five factors that define the major domains of posttraumatic growth: greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; warmer, more intimate relationships with others; a greater sense of personal strength; recognition of new possibilities or paths for one’s life; and spiritual development (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). In our experiences of traumatic events, we navigate a myriad of emotions and feelings. This means that we must feel all of the emotions, and even sit with the bad ones (which sucks!!). We must be self-compassionate towards ourselves in this process, the ups and the downs. Posttraumatic growth is not a cure from the suffering, nor will it take away the pain or loss. It’s a process of feeling the emotions experienced by the traumatic event and navigating them with self-compassion and non-judgement towards the self. As we sit with our emotions, we can begin to think about the impact they have on us and when we move through these emotions, we are free to explore all emotions. One outcome of engaging in this process of meaning making is to understand oneself in a different way, finding a new way to be in the world and with others in the world. Posttraumatic growth speaks to a transformation or a qualitative change in functioning (Tedeschi & Chalhoun, 2004).

As we are navigating this collective trauma of the pandemic, we can work towards this posttraumatic growth process through being with others and by asking questions of ourselves about the meanings we make from the events in our life right now. Navigating difficult emotions can be done through journaling, connection and conversation with others, and through meeting with a licensed therapist.

A few clarifications were made by the posttraumatic growth research group (https://ptgi.uncc.edu/what-is-ptg/) which are worth including here: posttraumatic growth does not mean someone does not experience suffering. In no way does posttraumatic growth mean that traumatic events are good. Not everyone experiences posttraumatic growth after a traumatic experience (and that’s okay!).
A few journal/reflection questions:

• What are some things you have learned about yourself during this pandemic situation?
• What are strengths you had before the pandemic, what strengths did you draw on during the pandemic, and what are new strengths that you have developed/continue to develop?
• What is a memory from the pandemic experience that you want to remember?
• What positive changes have you made that you want to continue in the future?
• How have your priorities changed since the pandemic?
• Is there anything you appreciate differently because of the pandemic situation?
• What new experiences are you open to?

Sentence stems for journaling:
• I am angry that....
• I regret....
• I missed out on...
• I felt supported by...
• I made it through...

A few sites for further reading:
• American Psychological Association, Post-Traumatic Growth
• What is Post-Traumatic Growth Research Group
• Growth After Trauma

Resources:
Find a licensed therapist: psychologytoday.com

References:
Gains and Losses

All of these changes! Some are true losses big and small. Some, though, are gains.

Here are some examinations of how the year has been in New Mexico:
- From the state government’s perspective
- From the Albuquerque Journal

How might work and workplaces be changing?
- Redesigning workplaces
- The virtual Water Cooler
- Ditch Zoom Meetings
- Have you resumed your commute, even a fake commute?

How has this past year been for kids?
- How are the kids faring?
- Helping kids who have regressed
- Can your kids reclaim their superpowers?
- Kids’ mental health has been affected too.
- Ways for kids to stay connected.

What has the pandemic done to our minds?
- Some tips for coping with a pandemic depression
- The year of making decisions

The IFCE faculty and students were asked for their reflections on our professional and personal experiences with this year of COVID-19. Here is a sampling of our thoughts.

How has the Pandemic changed how you spend your time?

“We spend a lot more time with our kids which has benefits and drawbacks.” Cari Hushman, Asst. Professor of Educational Psychology

“For me it has helped since I am working from home. I am able to break things up more...if I get fatigued with work I can switch to something like schoolwork or something fun for 30 min before returning to work tasks. I can spread out my day since it is not location bound. I rarely get out of the house. I take a few road trips for errands, but not many.” -- Educational Psychology Graduate Student

“I don’t have to spend so much time commuting.” -- Diana Gonzales-Pacheco, Asst. Professor of Nutrition

“I am finally getting caught up at home with house work and yard work. I am cooking more and spending more time with my husband and our children.” -- Nutrition/Dietetics Graduate Student
What tricks or tips have you learned for living through this pandemic?

