The New Normal

- Post Reprint: Endangered Experiences | “Will the birthday candle tradition be snuffed out?”
- Student Activity: Lede to Set the Scene
- Student Activity: My Endangered Experience
- Editorial Cartoons: Tom Toles | School 2020
- A Closer Look: Tom Toles | School 2020 Vision
- Teachers Notes: In Times That Are Anything But Normal
- Post Reprint: “Ready or not, here they come”
What's Normal?

Expectations were clear: maintain six feet between people, wash your hands and wear a mask in public.

Specialists talked about the three C’s — closed spaces, crowded places and close contact.

Phrases were bantered around — establishing the new normal, setting a routine, looking a little different but the same, returning to play. Bubbles, distance learning and in-school testing took on new meaning.

This resource guide provides activities and readings for students to discuss, debate and determine changes in their life style, entertainment and traditions. Endangered experiences stimulate essay writing about the activities that are curtailed and whether they should return. Editorial cartoons by Tom Toles comment on the complex issues surrounding school opening and plans to educate students while maintaining a safe and healthy environment for all. Dave Sheinin’s sport perspective piece focuses on professional sports returning, but also opens the door to asking the same questions about scholastic and collegiate sports.

What repercussions do our actions have on the health and very life of others? What is okay to do at home, in school and around the community? What will be normal in a quarter or an academic year?
ENDANGERED EXPERIENCES

Will the birthday candle tradition be snuffed out?

BY CAITLIN GIBSON

• Originally Published July 21 2020

Part of a series of stories on experiences that the pandemic has curtailed — and whether they’re worth saving.

Picture the scene in its nostalgic innocence, the way it’s always been captured in photo albums and home movies: family and friends huddled together, voices raised in song; a smiling face illuminated by flickering flames atop a colorful cake; a momentary darkness when the music ends and the room fills with the distinctive whiff of blown-out birthday candles.

Now imagine it again, this time having spent 100-something days in quarantine, barraged by news graphics detailing the spittle plume that erupts from our faces every time we speak, laugh, sing or cough. Visualize that same gathering of loved ones, hovering shoulder-to-shoulder, cheering as someone forcibly exhales a blast of aerosolized germs across the surface of a communal dessert.

Will we ever go back to that? Someday, when we are freed from pandemic purgatory, when our birthday parties no longer involve a grid of pixelated faces on a computer screen, will we still dim the lights and sing as a glowing cake slowly glides into the room? Should we even want to go back?

“The tradition of blowing out candles on a cake has always kind of grossed me out, even before covid-19,” says Caissie St. Onge, a comedy writer and television producer in Los Angeles. “I played the trumpet for years, and have always known too well just how much spit a person’s breath contains.” Sure, she’s gone along with it at family parties — “it makes for a festive moment and better pictures,” she says — but unless the candle-blower is her husband or her kid, she’s passing on dessert. “Why would I want to eat something I just saw you blow on?” she asks. “No thanks.”

But for those who never played in the horn section of the band, a cake crowned with candles might still represent something more pure. Jennifer Carlson, a 45-year-old human resources director and mom of two sets of twins in Florida, still remembers the climactic moments of her own childhood birthday parties — the mesmerizing glow of the flames, her parents turning off the lights, all of her favorite people surrounding her. She still remembers the year she wished for a princess doll, and actually got one, and how that made her feel: “Almost as if magic really does happen,” she says. “I do hope the tradition of blowing out candles on the cake continues.”

History suggests it will, in one form or another. The pairing of cakes and candles has been part of humanity’s story since ancient Greece, says Bethanne Patrick, an author and Washington Post contributor, who researched the origin of birthday cakes and candles for her book “An Uncommon History of Common Things.” Back then, candles were ceremonially placed atop a cake and brought as a worshipful offering to the temple of Artemis, goddess of the hunt, Patrick says.

Birthday parties were added to the mix in 18th-century Germany, Patrick says, thanks in part to one Count Ludwig Von Zinzindorf, who celebrated his birthday in 1746 with a lavish bash featuring a massive cake festooned with candles. Germans started placing a candle on cakes — the fire was meant to represent the light of life itself — to celebrate their children’s...
birthdays. “Candles on cakes evolved from ceremony to extravagance to a celebration for regular people,” Patrick says.

