

When I woke up yesterday morning, I knew not what day it was in this Coronavirus new normal. I opened the front door, carefully because I was still in my bath robe, and learned what day it was: The Sunday Denver Post proclaimed it.

It was with a slight depression that I ate some fruit and cereal and realized that Laini and I would not be attending Trinity Academy from 9:30 to 10:30 for a stimulating lecture on theology or comparative religion, nor would we catch the 11:00 worship service with Reverend Ken Brown doing his conversational sermonizing. While eating and reading another level of my consciousness considered how to use this empty time. Why not walk one block through a different world of art? I would spend some time on the single block of Denver that is famous and yet unknown to most citizens.

It was Thomas Alva Edison who pronounced the block of Curtis between 15th and 16th to be the best-lighted street in the world. Yes, the businesses in that block, bars, restaurants, and an opera house, tried to outdo each other with external lighting. Now, again unknown to most Denver citizens is this: that same block is a nod to aural art. Why not? Walk a block on Curtis in the opposite direction and you will find the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, with auditoria for the Colorado Symphony Orchestra and other stage performances.

So, I started from 15th Street on the side that flanks the Federal Reserve Bank. As we stroll along the sidewalk toward 16th we find a grating, about a yard square. I stopped and bent over because I was not wearing my hearing aids. The first sound I heard was that of the water coursing, rippling under me. I moved on to the next one and again heard rippling water and birds singing. At the third grate I again heard flowing waters and a bobwhite singing his name. At the next grate the water was still flowing and I heard a woodpecker doing his duty. All six grates had similar sounds.

Now I was at 16th Street and two trucks were stopped on the Pedestrian Mall, headed in opposite directions. The door on the smaller truck opened and the driver started a conversation with the driver of the larger truck headed toward the other way. This was unthinkable on a real Sunday. Laini and I often caught the free 16th Street bus down to Glenarm and walked the rest of the way to beautiful Trinity United Methodist Church. The absence of the free bus ride from the Civic Center to the Union Station is perhaps the greatest difference in the Pandemical Streets of Denver. In addition, on a normal Sunday the restaurants around me would have been open and getting ready for a big day.

I watched three teenagers wearing shorts and tee shirts as they walked together; they chattered with each other at close range without any one of them wearing a mask. I exhaled through my nose so that my sunglasses would fog up, a check that as usual I was wearing my mask. I saw a man walking the other direction and maintaining more than six feet of social distance between us; he had a sign but I could only read the first two words: "Need some" I regretted not seeing him in time to help.

I would walk back above the six grates along the Federal Reserve Bank. I stopped at the first one and heard nothing but steam for a while. Then a man's voice making an announcement I did not understand. At the second grate I heard the clack, clack, clack of the train on its way toward the mountains. At a place near the side entrance to the Federal Reserve Bank I found the metal plaque in the sidewalk I was looking for:

"Sound Walk"

Jim Green

Public Art Program

1992

At the next grate I stopped, lent my ear and heard the deep clickety clack of a train making pretty good time under the sidewalk. This speedy sound came out of each of the rest of the grates. During the old normal there might be a group of people standing around any one of the grates, smiling, listening intently to the train or other sounds. It was perhaps a decade before when I had walked along this way and as I passed three people gathered around a grate. I heard one of them, a vibrant woman with a wide smile on her face say to her friends "I have lived in Denver my whole life and had no idea we have a subway."

I smiled inwardly and continued walking above our super subway.