“Reducing time on social media has been helpful; having a routine; taking a step back before responding/reacting to a situation as everyone is currently in a state of crisis.” -- Counselor Education Graduate Student

“Learned how to designate a work space at home so that I can focus.” -- Family and Child Studies Undergraduate Student

“I have learned that you cannot plan everything. That what should be a priority will make itself a priority regardless of how you try to rearrange your life.” -- Educational Psychology Graduate Student

Are there any pandemic changes to our lives (personal or professional) that you hope we KEEP in a post-pandemic world? Explain.

“No.” -- Maria-Elena Salazar, Lecturer in Family and Child Studies

“If we are ill and we need to be out and about, we should wear a mask to protect others.” -- Diana Gonzales-Pacheco, Asst. Professor of Nutrition

“Teleworking has been helpful in being able to complete other tasks as well as reducing the time spent commuting.” -- Educational Psychology Instructor

As we approach one year of the pandemic, memories, emotions, and reflections may be emerging. I have heard people reflect on the before times, symbolizing this crux in our existence now. Collectively we are heartbroken over the loss of life and have experienced so much change. We are grieving and processing together. In this collective grief we wanted to revisit information about processing grief with our children, provided to us from the Children’s Grief Center in Albuquerque.

Coping Skills

We need to recommit to what works and to learn new ways.

Grief is deep sorrow prompted by loss. We are all going through a grieving process due to significant loss, individualized to each of us. Children continue to be confronted with many losses that we as adults may not understand or even realize. Children have not gathered with peers and friends for a year, many of whom they care deeply about and perhaps never had the opportunity to say goodbye to. Depending on how much news we are watching and the conversations we are having, children may also continue to hear about the death toll and the new variants possibly increasing our loss. All of this takes a toll on children and their emotions and feelings, oftentimes manifesting as unrealized grief. Your child may be showing...
you they are grieving through questions about death and dying, or through their behaviors. Grieving children may show more anger or sadness, they may be clingier, and share worry about being left alone, they may show developmental regression, or changes in their overall behavior.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we reached out to Kelly Geib-Eckenroth, the program director for the Children’s Grief Center in Albuquerque, about thoughts and considerations for being with children in their grief. Kelly shared that grief is isolating and that, with our stay-at-home orders, children and families may feel even more isolated. Unfortunately, during this time extended family and friends are not available as they once were for support because of the social-distancing requirements. With this COVID-19 situation bringing so many new transitions, situations, and worries, grief can take a backseat to concerns that are more pressing (food, work, managing kids).

Kelly recommended the following resources:

**Dougy Center, the National Center for Grieving Children and Families:**

Kelly provided several thoughts and tips to consider for families navigating grief with their children:

1. Grieving children worry about other people they love dying. With a pandemic it is not easy to allay those fears. Adults might even share those fears.

2. Routine and boundaries are important for children to feel safe. When everything around you is unpredictable and beyond your control, controlling those things you are able to control can give you a sense of control and normalcy.

3. Grief impacts our ability to focus and concentrate, so online school or even daily tasks might be challenging. Don’t be too hard on children.

4. Be honest - Keep your child informed with clear simple language. When children lack important information, they tend to make their own conclusions which are often wrong and can cause more anxiety.

5. Teens need “down time” and often crave more privacy.

6. Make sure teens have time with friends “virtually” or with appropriate social distancing. Teens value their social relationships.

7. Teens might not be taking social distancing seriously. The frontal lobe of the brain that controls impulse control and delayed gratification isn’t fully developed, so they don’t always realize the consequences of their actions.