From the start, the act of extinguishing the flames was infused with potent symbolism. “The original idea is that the smoke would carry your wish up to the gods,” Patrick says. “As part of the process of individuation in the industrial age, it became increasingly about a single person’s wish instead of the wish of a community. When you blew out the candle, that carried your wish out to the universe.”

The tradition took root in the United States at the end of the 19th century, before the devastation wrought by the 1918 flu pandemic. Patrick couldn’t say for sure how birthday parties were affected or altered during that particular chapter of history — but that pandemic obviously didn’t stop anyone from blowing out birthday candles once the crisis had ended, which perhaps reveals something about how quickly germophobia subsides once an imminent threat has passed.

And it’s not like prior warnings have done much to dissuade us. In 2017, a widely circulated study (unappetizingly titled “Bacterial Transfer Associated With Blowing Out Candles on a Birthday Cake”) revealed that “blowing out the candles over the icing surface resulted in 1400% more bacteria compared to icing not blown on” — meaning that any microorganisms dwelling in the candle-blower’s respiratory tract would probably make their way onto your plate. Ugh — and yet, the upshot was still that the scenario is pretty harmless: “In reality if you did this 100,000 times, then the chance of getting sick would probably be very minimal,” one of the study’s authors told the Atlantic.

Candle industry experts aren’t worried about the future of this tradition. Kathy LaVanier, president of the National Candle Association, says she’s talked to wholesalers and retailers who report no sign of waning sales — in fact, “they’re seeing exponential growth in the baking category as a whole, and birthday candles haven’t slowed down at all,” she says. “I think people are definitely still doing it. If it’s just you and your kids at home and your kids are going to blow out the candles and it’s just your family eating the cake, I don’t think people are going to worry. And from an industry perspective, a couple of the people I’ve spoken to said that cupcakes have become more popular in recent years anyway.”

Given everything we’re going through as a country, “I don’t think people are going to be inclined right now to give up things that make them feel good,” she adds. “If anything, we’re going to gravitate toward wanting to do more of that.”

When something is worth saving, we find ways to make it work — and within the constraints of quarantine, people are already coming up with inventive workarounds: They place a single candle atop an individual cupcake. They wave their hands to extinguish the flames. They poke candles through a paper plate to fashion a homemade cake shield. They offer alternative dessert options for those who have long cringed at the thought of breath-fogged frosting. They applaud the ceremonial birthday candle blowout from a safe distance, through glowing screens, until someday they hopefully won’t have to anymore.

But maybe the return we long for isn’t really about candles, anyway. It’s the ritual that surrounds them — the creation of a happy memory, the voices of friends joined in a familiar melody, our family members gathered to celebrate the passage of another year of life — that feels, especially now, like something worth wishing for. ■
Welcome to the new buffet, which isn’t a buffet anymore
BY TIM CARMAN

Before every stranger and every set of communal salad tongs became a threat to our existence, the Bacchanal Buffet at Caesar’s Palace was the ultimate grazing land for herds of wandering tourists in Las Vegas. It served more than 3,000 people a day across nine stations, featuring hundreds of items including nigiri sushi, dim sum, rotisserie chicken, bone marrow, 12-hour roasted American wagyu, paella, lobster bisque, snow crab legs, chicken and waffles, gnocchi, pizza, deviled eggs, pho, miso soup (pause for breath), panang curry, cheeseburger sliders, soba noodles, poke, foie gras PB&J, oysters on the half-shell, shrimp and grits, street tacos, pozole, mapo tofu, General Tso’s chicken, avocado toast, peppercorn-crusted prime rib and I haven’t even touched upon the dessert options yet.

If you had a hankering for some dish in the world, the odds were good you could find it on the Bacchanal Buffet, prepared by one of nearly 50 cooks employed to set (and reset and reset again) the daily feast.

— July 14, 2020

Will we ever be able to dive back into ball pits?
BY MAURA JUDKIS

Natalie Pariano was feeling some pandemic-related wanderlust and found herself looking through old travel photos when something stopped her scrolling finger dead in its tracks.

It was a shot of her head poking out of a pool of pastel-colored balls.

The picture was from a 2019 trip to the Color Factory, an immersive, Instagrammable attraction in New York City that features rooms full of colorful installations.

At the time, it had felt perfectly natural to dive in. But now?

“I just stopped at that photo and thought, ‘Oh, I’ll never get in a ball pit again,’” she says.

