Then and Now

Then
My mother died
Twelve years growth on my bones
Father and stepmother
Took brother and me
Away
To live in a trailer
In a small Wyoming town

And the polio epidemic arrived
Iron lungs
Impossible to imagine
Frightened children’s eyes
Staring at the ceiling
Machine breathing for them

Every day my stepmother
Packed a lunch
Loaded four kids in the car
Took off to the east
For rock hunting
Or into the mountains
For fishing

Every day
Every day
Every day
For months on end
Out of polio’s reach
Out of contact with others
Away
Away
Away
For me, grief so raw
A meditation for my mother
Keep my eyes on the ground
To spy moss agate
In old stream beds
To spy jade and petrified wood
Among the sage and tumbleweeds
To spy arrowheads
In old tepee rings
Learning the thrill
Of the find

A meditation for my mother
Keep my eyes on the water
Bait the hook
Understand the cast
Look for the quiet
Watch the ripples
Feel the bite
Set the line
Hook a trout
Learning the thrill
Of the catch

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Now
Needing to keep
Safe from the virus
No contact with others
Alone
Alone
Alone
Alone

Alone in my house
Alone in my car
Alone in an office
Respect others
Social distancing
Mask
Gloves
Staying away
Away
Away
Away
Meditate
On the bush
Outside the kitchen window
So many birds
Hummers
Goldfinch
Why that bush

Meditate
On life
Remembering
Working to understand
Keeping news at bay
For sanity

Blue Sky
Bright Sun
Cool Moon
Scudding Clouds
Wet Wet Rain

Read
Read
Read
Voraciously
Completely
Discovering
The wonder of it again

~ Jill Thurston 2020 ~