8. Make time for grief.

9. Recognize your supports and stay connected.

10. Schedule in fun time and physical exercise.

11. Name your fears and also name the strengths you have as a family to face those fears.

12. Be kind to yourself - everyone is doing the best they can.

**Children's Grief Center**,

- Grief Expert David Kessler has been offering guidance for how to grieve during these times. He talks with Brené Brown on her podcast, Unlocking Us, about grief and finding meaning. [Have a listen](https://www.unlockinguspodcast.com/episodes/david-kessler/)
- He also spoke with [Harvard Business Review](https://hbr.org/2020/04/self-the-pandemic-anniversary-is-coming-heres-how-to-cope)
Here are some strategies for students and parents as we all continue to navigate this online learning platform and may be falling behind:

- **Seek support!** Contact your teachers, contact your school counselor, ask caregivers for support to reach out to the school as needed!

- **Prioritize.** It’s so difficult when there are so many tasks to complete in one day. Write a list of all assignments and next to each item write the amount of time you think it will take (5 minutes, 10 minutes, 3 hours...), do the tasks that take the shortest amount of time first! It feels good to check things off a list and can increase motivation/decrease the amount of items on the list.

- **Schedule in some fun/self-care.** It can feel like all you are doing is working when the list keeps getting longer. Write a list of things that you enjoy that can take 5-10 minutes and build in these activities into your schedule. (examples: watch a youtube video, read a chapter in a book, text a friend, sit outside, journal/write/write a poem, drink some hot tea/water...). When you build in fun, then it feels like you have more control over your schedule and you are not just working all day everyday. It’s important to leave room for other things, even if for just a few minutes.

- **Self-compassion.** When you are feeling overwhelmed try to tell yourself kind things. When we are mean to ourselves it actually decreases motivation. Remind yourself you are trying. Remind yourself that this is a really hard time and you are working hard. Remind yourself that it’s okay to feel stressed or overwhelmed, or whatever the feeling may be. We need to have grace and understanding for ourselves.

- **Know you are not alone.** Students everywhere are struggling right now. We are all in this together. In fact, the New York Times has an article addressing this exact issue for students because it’s becoming more common!

- **The New York Times:** How to Help a Teen Out of a Homework Hole.
The Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education has released the Mental Health Primers for classroom teachers. They are meant to assist teachers in identifying students who would benefit from access to mental health resources.

For those in the Helping Professions

- The Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education has released the Mental Health Primers for classroom teachers. They are meant to assist teachers in identifying students who would benefit from access to mental health resources.

COVID-19 Housing Cost Assistance Program (applications open starting March 4, 2021)

KOB: New Mexico launches support line to help residents cope with COVID-19.

School’s In -- April 14 -- Schooling as we knew it has changed forever. What have teachers and kids lost? What have they gained? How do kids, parents, teachers, schools go forward from here, attending not just to learning but to all aspects of the benefits of schooling?
The faculty and students of the Department of Individual, Family and Community Education in the College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of New Mexico would like to offer to all New Mexicans thoughts, ideas, and resources from ourselves and our areas of study and work -- counseling, educational psychology, family & child studies, and nutrition -- to enlighten, soften, and aid the COVID-19-related transitions. We intend to make this offering monthly, each with a theme relevant to our times. With informed reflection and action throughout this time, we can all improve our Wellbeing at School and at Home in New Mexico.

All issues of WASH NM are available in pdf format at: http://coehs.unm.edu/departments-programs/ifce/wash-nm.html

An e-mail distribution list (WASH_NM-L) will announce each new issue. You can subscribe to the list by sending a message to listserv@list.unm.edu: Leave the Subject field blank. In the body of message type (with no other text): subscribe WASH_NM-L Firstname Lastname

The department houses four diverse, but interconnected, programs that prepare students to address the myriad issues faced by the State of New Mexico. Our faculty members are leaders in their disciplines of Counselor Education, Educational Psychology, Family and Child Studies, and Nutrition; although each of these programs reflect different professional fields and identities, we all have shared values of human development, diversity, and excellence in scholarship and teaching. We offer various Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral Degrees and a number of programs have achieved national accreditations in their fields, a true marker of success and innovation.

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