What once looked like an ocean of color is now a sea of respiratory droplets. Unsafe waters. A breeding ground for extremophile bacteria, like the darkest crevices of the Mariana Trench.

When it comes to the risk of coronavirus infection, “we talk about the three C’s,” says Peter Raynor, a professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. “Closed spaces, crowded places, close contact.” Ball pits have all three.

— July 28, 2020

Asking a stranger to take your picture is now a blurry proposition
BY ANDREA SACHS

On a recent visit to Fallingwater in Pennsylvania, David Dausey felt that familiar pang of parental duty: The father of two should snap a family photo and preserve this special moment for posterity.

He considered his options. They could take a selfie, but their heads would eclipse Frank Lloyd Wright’s masterwork. He could press the button, sacrificing his own appearance in the portrait. Or he could enlist the services of a stranger. However, during the coronavirus pandemic, that once-harmless request was now a risky proposition.

“If you want something that’s guaranteed to have droplets, it’s your phone,” said Dausey, an epidemiologist and provost at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. “The smooth surface is ideal for spreading the virus.”

Asking a stranger to take your photo, or fulfilling the favor, could conceivably violate several guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition to handling a high-touch surface, parties on both sides of the lens will need to cross the social distancing red line twice — once to hand over the gadget and again to retrieve it.

In addition, most people remove their masks for photos. Depending on the outcome of that encounter, your photo may mark an entirely different occasion.

— August 4, 2020
LEDE TO SET THE SCENE  | continued

You have read three ledes (opening paragraphs) for a new series called Endangered Experiences. These are stories of experiences that the coronavirus epidemic has curtailed — and make us wonder if the experiences are worth saving.

1. Which of the three ledes did you find most appealing? Was this because of the subject (the experience) or because of the way it was written?

2. Read the essay about buffets again. Notice Carman’s use of specifics. What is his purpose in listing the items?

3. The next paragraph in his essay follows. The writer achieves a transition. Complete the following sentences.
   
   You know what happened next. Buffets — along with salad bars, hot bars, continental breakfasts, condiment stations and anything else that allowed customers to serve themselves — were one of the earliest victims of the pandemic. The Bacchanal Buffet was no exception. The federal government has recommended restaurants, hotels, supermarkets and the like discontinue any operations that “require customers to use common utensils or dispensers.” Journalists started writing the buffet’s obituary, sometimes with a heavy heart. They wondered if the pandemic would permanently padlock the gate at the Golden Corral.

   A. The reader is taken from Caesars Palace to _______________________. Explain the contrast being made.
   B. The federal government recommendation was based on customers’ use of what utensils?
   C. What other concerns might there be relating to open buffets?
   D. Who are affected financially by the recommendation?

4. Read the essay about the ball pits.
   A. This essay begins with the description of another person. What is she doing?
   What experience is she reminded of?
   B. Have you experienced being in a similar ball pit? Would you agree or disagree with Pariano’s view of diving into a ball pit? Explain your response.
   C. In addition to interviewing Pariano, Maura Judkis interviewed a professor of public health.
   To what personal experience could you apply the three C’s?
   D. Many people have looked through photographs and journals from their travels to remember the freedom of exploring new places. What photograph(s) remind you of a special person or place that you have not been able to visit because of the pandemic?

5. The third essay begins with a typical scene of visiting a tourist attraction and wanting a group photograph.
   A. The first paragraph sets up the scene and situation. Why does asking a stranger to take the family photograph appear risky?
   B. What new information in paragraph 2 adds some authority to the concern?
   C. Andrea Sachs uses the third paragraph to step away from the anecdotal lede to supply facts. What is the source of her information? Do you consider the organization a reliable source?
   D. What is the other outcome to which she refers? Is this enough information to make you reconsider sharing your phone or camera?
My Endangered Experience

The Washington Post began a series of essays about experiences that have been curtailed because of the coronavirus pandemic — and that perhaps should not return at all or in its present manner. The series has included eating at buffets, asking the help of a stranger to take your photograph, diving into a ball pit, and blowing out birthday candles on a cake.

Why don’t you write an essay about a personal experience that has changed, been limited or currently isn’t allowed.

1. Let’s begin by brainstorming topics. Focus on experiences that have been curtailed.
   A. Name an experience that you enjoy or that you share with you friends and family.
      You can no longer do this or go there.
   
