

LIFE

How striving hard can move mountains in difficult times

I've been a homebody of late. In China, there are a lot of us in this invisible demographic these days — not that I have left my apartment to substantiate the assertion. But making the streets quieter and homes busier, as the Year of the Mouse arrived, was the aim of the government's extensions to the holiday. With a virus to beat, that made sense. Ditto the closure of tourist sites, and people are steering clear of restaurants and bars — the ones still open. I know this because the Wi-Fi signal still reaches into my mouse hole —



Anthony Perry
Second Thoughts

and the worthiest bandwidth is occupied by the bravery of hospital workers, with those in the essential services also pairing duty with risk. Although most holidaymakers came back this week, it's a return to work, not to normal. Some workplaces have encouraged employees to work from home, to keep everyone safe. That includes companies with protocols on self-quarantine for staff who return from travels. That's how I became a homebody. Being cooped up in a bunker for days on end is a small price to pay when others are contending with fear, exhaustion — and grief. Confinement, though, does make you look afresh at the ordinary things around you. So it is with the least-used fixture in the home — the

front door. I've come to see it as a wall with a handle. In moments of more expansive thought, the door swings open, and I am on the outside looking in. Instead of furniture and other objects, I see ruts in the floor carved out by the routines of life. My apartment ought to have a navel for all the contemplation directed at it, and within it, especially now that it's been recast as an oversized box containing the habits of the occupant — not all worth keeping. In more footloose days, this would be the cue for a good walk. Still, it's just a stroll to the kettle, perched by the kitchen window. My rituals of tea making, and imbibing, now incorporate gazes at the world on the other side of the glass — the boxes upon boxes

in my Beijing district. While I'm still a few lines short of a sonnet, I have cultivated a long gaze. Imagine, then, the sensory stimulation when, on Sunday morning, my kitchen window swapped out the gray vista with whiteness. And it was falling as I gawped. OK, it wasn't the first snowfall in Beijing this season. But the world suddenly got a lot closer; it was in my face. Window thrust open, I was leaning out as far as I could. The cold bite of the winter air gave me kinship with the distant figures I could make out. The kill switch was hit on the impulse to run downstairs. But there's that long gaze. Beyond all Beijing's little boxes I was transported 700 kilometers away. I felt the crunch of the packed ice under

foot, I was gasping for breath and I was debating whether to chalk up the lie I had just told as one for the then-vanishing 2019 or my first for 2020. Ahead of me was the peak of Laoshan, 1,100 meters above the Yellow Sea near Qingdao, Shandong province. The Shandong gem wins on all counts as the wall-busting destination for my time travel. There's the jagged cliffs and boulders artfully dumped by glaciers and the higher up the mountain you get, the bigger the ocean becomes. No mystery why it was a retreat for the sages. As for the snow, unlike in Beijing at the weekend, there was too much of the stuff on Laoshan that day and the highest trails were closed. My kitchen reverie brought me back to the falsehood uttered on its slopes.

A fellow hiker had asked, presumably in encouragement, if I was fit — the word that showed on his translation app when I had got lost in the blizzard of Chinese. I wheezed in the affirmative. If it proved to be a stretch of the truth then, it's even more evident now. My fitness tracker clocks me at barely 2,000 steps a day. But it's another word that I picked up from the chatty hiker that now sticks with me: *litu*. My dictionary defines it as "to try hard, to strive to". There's a mountain of that going on in China, and that's one habit to keep. As for me, one day I'll get back to Laoshan — there's a sonnet to finish.

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Candid camera: Medical flight



The third batch of medical staff from Jiangsu province prepare to take off from Nanjing Lukou International Airport to Hubei province on Sunday to help tackle the coronavirus outbreak. The medical team consists of 118 people from 32 medical institutions, including 18 doctors and 100 nurses, mostly from respiratory and intensive medicine departments. JI CHUNPENG / XINHUA

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Hospital is my frontline, says nurse sister of hero

By WANG QIAN in Beijing and LI YINGQING in Yunnan

A courageous and decorated soldier is providing inspiration for his sister fighting on the frontline against the coronavirus outbreak. Nurse Du Fujia volunteered to work at the fever clinic of the Meitan County People's Hospital in Guizhou province and hasn't had any time off recently. The hospital is among the 183 facilities designated to treat pneumonia patients in Guizhou. She is among the first batch of medical staff who volunteered to combat the growing coronavirus outbreak in the hospital. The virus, the epicenter of which is Wuhan, Hubei province, has infected more than 28,000 people and killed more than 560 across the country as of Thursday, the latest official data shows. In Guizhou, 69 cases of infection were confirmed as of Thursday with one death reported. "Just as minefields were my brother's battlefield, amid the fight against the coronavirus outbreak, the hospital is mine. It is a doctor's and nurse's duty to cure and treat the ill, and we are ready to serve the country," Du Fujia says. Her brother, Du Fuguo, lost his hands and eyes when a bomb exploded during a mine-clearing operation in October 2018. He was honored as an Heroic Demining Soldier by the Central Military Commission in July. "I feel very proud of him, he has empowered me with his energy and courage," Du Fujia says. "It is the first Spring Festival that my brother has stayed with the family at home in seven years, but I cannot be reunited with him, in case I bring the virus back," Du Fujia says. She signed up to join the coronavirus team immediately after the hospital, on Jan 27, issued an initiative asking medical staff to work in the fever clinic, the frontline. "Without telling the family, I signed up at once. I know they will support it," Du Fujia says. She says that although no infected cases have been reported in Meitan, a surging number of residents have gone to the fever clinic. Besides taking temperatures, Du Fujia also shows the public how to prevent being infected and helps to deal with mental health issues. Besides Du Fuguo and Du Fujia, there are also two brothers — Du Fuqiang, a border soldier in the Tibet autonomous region, and Du Fumin, an ICU doctor at Jiali Hospital in Meitan.

