

Things Are Not Always As They Appear
By Sheila Johnson

Growing up in the small town of El Paso, Texas, the pace of our family's life was slow compared to that of other family and friends who lived in the big cities of Houston, Austin, Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago. We celebrated parents' and siblings' birthdays, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, and New Year's Day, but we didn't have many "scheduled" activities. Mom tracked our doctors' appointments in a small purse calendar that was always buried deep in her bag. Even though a current calendar hung on the kitchen wall, few events landed onto the small, white rectangles; we just lived life as it came with events of the Spirit filled with hope.

With this in mind, it surprises me how enamored I've become with calendars. I'm not sure when the love affair began, but I'm smitten by a "good looking" calendar. There are calendars that don't pictures of beautiful flowers, exotic animals, and breathtaking landscapes. In the past, I've even made calendars containing pictures of my family. Calendars can speak, sing, laugh, walk, run, or dance, depending upon the level of fuel they are given by daily events.

Perusing my 2020 floral calendar, it looks as though I've had no plans, very few appointments, no Church activities, and well, no life. How could this be? In January I did have a minor outpatient procedure and a follow-up at the end of the same month. In February, my daughter and her boyfriend took me to dinner to celebrate Valentine's Day. However, the months of March, April, May, June, July, August, and now September, reveal blank pages with the exception of beautiful floral art. How could this be? I'm sure that I have been actively engaged with life.

It would have been ridiculous to 'calendar' the days that I spent sewing masks (along with ten other amazing women at my Church) for front line workers and family visitors at the hospitals. It would be unheard of to 'calendar' prayer time for "the world" (like so many others), and the caged immigrants, and the incarcerated, and Black Lives Matter, and racially charged violence all over the world, and the thousands of people affected and/or killed by the fires and hurricanes and COVID 19, and the racially-mixed blended families of my children and universal depression and loneliness—how does one 'calendar' prayer?

There will always be silver linings underneath dark clouds. They, too, are impossible to 'calendar.' Many hearts have positively changed. Hope is alive in the sweeping tide of evil. Courage is standing tall. Anger dies when we speak truth to power. Light drowns out fear, and love will always rise above hate. When our big trees fall, they fertilize the ground beneath them and new growth will carry their wisdom into future forests. People are taking time for introspection and showing forgiveness, mercy, and grace. We are learning how the 'other side' exists.

Like the calendar that hung on my family's kitchen wall in Texas, my 2020 calendar will appear to be almost blank at the end of this year, but for different reasons. My days have been spent doing things that have been impossible to plan, schedule, or 'calendar.' I'll have to keep living life as it comes with events of the Spirit filled with hope.