   B. What aspect of school life has changed and influenced you the most?

   C. Consider an activity that someone in your family enjoys, but can no longer experience.
      What is the impact on the family member? On the family?

   D. What activity or requirement has ceased that you hope never returns?

   E. Is there an activity that has ceased and made your community a better place?

2. Think about your ideas. Select one for your topic. Summarize the idea and the point you want to communicate.

3. Think about the different approaches in our examples from The Post’s series:
   A. Description of the activity
   B. Lists of elements or items needed for the activity
   C. People interviewed and quoted
   D. Details to bring the scene to life
   E. Contrasts of then and now
   F. Personal reactions

   Which of these would strengthen your essay?

4. Write your essay. Remember to include enough details so when you read it now, it is very real. And when you read it five years from now, you can relive the experience and your personal reaction when it was happening.
Tom Toles | School 2020

In Spring students in many schools experienced a change in daily schedules and special end-of-school events. Some completed the academic year at home. The coronavirus continued into the Fall, requiring administrators, educators, parents and students to face serious choices about in-school or distance learning. The Post’s editorial cartoonist Tom Toles added his visual commentary to the dialogue.

For each cartoon, Toles’ alter ego appears in the lower right corner to emphasize the word play, satirize actions, expand the image or add another dimension to his point of view. “Read” each political cartoon before answering the questions. >>>

July 10, 2020    Trump has an idea for schools.
                 Spoiler alert!

July 29, 2020    It’s school daze for Trump

August 17, 2020  Worst back-to-school of all time

DATE       TITLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 10, 2020</td>
<td>Trump has an idea for schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spoiler alert!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 29, 2020</td>
<td>It’s school daze for Trump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 17, 2020</td>
<td>Worst back-to-school of all time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TOM TOLES

A Closer Look | School 2020

July 10, 2020
1. Cartoonists use icons and symbols to communicate setting, people and situation.
   A. What details indicate the identity of the two figures in the foreground?
   B. What details indicate the identity of the figure behind the wheel?
2. To what current issue does this editorial cartoon refer?
   A. What makes school bus and public transportation problematic?
   B. What does the statement of the figure on the left indicate?
3. Is transportation the primary concern presented by Toles? Explain.
4. Tom Toles’ alter ego sits in the lower right corner. What does his one word question add to his visual commentary?
5. What is your point of view on this issue?

July 29, 2020
1. What is the setting for the editorial cartoon? What details confirm this?
2. To what do each of the terms that have been crossed out on the board refer?
3. What is the intent of the question asked by the figure on the right?
   In responding, consider when a plan should be in place.
4. Tom Toles’ alter ego asks a different question.
   A. Who is his concern?
   B. What lesson(s) should the electorate learn? By what date?
5. Do you agree, disagree or partially agree with Toles’ point of view?

August 17, 2020
1. What is the setting of the editorial cartoon? What images convey this?
2. List details that establish that the scene takes place in 2020?
3. A different kind of test is being given.
   A. Why is “number two” a play on words?
   B. What is the purpose of this test?
4. Toles alter ego is pessimistic before the test is even given.
   A. Who are “we”?
   B. In what way have we failed?
5. What is your point of view about testing for the virus in schools?

YOUR CARTOON

You have been asked to draw a school-related cartoon.
Write five questions for your classmates to answer about your visual commentary.
ANNOTATING ENDANGERED EXPERIENCES

The Post’s series Endangered Experiences can serve as a model for students to write about the changes in their daily life and the special occasions that have been either cancelled or modified. The premise of the series: experiences have been curtailed because of the pandemic — do we want them to return?

This resource guide contains one whole essay, “Will the birthday candle tradition be snuffed out?” and the ledes (opening paragraphs) from three others in the handout Lede to Set the Scene.

Older students, in particular, should be encouraged to annotate the whole essay. It will help them to understand the writers’ craft of including personal experience, research, interviews and reactions to situations. Read and annotate “Will the birthday candle tradition be snuffed out?” The following should be noted.

