

More normal living could be on horizon

Had heavy, winter-like, ice-encrusted things to talk about, until I noticed a couple of harbingers, maybe, of better days ahead.

First was that pitchers and catchers reported to spring training in Florida and Arizona the end of last week. And in Mesa, Ariz., the position players—that’s everyone else, Javie Baez, Anthony Rizzo and anyone else that the Ricketts family hasn’t traded away over the winter—reported to Cubs camp on Monday.

No promises for anything grand this year, what with the pitching staff mostly working elsewhere now, but just the idea that buckets of baseballs and bags of wood bats are being brought out and the prospect of something like a real baseball season ahead is enough to dissolve the blood clots formed in the year of Covid.

And the other thing I ran across was an article by James Hamblin pub-

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A MOMENT
Ed Breen



lished in the Atlantic magazine over the weekend. I know nothing of the man except that he is introduced as a medical doctor, a prof at Yale University and he has written a book called “Clean: The New Science of Skin.” That worried me a bit; what, exactly, was the old science of skin? But I moved ahead.

The doctor’s editor introduced the article thus: “We’re close, so close,” she wrote after reading

what the doctor had written. “He cautiously forecasts a delicious summer in this country, teasing the stuff of many a quarantine daydream: Gatherings, re-openings, travel and hugs. Summer in most of the U.S. could feel “normal,” she wrote, and she quotes the doctor: “Pre-pandemic norms could return to schools, churches, and restaurants. People could travel and dance indoors and hug grandparents.” And the national mood, he cautions, might become absolutely euphoric. “Periods of intense hardship are sometimes followed by unique moments of collective catharsis or awakening. Think of the Roaring ‘20s, but don’t get complacent.” And it probably – it most certainly – is way too soon rid ourselves of masks and social distancing and all those other new norms we have slipped into since St. Patrick’s

Day weekend of last year. In fact, that’s precisely when reality overtook us here in Indiana a year ago. Some of we Irish, along with a few fakes and wannabes got together on that Saturday night in mid-March last year. Even then it was oddly ominous. We drank, we sang Irish songs, mainly off key, but we knew so little. People were sick and dying in Washington state and in New York and we were learning of social distancing, which is difficult to do with 30 of us in a nicely-appointed basement bar. We were tentative, not unlike the sixth grade boys hovering around the sixth grade girls at a sock hop so many years ago. Just don’t get too close. And don’t even think about touching. It may have been that night that we first bid farewell to one another with a simple fist bump or an ungainly elbow bump accompanied by the coor-

dated footwork that must precede it. And now, after a full trip around the sun, we dare to begin reading and thinking with optimism. No airplane trips just yet, but what of some long drives just because we need a long drive to somewhere, anywhere. Might this be the year to pack the brood into the station wagon and take them in search of Abe Lincoln’s life? First straight south to Hodgenville, Kentucky. Just 200 miles to Mr. Lincoln’s birthplace. Then back up into Indiana to Spencer County and his boyhood home where he grew to manhood, and, if time allows, a journey west into Illinois to Springfield and the Lincoln home and burial site. A socially-distanced, Covid-free four day weeknd. Or aim for the north country and let the kids stand there on the wind-swept shore of Lake Superior at Whitefish Point and consider

that just 17 miles out there on that inland sea and then a mile straight down into the frigid waters is where the Edmund Fitzgerald lies at rest with its 29 crewmen. An eight-hour drive from Marion and you’re there. Just some ideas as we all begin, with great caution, to emerge from our long year of discontent.

If all of this holds true, it would mean that many aspects of pre-pandemic life will return even before summer is upon us. Because case numbers guide local policies, much of the country could soon have reason to lift many or even most restrictions on distancing, gathering, and masking. Pre-pandemic norms could return to schools, churches, and restaurants. Sports, theater, and cultural events could resume. People could travel and dance indoors and hug grandparents, their own or others’. In most of the U.S., the summer could feel ... “normal.”

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