

Life in the Time of Covid: 2020-2022

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Sandra and I have wintered on the island of Kauai for the past twenty-five or so years. We had previously decided 2020 was to be our last year for a variety of reasons. Then in February we started hearing stories of a new disease that was killing people. We first thought, "Like the flu." Then news reports became more serious and we had second doubts as to the seriousness of the disease. A phone call from our son, Nathan, made up our minds when he said, "You should think seriously of getting back home and quarantine." Our daughter Martha told us that we'd likely "stew" if we stayed on the island. So we hurriedly packed and booked a flight home.

Upon going to the Lihue Airport, the rental car agency was packed to the extent I couldn't find the driveway, a driveway I had driven into numerous times. It was camouflaged with bumper-to-bumper cars that tourists had returned. People were fleeing the island.

The airport waiting room was packed. No masks except for one family. The airplane to Phoenix was completely full. No masks. After an overnight flight we arrived to an echoing Phoenix terminal, normally packed with travelers. The plane to Minneapolis was full. No masks in sight. Our daughter met us outside the luggage area on the street instead of by the carousel. The regular welcoming pick-up.

Once home, our daughter-in-law Tracey, Nathan, Martha, and son-in-law Chris had all the necessities of life, including groceries, toilet paper, and Bubbly, waiting at our door. We hunkered down like most of the population but felt no angst as we were well taken care of. We slipped into a routine of painting pictures, reading books, volunteering, sewing, and going about our business outside our house fully masked. I felt no guilt about spending time painting pictures (mostly landscapes, some with old barns in them) and reading books on history and biographies of historical figures including James Cook, William Clark, and Winston Churchill. Sandra spent hours reading books by her favorite authors, sewing, and volunteering at Used-A-Bit and St. John's.

Sandra is an avid reader and stayed in touch with her two book clubs. I began to learn Zoom was a substitute for face-to-face committee meetings of the church and Cannon Valley Elder Collegium. We attended Fifty North for our workout sessions, fully masked and carefully distanced.

Then that wonderful call came from the Northfield Hospital. Would you like to get vaccinated? Yes, yes, a thousand yeses. That cold February day felt like a weight taken off our backs. The staff was incredibly well organized and we were in and out . . . allowing for the prescribed waiting time . . . and into the cold air feeling that a weight was sliding off and we were going to make it through this pandemic. Historically, other generations did not fare as well during their pandemics, i.e., the Spanish Flu and the Black Plague.

I had a friend I have known since we were babies on the same blanket. We e-mailed three or four times a week and I learned about the weather and crops around my old home town of Thief River Falls. I asked if he had been vaccinated but he never answered my question. Then the e-mails stopped until a couple weeks later he mailed, "Bob, I have Covid." I never got

another e-mail from him. A phone call from his sister-in-law a few days later informed me he was in hospice but he could still talk. I called his cell phone and his wife answered and gave Allen the phone. I could not understand a word he said. His speech was mostly groans and gasps. He was moved to his home and he died a week or so later. I lost a big part of my history with his death. I grieve for my friend and also for those who reject the vaccines for one reason or another.

We learned the world has changed, bringing out the worst in some people and the best in others. The pandemic seems to ebb and flow like ocean tides, teasing us with the carrot of normality only to make us hunker down again in a siege mentality. Viruses change and mutate. Take the common flu as an example. I have faith this disease will be managed with the help of vaccines. Lastly we are fortunate to live in a time when viruses are understood, thanks to scientists and their research that has culminated in life saving vaccines.

May 29, 2022