• Begins with a typical birthday celebration with lighted candles on a cake — the norm.
• Shifts to being in the midst of the pandemic (even quarantine).
• Note the last sentence of the second paragraph — how the norm becomes horrific.
• The question of return to normal is included. Next we shift to the writer’s personal response to the practice of blowing out candles and personal experience of interviewee (Jennifer Carlson).
• Now enter history — and research by the writer. Look back to the headline. We were warned (“tradition”) to expect a little background. Even the 1918 flu epidemic is included for a comparison/contrast.
• Who cares if we no longer blow out candles on birthday cakes? Perhaps, the candle industry. Interview a reliable source.
• Idea presented: People don’t want to give up what makes them “feel good.” Examples of adjustments and “inventive workarounds” follow.
• Features don’t worry about the cut-off test. Re-read the last paragraph.

Teachers may wish to include vocabulary develop with these terms found in the essay: “purgatory,” “pixelated,” “festooned,” “potent symbolism,” “germaphobia,” “imminent” and “inventive workaround.” Or ask students to make a list of unfamiliar terms as they read.
FOCUS ON LEDES
Use the handout “ENDANGERED EXPERIENCES | Lede to Set the Scene” to guide the reading of the first paragraphs of three more essays from the series. Perhaps before reading each lede, ask students to share any experiences they have had with the subjects — eating at a buffet, asking someone to take their photograph or offering to take someone’s picture, and diving into a pit of balls.

WRITING ABOUT PERSONAL EXPERIENCES
“My Endangered Experience” is meant to guide students in the writing process. This may be particularly helpful if you are involved in distance education. Students could do the step alone or in small writing groups. For example, after doing #1, students could share their ideas or the one they think they will use for their essay topic. Classmates may help them to brainstorm the order or the approaches (#3).

Teachers may add a step. Make #4 be to write the lede to their essay. Share the lede with classmates to see if it captures their interest. Or to guess what might follow. Or to offer another approach that might be more effective. This step could also be done after the essay is “finished.” Peer comments could offer very effective suggestions and teachers can give the opportunity to revise the essay.

DEVELOPING VISUAL LITERACY
Tom Toles, the Post’s editorial cartoonist, takes on the issues surrounding the beginning of school in the time of pandemic. Questions are provided to help guide reading of the cartoons. Student responses may vary, especially if they are in the classroom or at home as school begins. Respect for different opinions makes the discussion of Toles’ visual commentary richer.

In this activity, students are asked to draw their own commentary about a back-to-school issue or situation. It is left open so teachers can direct students based on your school’s and community’s situation. Teachers might consider posting the students’ editorial cartoons in the classroom or online for discussion.
So we’re really going to do this, are we? We’re really going to bring back sports in the middle of a global pandemic? We’re really going to send our best athletes back onto their fields and courts, in empty arenas and stadiums, despite their own trepidation, sometimes spoken, mostly not?

We’re really going to have the stomach to root again and cheer again — from the socially distant comfort of our living rooms — for athletes who are risking their health for our entertainment? We’re really going to have the heart to boo the Houston Astros over a cheating scandal?

And we’re going to do this all at a time when the United States is a trembling, lonely dot at the upper right corner of the global novel coronavirus case chart, soaring into the uncharted stratosphere and signaling to the rest of the world our singular inability to handle a pandemic most other first-world countries have successfully beaten back?

Yes, it appears we are.

This, finally, is the week big-time team sports, such as they are, return to American life. Major League Baseball launches a truncated, 60-game regular season Thursday, followed by the WNBA two days later and the resumptions of the NBA on July 30 and the NHL on Aug. 1. And that’s on top of the professional soccer leagues, National Women’s Soccer League and MLS, which have been playing games for weeks now. Coming this fall — maybe, possibly, we think: football.

What’s it like in the NBA’s Disney bubble? For me, hotel room workouts and lots of time to think. Inside the NBA bubble with a sports reporter

As San Francisco Giants all-star catcher Buster Posey, full of skepticism and doubt, put it in early July: “What are we doing?” A week later, Posey opted out of playing, joining Davis Bertans of the
Washington Wizards and Carlos Vela of Los Angeles FC among those choosing to sit out.

Consider this: The week our sports ground to a halt in mid-March, as one league after another shut down its operations because their stewards felt it was no longer safe to play, the United States was adding several hundred new cases of the coronavirus each day. The total number of cases was in the low four figures. The number of American deaths was in the mid-two figures.

Some four months later, total confirmed cases in the United States are north of 3.5 million, and deaths are approaching 140,000, with another 800 or 900 added to the total each day. By every available measure, things are so much worse.

