Emerge. Slowly. Look Both Ways.

Is there anybody out there?

It has been a solid two years in near total isolation for us. A year of lymphoma treatment and quarantine ended just in time for the Trump virus to shut everything down for another year.

Finally, Stanwyck and I are fully vaxxed and ready to take those first tentative steps back into polite society. As luck would have it, our resurrection coincides with Tallahassee's annual Word of South Festival of music and literature. It's one of my favorite events on the local calendar, and it was sorely missed last year under the COVID pall. As difficult as it is to contemplate crawling out of my hidey hole, Word of South offers a fine motivation to poke my head up and see if I remember how to be social and such.

As always, the lineup has prime talents, with music from Dom Flemons, Allison Moorer, Randall Bramblett, Royce Lovett, and the great New Orleans trumpeter Wendell Brunious. Writers talking to writers. Writers talking to musicians. People who love books and music hob nobbing in the beautiful Tallahassee springtime weather.

Yeah, the weather has gone to hell in a hockey bag. But the rain has plagued WoS before, and I figure they will come up with alternate venues and such, although a fair number of the

alternate venues from festivals past have shuttered due to the pandemic. As of this afternoon, I have not seen any official announcements. Here's hoping they pull another miracle.

It is an amazement that the festival is still with us. Chalk it up to a committed team of mostly volunteers throwing their shoulders to the wheel. It was a towering act of faith to program and schedule this event without knowing what the COVID drama would bring. Even with limiting the daily attendance by issuing tickets in advance, if the vaccine rollout had been any less effective we would not even think of attending.

And with events moving indoors, perhaps, we may have to think twice anyway.

Word of South 2019 was my last public appearance, aside from the occasional trip for groceries. Two weeks after first chemo and it was clear that I was too compromised to be there. So the idea of WoS serving as my post-transplant debutante party was pretty slick, symmetry-wise.My original dream had been a triumphant return to Big Ears, but they have deferred for another year.

But here's the thing after two years of hibernation: The idea of crowds and small talk and conversation and trying so hard to hide that I have lost all recall of the name of whatever person I am talking to that I have known foreverName recall never having been my strong suit, the random access memory is even worse post-treatment. My apology in advance. – all that stuff has been giving me a real case of the yips.

I figure I'm not the only one. So, assuming we get to go at all, I've settled on some strategies to cope.

- Breathe (even in situations where it is optional).
- Smile.
- Be kind.
- Embrace awkward silences.
- Smile some more.

- Resist asking “So how’s it been going?”
- Do not stare at my shoes for more than ten seconds at a time.

Speaking of shoes, I notice that several of the bands on tap at the young people’s stage (young meaning anything under say 50) describe their genre as shoegaze, which seems to indicate an amalgam of jam band and emo, though there is probably some sort of “something-core” involved, too. I don’t know. I am, as my kids remind me, an Old. But it sounds like something I would like.

So maybe you’ll see me grooving at the shoegaze stage where my inordinate interest in my laces will not seem so out of place. Or maybe you’ll run into me somewhere else. If I forget and stare at my fancy kicks for more than a count of ten, please tell me to look up and smile. I’m really out of practice and could use a little help.