



# AND THE PEOPLE STAYED HOME

By Kitty O'Meara

Illustrated by  
Stefano Di Cristofaro and Paul Pereda



And the people stayed home.





And they listened,



and read books,





Some meditated,



some prayed,

some danced.





Some met their shadows.





And the people healed.







# Talking with Author Kitty O'Meara

*And the People Stayed Home* was written in the early days of the global coronavirus pandemic. For Kitty O'Meara, who lives in Wisconsin with her husband, Phillip, and their five dogs and three cats, life was quieter than usual. That slowing down gave Kitty time to think deeply about people and the planet.

One day, Kitty wrote a poem about what might happen during the pandemic and after it. She posted the poem on Facebook, and people all over the world loved it! Kitty's words teach us the importance of spending time with ourselves and the people close to us, listening deeply, and doing what we love. She believes that when we are kind to ourselves and others, and when we use the special gifts we each have, we can make the world a better place.

## What led you to write this poem?

I was anxious because so many things about the virus weren't understood yet. I was worried about my family and my friends who work in hospitals. I was thinking about the quarantine and how it might affect us. And I was thinking about the earth. I care deeply about the earth. We depend on her for our food, and homes, and for beauty, too. We need to take care of the planet. We have been ignoring her, and she is not doing well without our love.

## We are talking to each other while COVID-19 is causing us to stay at home. But there are some good things about this time, too, as your poem describes. What are some of them?

I think it is a time to go deep inside of ourselves and listen to what we are thinking and feeling. If we are scared, sad, happy, or angry, we can dance about it, compose a song, paint a picture, talk with our family, write a play. There are many things we can do. We have the gift of time to explore our feelings, to figure out what our talents are, learn more about what we love, and offer our talents to each other and the earth. The virus brings sickness, but we can choose to be more alive than ever. We can rest. We can sit and listen to the birds, and make art, learn something new, share family stories, or plant a flower seed and watch it grow, day by day.

## After you wrote the poem, it spread quickly on the Internet. You heard from people around the world who love it. People from India, Italy, Spain, South America, Africa, and so many other places. Can you talk about that?

A great source of joy has been the people from all over the world who have interpreted the poem using their gifts—music, art, dance, and more. There has been a ballet with people narrating in eight languages. A children's choir in Italy sang it. Two people filmed themselves singing it on a rooftop in Spain. A famous opera star sang an original work based on it! And it has been translated into so many languages—more than twenty. I have new friends all over the world thanks to this poem. I want to hug them all.



## What are your days like during quarantine?

Our four-leggeds get us up. We walk the dogs, then we feed them and have a Morning Party. Phillip, my husband, goes into his shop where he builds furniture. And I write. We also spend a lot of time in our gardens.

## Your four-leggeds are your five rescue dogs and three cats. What are their names?

The dogs are Gracie, Micky, Marlarky, Dooley, and Teagan. (Gracie and Teagan are girls.) The cats are Fiona, Murphy (we also call him Bunny Bundles), and Fergus, who is a little blond stray that followed me home one chilly November day.

## When did you start writing?

I have written since I was six years old—stories, poems, and book manuscripts. And I was always reading. My mother and father both read to us. As soon as I could read, trips to the library were the most magical adventures in the universe.

## What were you like as a kid?

I loved school. I did a lot of inventing. I was athletic, and I was confident. I've always loved to laugh. I liked to write plays and then direct them. I was always writing. And every summer I had a little garden. I loved my friends, and being kind has always been important to me. I've never been a bully, and I do not like it when other people behave like bullies.

## What are you like now?

I love learning. I'm a good friend. I love to cook and bake and make candy. I make caramels and toffee and fudge. I love the earth. I love life. Being an artist, I am never satisfied with what is given. I want to change and recreate. I write, take photographs, and garden. I adore being with my husband and our four-leggeds.

## What would you say to a kid who wants to be a writer or an artist?

Do it! Read a lot, and keep a journal. Start thinking about things from different points of view. Bring in as many of the arts as you can. How would I dance that? How would I draw it? And don't judge! Just create. Do what you love and learn from other artists. We are students all our lives.

## Is there anything else you would like to say to your readers?

I want to remind people that they are already artists. Art is not for only a few people. Any job, anything you do can be art. It is the attention and grace you offer it. It's about talent, beauty, generosity of spirit, innovation, and your humanity. Find your art and offer it to the world. And be kind; always try to be kind, and feed your joy.



For Phillip, who makes staying home an endless, surprising adventure,  
our few rooms a universe, and our life together magical and holy. Thank you for  
keeping me joyful and hopeful during the time of pandemic, and looking  
forward to the days of bright sunlight to come. —Kitty O'Meara

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## Kitty O'Meara

lives in Full Moon Cottage, near Madison,  
Wisconsin, on a river and a bike trail, with her  
husband, Phillip Hagedorn, their five dogs,  
three cats, gardens, and books. A former  
teacher and chaplain and a spiritual director,  
O'Meara has been a lifelong writer and artist.  
*And the People Stayed Home* is her  
first print book.

## Stefano Di Cristofaro

is an illustrator and designer whose works have  
been widely exhibited. Raised in Venezuela and  
Italy, he currently lives and works in Mexico  
City. He has previously illustrated the children's  
books *Conejo y Conejo*, *Guachipira va de viaje*,  
and *La Sayona y otros cuentos de espantos*.  
His family says that when he was little, he only  
stayed still if he was given a pencil  
and a piece of paper.

## Paul Pereda

is an illustrator who has primarily worked  
in video game development and trading  
card games with clients such as Disney,  
Nickelodeon, Atari, and MTV. Born in  
Venezuela, he now lives in Madrid. He has  
been passionate about drawing since  
he was a child; his mother carried  
drawing supplies everywhere they  
went to keep him busy and calm.



# AND THE PEOPLE STAYED HOME

was written in March 2020 in response to the global coronavirus pandemic. The poem was first posted on the author's Facebook page, and it quickly went viral. Its hopeful message of profound healing for people and the Earth struck a chord all over the world. In these pages the thoughtful words are richly illustrated, and words and images together communicate an optimism for our shared human experience and our future that will resonate with readers of all ages.



**"In Kitty O'Meara's book, *And the People Stayed Home*, she offers us wisdom that can help during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. She is challenging us to grow—to look inside, to listen deeply, to allow ourselves to think differently, and ultimately, to create new ways of living on the planet."**

**—Deepak Chopra, MD, author, *Metahuman***

**"Kitty has managed to take such a complex historic moment and craft an eloquent, heartwarming reflection that will resonate with generations to come. In a time when we all need to believe something good can come out of something so devastating, Kitty's words give us pause and hope. Combined with the warm illustrations depicting life, this book offers the reader encouragement for a brighter tomorrow."**

**—Kate Winslet, Academy Award-winning actress**

**"Thank you, Kitty O'Meara, for showing us promise amid the panic, and for pointing out that at this very moment, this very day, we can seize the opportunity to restore wholeness to our world."**

**—Sy Montgomery, bestselling author, *The Good Good Pig* and *The Soul of an Octopus***

**"Kitty O'Meara is the poet laureate of the pandemic..."**

The poem has become shorthand for a silver-linings perspective during the coronavirus outbreak—the hope that something good can come out of this collective state of 'together, apart.'"

**—O, *The Oprah Magazine***

