

## Life in the Time of COVID-19: 2020-2022

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The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on me personally seems to boil down to the following points:

My background.— That which has formed me into what I am today in this time of Plague: born in 1944, I came of age in the late 1950's and the '60's. My life has seen radical change take place, most of it for the better, but with some horrifying exceptions, such as the Vietnam War and the deadly urban riots of the 1960's that destroyed Detroit and large parts of Los Angeles. During this time, after an utterly boring first year at a local college in La Crosse, Wisconsin, which was a slowly devolving disaster following a wonderfully exciting high school career in Westby, Wisconsin, I was poised for the Draft – and thus the distinct possibility that I would end up dead in a rice paddy 10,000 miles from home. Therefore it seemed only logical to face the monster of destruction by devoting myself to medicine, so I began by enlisting in the U.S. Navy for training as a Hospital Corpsman. I refused to carry a gun. Maybe I could justify my existence by becoming a healer. From late 1963 until late 1967 I did just that. Then, it was time to return to college, but this time I chose St. Olaf College. I was not disappointed! Fast forward some fifty years to our present dilemma . . . I can say with some degree of certainty that I'm enmeshed in the following because of the COVID-19 plague:

Resentment.— At the appalling incompetence of the previous Administration who insisted on politicizing the wildly spreading virus as some sort of political dirty trick being played on them and thus not to be taken seriously. The ex-President made a huge bravado-showing of his immunity (fake) to the disease in a vain attempt to cast blame for it upon his political opponents. Priceless time was wasted before mounting a rapid response to this virus. The result? Over 1,000,000 Americans have died from the virus. Countless others have lost time from work, and the economic toll is still unknown after almost three years of coping with the lockdowns, masking mandates, and school closings. The long lasting effects of the disease have yet to be discovered. Shame on that Administration!

Determination.— Early on I became convinced that the only way out of the pandemic was to get through it as far as possible while researchers perfected vaccines against it. Hence, the months of self-quarantine, N-90 masks whenever going out, and learning new skills in working with Zoom meetings. The vaccines were developed in record time, no thanks to the previous Administration, and distributed as quickly as possible. Both my wife and I were eligible because of our age for the first rounds. We were immunized, both doses as quickly as they became available, as well as the booster shots as soon as they became available. We are determined to stay ahead of the curve as far as possible. So far, so good.

Incredulity.— As one of the first generation to receive the Salk Polio Vaccine, sixty-plus years ago, and thus a grateful recipient of immunity to that ancient deadly virus, I cannot comprehend the so-called “vaccine skeptics” who have refused to get this new life saving medicine. They are not only harming themselves, they are potentially providing the reservoir for the new variations of the COVID virus to incubate and mutate, thus potentially harming us all in the long run. Shame on them in their selfishness!

Some lessons learned.—

1. Whereas the Civil Servants of our Federal Government are to be trusted for their expertise in dealing with pandemics, certain political leaders are not to be trusted ever again because

of their evil incompetence and sullen refusal to change their toxic insistence that their way is the only way that will be permitted.

2. Our own State of Minnesota leadership acted wisely and compassionately, as they moved as quickly as possible to get true, correct health information out to the public, in spite of active disinformation campaigns by opposing political leaders. I am still shocked at the ruthless partisan politics used by these opponents to try and blame the COVID pandemic on their opponents. I'll never forget these shameful tactics and who is responsible for them.
3. In spite of partisan political opposition to scientifically proven successful methods of dealing with highly contagious diseases, common sense has prevailed, and the overwhelming majority of Americans have been successfully immunized and boosted.
4. Never trust an elected official from a party that specializes in disinformation campaigns that promote hate, discontent, and distrust in our duly elected democratic government.

Losses.—The thing I miss the most? Wednesday night suppers at St. John's Lutheran followed by Holden Evening Prayer. When we are allowed to safely resume I plan on having a large handkerchief in my pocket to mop up my tears. I am confident that the pent up grief will not be contained, but will insist on being expressed by weeping. No shame for the tears. They help wash away the fear and grief and restore things to some sort of balance.

Gains.—I completed dozens of Byzantine style icons, my favorite hobby! They are colorful prayers that occupy the majority of my hobby time. The many months of isolation were filled by an equal amount of time spent in my studio painting and studying. Whereas my wife loves to knit and read books, I love to study and paint icons.

I give thanks for the wise and calm leadership of our pastors and Council as they carefully considered the options available to them on dealing with the plague, and then put into action the procedures necessary to keep us all safe. They are a blessing to us all!

Future plans.—It seems clear that the 'new normal' includes living with the COVID virus and thus future breakouts of the disease. This means things like occasional booster shots, normally wearing a N90 mask (especially in the winter time), and avoidance of large indoor crowds as much as possible. Such a bother to put up with. But, if that's what it takes to stay healthy, so be it! I look forward to the return of some semblance of pre-COVID life and the ability to travel once again. Who knows? We might even be able to travel to our beloved Norway in 2023!

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