"The development of the epidemic is unexpectedly quick. Every Chinese person should stand up to combat the illness," Du Fumin says. "I hope the war without gun smoke can be over soon," he says. Du Fuguo solidly supports his younger sister's and brother's decision. "It is their mission to save patients. They are true to their mission," Du Fuguo says, adding all the doctors and nurses on the frontline to contain the virus are heroes in our heart. "Stay strong, medics! Stay strong, Wuhan! Stay strong, China!" He says. Their story has become a hot topic online, viewed more than 130 million times on social media site Weibo by Thursday. One user comments: "Salute their mother. Her children make the country proud." Like Du Fujia, there are hundreds of thousands of doctors and nurses, who have devoted themselves to controlling the coronavirus on the frontline. At the same time, thousands of medical staff from across China are being dispatched to help tackle the epidemic in Hubei, which has isolated itself in a bid to curb the rapid spread of the virus. Medics, who were in close contact with infected patients, have in some cases been infected with the virus and their plight has hit the headlines. Many of them, even in isolation, still keep an eye on the outbreak and make their own contributions from their hospital beds. Yu Changping, a respiratory specialist at the Renmin Hospital of Wuhan University, who was infected by the virus and is still in isolation, has updated news on his treatment and recovery online. Yu said in a video clip that his symptoms were relieved after five days of treatment and he hopes to get back to work as soon as he is cured. "Through the clip I want to use my experience to tell the public that we can win the battle. Stay strong, Wuhan," Yu says. On Monday, five medics in the intensive care unit of the cardiology department at Beijing Fuxing Hospital were confirmed to be infected. "There is no angel in white, but a group of young people wearing medical uniforms following the steps of their predecessors to tackle the illness," Tang Sha, head nurse at The Central Hospital of Wuhan, posted to her WeChat circle.

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FIRST PERSON

Inside accounts of home-based quarantine

The following are personal accounts from two people who are undergoing a two-week quarantine in Beijing. They returned from Hubei province, whose capital, Wuhan, is the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, to Beijing before and during Spring Festival.

Zhang Jian (pseudonym)

To be honest, I could never have imagined that our family would spend New Year's Eve on the train back to Beijing. Two days before Spring Festival, my wife and I took our children back to my hometown in Hubei province to spend the holiday with our parents. But the development of the epidemic made us come back to Beijing earlier than we planned. We canceled New Year's Eve dinner, and left without visiting friends and relatives. On the train journey back, passengers covered their faces with masks. Sitting in the carriage and watching the changing view outside the window, my heart was filled with worry and anxiety. When we exited the train station, our temperature was taken and on the subway station, the smell of disinfectant fluid was floating in the air. Each carriage had been disinfected with the date that it had been done clearly displayed. Although I couldn't see people's faces clearly, everything was in order and there was no sign of panic. We received a long text from the Beijing Center for Diseases Control and Prevention with



A security guard checks the temperature of a resident at the entrance of a community in Chaoyang district, Beijing, on Wednesday. KUANG LINHUA / CHINA DAILY

detailed instructions to carry out self-protection. After I returned home to Yizhuang, Daxing district in Beijing, I immediately reported to the property management staff and the neighborhood committee about where we had been. Since we originally planned to stay in Hubei for a few more days for the holiday, we didn't save much food in our flat. This could be a problem, I realized, during the two-week quarantine. On the fourth day of the Chinese lunar New Year (Jan 28), when the neighborhood committee called to check on our temperature, I asked if they could help buy some food. The committee members wrote down our requests, and delivered food to our door in just a few hours. Although we never stepped outside, our everyday life went on

smoothly inside. It has now become a regular activity to speak with the neighborhood committee on the phone, and every day, we are assured that we can contact them anytime should we need anything. Li Nian (pseudonym) You never notice how time flies, it's already the sixth day of the Chinese New Year (Jan 30), and the fifth day since my family and I returned to Beijing from Hubei. When we were staying in Hubei province for a family reunion to celebrate the Chinese New Year, we learned that people who returned to Beijing from Hubei needed to stay at home for close observation of body temperature for two weeks.

Wishing to attend work as early as possible, we drove back and got home at 9 am on Jan 26. The neighborhood is doing a thorough job of preventing the disease. There are security guards disinfecting passing cars, guiding people coming from outside to register and undergo a temperature check. Tips about how to prevent the disease are posted on the bulletin boards and the door of the apartment buildings, with the contact number of the neighborhood committee written on them. We reported our trip to the property management staff and the neighborhood committee right after we put down our luggage, and started self-isolation. At home we always watch the latest news of the epidemic, worrying about loved ones in Hubei. We have also been receiving good wishes from many people. The staff asked if we needed anything, and the next day, they went to the supermarket early in the morning and purchased much-needed sterilization supplies to deliver to our door. Everyday, we leave the trash on the doorstep waiting to be disinfected and thrown away by property managers, and friends who live in different areas frequently bring food for us. We talk to friends and relatives on the phone. With books at hand, we relax by watching television together. The weather has been nice these past few days. I believe that as long as people are fighting the disease together, it will soon be overcome.



Du Fujia, sister of Du Fuguo, a decorated soldier, on duty at the fever clinic of the Meitan County People's Hospital in Guizhou province. QIU ZHENGTEG / FOR CHINA DAILY