

“The Real Voyage”

By Misty Shafiqullah

2020 had arrived and I was ready to EMBARK on my new career. My Travel Calendar was full. My Marketing Plan was SET IN MOTION. But as the new year dawned, there was also a wave of chatter about a new virus coming out of China.

The Center for Disease Control began screening people flying in from China for a travel-related infection that was increasingly becoming more concerning.

In early February, my husband and I made a trek to the Travel and Adventure Show in Chicago. The convention center was abuzz with the excitement that planning and pending travel can bring. At this same time, the Department of Homeland Security had begun to reroute all arriving air passengers from China to one of eleven airports for screening and possibly quarantine. No one at the Travel Show was even talking about this, and it struck us both as a little strange.

The next week the World Health Organization declared the COVID 19 outbreak a Global Pandemic. A week later, a cruise ship was quarantined in Japan because hundreds of people had become infected and many had died from this strange new illness.

By early March, thousands of people were now captive on ships around the world, including off the coast of California. Some were deathly ill and they were not allowed to dock and disembark. Italy became a Covid hotspot and the country went into lockdown. The Cruise Lines all declared that cruises after March 14th were canceled.

Now I was really getting a SINKING FEELING. This dream job of mine was now starting to feel ADRIFT as well. My new VENTURE as a Franchise owner of a Travel Agency, called Cruise Planners, was suddenly in question.

The fast, exciting pace I was on, came to a screeching halt. I tried to absorb what was happening and changing. All of it was out of my control, and I started to spend a lot of time outside in my yard reflecting. I began to explore my immediate surroundings – photographing the spring blossoms in my yard and the wildlife that was thriving there.

To deal with these stir-crazy feelings, we began to take drives out in nature. I remember seeing the Ironwood trees all in bloom on one of these drives and saying to my husband, “I don’t think they have ever boomed this much or been this colorful”. Of course, in the 40 years I’d lived in the Sonoran Desert, that could not be true.

We went on several “Treasure Hunts” through Tucson to find and photograph all the beautiful murals around town. They seemed to be everywhere where there was a large wall serving as a canvas.

As the spring progressed, the quiet and calm went from unfamiliar and disconcerting to brilliant and colorful and adventurous. My local surroundings became a Kaleidoscope that was now in focus...maybe with new eyes.