The obvious question: If it wasn’t safe to keep playing in March, how, pray tell, is it safe to restart in July? If, as Washington Nationals closer Sean Doolittle theorized, sports are the reward of a functional society, by what definition have we earned this reward?

Yet another paradox: Fans will not be allowed into these sporting events, at least at first, because it isn’t safe for humans to be in such proximity to each other. For that matter, many of us have not touched another human who isn’t an immediate family member for more than four months now, for the same reason. So how, then, is it safe for athletes to gather on grass, ice and hardwood to forecheck, box out and chop-block each other for two or three hours each night?

Perhaps it will be worth it, from our perspective, to be able to see Juan Soto swing a bat (or merely take a borderline pitch) again, or LeBron James striding toward the hoop again with a full head of steam. In a matter of days, we will finally see Gerrit Cole pitch a meaningful game in a New York Yankees uniform and Sabrina Ionescu make her debut for the New York Liberty. We will witness James, Kawhi Leonard and Giannis Antetokounmpo resume their battle for NBA supremacy — as both individual MVP candidates and as the engines of the contending Los Angeles Lakers, Los Angeles Clippers and Milwaukee Bucks, respectively.

But never has the old analogy of the Roman gladiators seemed more fitting, except in this case the lions are invisible and microscopic and cause severe respiratory illness and other medical issues and the spectators are not in the Colosseum stands but on couches and recliners in their living rooms. Good luck to all of you. We raise our beers to your health.

The answer to the essential question — How is this safe? — appears to have been distilled down to one word: protocols. Everyone is safe, the leagues tell us, because we have these protocols.

The NBA and MLS are ensconced in “bubbles” at Disney World outside Orlando. The WNBA has its “wubble” across the state in Bradenton, Fla. The NHL soon will be housed in a pair of “hubs” north of the border in Toronto and Edmonton. Each sport’s protocols, to varying degrees, restrict players’ movements and limit contact with the outside world.

The NBA and MLS are ensconced in “bubbles” at Disney World outside Orlando. The WNBA has its “wubble” across the state in Bradenton, Fla. The NHL soon will be housed in a pair of “hubs” north of the border in Toronto and Edmonton. Each sport’s protocols, to varying degrees, restrict players’ movements and limit contact with the outside world.

MLS already has seen a match between D.C. United and Toronto FC postponed just before kickoff, and two other teams — Nashville SC and FC Dallas — withdrew from the tournament after multiple positive tests. With less than a week until MLB’s Opening Day, the District’s coronavirus regulations raised questions about whether the Washington Nationals would play their home games at Nationals Park, and the Blue Jays were told they couldn’t play home games in Toronto.

The list of athletes who already tested positive — before reporting to their teams — includes Freddie Freeman of the Atlanta Braves, Auston Matthews of the Toronto Maple Leafs and Russell Westbrook of the Houston Rockets. Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman tested positive a week into summer camp. At least two NBA players tested positive after arriving in Orlando (though before clearing the mandatory quarantine process).

The biggest question, then, isn’t how will this go — but how long will it last? Florida, home to the MLS, NBA and WNBA bubbles, has seen the biggest spike of coronavirus cases in the United States. California, home to five MLB teams, recently set a one-day record of new cases. Within MLB it is seen as something of a fait accompli that the sport will have to shut down operations again before the finish line. And if MLB doesn’t do it, the players will.

“We have an opportunity to bring joy to a lot of people that are home through these tough times,” Chicago Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo said. “But we’re all human. If guys start testing positive left and right and this thing gets out of control, I’m sure you’ll see some guys opt out.”

The best advice for sports fans this summer might be: Embrace it. Embrace the madness, the strangeness, the weirdness of it all. Because things are going to get weird. This will be unlike anything we have seen before and hopefully ever will see again.

And if you’re still wondering, amid everything going on in the world, whether it’s okay to boo the Astros this summer — even though they won’t hear you amid the fake, piped-in crowd noise in their empty stadium — the answer is: Yes, of course it is.

Steven Goff, Ben Golliver and Samantha Pell contributed to this report.

Dave Sheinin has been covering baseball and writing features and enterprise stories for The Washington Post since 1999. In 2019, he was awarded the Dan Jenkins Medal for Excellence in Sportswriting.