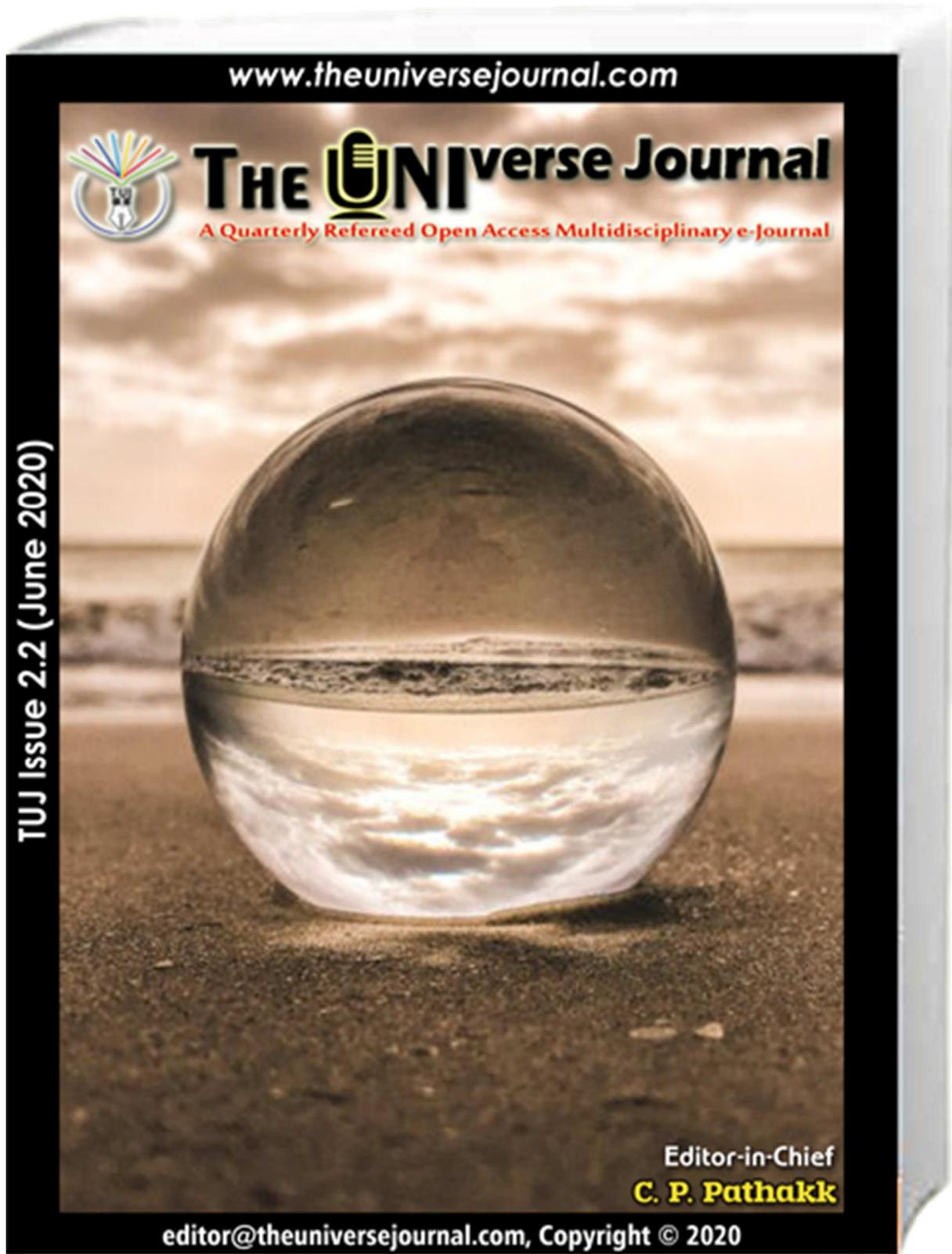


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“Quarantined in paradise”

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I have to start by apologizing: I'm currently in a beach house on the coast in Puerto Rico with my girlfriend Julie. Okay - I can see the nasty looks and hand gestures you're giving me from here, thank you very much.

We came from New York just when the virus was about to arrive in the U.S. It was a fortunate accident of timing. We planned on staying for 10 days. Ahhhh... hahahahaha! Now the plan is to stay *here* until the pandemic begins to subside *there*. Maybe Thanksgiving? or until we run out of money.

But don't get the wrong idea - it's not all rum and guffaws down here. There's a 7 PM curfew, take-outs till 6 PM only. Masks are always required and before you go into the supermarket they Purell your hands and take your temperature. Orally, thank you. True, there's a lovely beach here, but thanks to the virus no one is supposed to use it. This is the first time I've seen "look but don't touch" applied to the seashore. We have to wait for the police boat or helicopter to go by like inmates timing the rounds of the guards. "Quick - that's the 2:15 patrol boat going off into the distance! Grab a bathing suit and a towel. ...and don't forget the wire cutters!" You swim as fast as you can - not for the exercise but because you know that the policia will be back soon.

By day, it's lovely here with palm trees, crystal clear water, and blue cloudless skies. By night it's another story. The local rooster proudly announces, "It's 2:30 AM! It's 2:30 AM!". He repeats this valuable information every 6 to 7 seconds. I know this because I timed it. What else am I going to do when I'm wide awake at 2:30 in the morning, thanks to that f@>&[^g rooster? When dawn arrives I guess he's busy sleeping, because you don't hear a peep.... Except for the mourning doves. They usually start cooing around 6 AM, with a volume that causes the dinner plates to rattle in their cabinet.

Where we are staying, there is no air-conditioning and the humidity is in the upper 80s at night. O. K. - each bedroom does have an air conditioning unit, but it's purely there for decoration. The only setting that works is "off." I think those mini-moths, frantically flying around my reading light like an air traffic controller's nightmare, do a better job of lowering the temperature just by flapping their teeny little wings.

My girlfriend Julie is delicious - not to me so much as to the mosquitoes. They sense my curmudgeon-ness coming through my skin and find me unappealing. As do many people.

However they find Julie irresistible. She can spray the whole bedroom with insect repellent, close the window and the door, cover herself in saran Glad Wrap, and wake up in the morning with 23 fresh mosquito bites. Any meal we have outside is accompanied by so many citronella candles that it feels as though we're about to start a seance. This also makes it unnecessary to season food, as it's just going to taste like bug spray and citronella.

It's important these sequestered days to have planned activities. Our plan is to get up, have breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, and dinner when it's dark outside. Occasionally, we even shower and change out of our pajamas! But that's not a regular part of the plan.

To stay mentally sharp, we challenge each other to name the day of the week. For physical exercise I try to wrest the carving knife from her hand before she can do something that I'll regret.

Fortunately we each have our own individual iPads. This cuts down somewhat on the violence, as we don't have to fight over the remote. And we're getting to spend some quality time together. ...while we're doing completely different things.

We try to avoid watching the news, mostly out of guilt over our not-so-bad situation. Ordinarily, I would turn on the TV in the evening to see what I can get. Mostly what I get here is disappointed. I didn't realize that a basic cable package could be this basic. Unless you speak Spanish, the viewing selection is rather limited. There's news or TCM-YGYM. Turner Classic Movies - You're Glad You Missed.

Now assuming that someday in the distant future, we will return to the states, there are a few things that I'm concerned about. Having walked around barefoot for a few months, I'm pretty sure my feet have gone from an 11 C to a 13 EEE. Before I try to put any shoes on I think I better find a crowbar. Also, I'm not sure if I'll ever be able to eat a meal again without the smell of bug spray and citronella. (I have found that many restaurants frown on it when you bring your own.)

Anyway, my heart goes out to people suffering through this in the states. I feel somewhat guilty being where I am, but not so much that I'm running back to be with y'all. This probably won't be the best or worst vacation I ever had, but... ... it certainly will be one that I won't be able to forget.