

Collected Manuscript Submissions
May – September 2022



Please note: Jessamine County Public Library's Pandemic Stories Project is a community storytelling project. Views and opinions expressed in the following submissions are not endorsed by the Library.



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How did the COVID-19 shutdown change the lives of your pets? Did they adapt when things began to reopen?

The pandemic did change the lives of our two dogs, Riley and Sierra. Because of the need to work from home, they got used to not only both of us being home during the day but they also got to take more walks than usual. It was a time we were grateful for because months later our youngest dog became quite ill and eventually passed away. It was a time we'll always cherish and be grateful for.

The pandemic also created an opportunity for more people to work from home and that continued for me once the pandemic was over. Riley has enjoyed having at least one of us at home with him during the day. Since he has his own medical issues, it's been important for me to have the opportunity to be at home to better take care of him.

--Bryan S.

A BIKE RIDE

The message posted to a WhatsApp group chat read: “This senior citizen needs a responsible adult to accompany them on a bicycle ride this afternoon. We will be doing about 12 to 15 laps of a short, mostly flat, 1-mile circuit near here as warm up. After that, we will go up to the summit of the 4-mile long ‘El Salado’ hill.”

LOCKDOWN

Colombia, Tuesday, March 24, 2020, 11:59 P.M., Covid 19 lockdown begins.

The meaning of lockdown came swift, hitting the country as with the clank of a steel curtain door slamming against the floor. Colombia had passed one of the most stringent lockdown laws in the region. It was almost draconian. And it was strictly enforced. Special ID’s were issued to people whose jobs were considered essential, health and service providers and those in the food processing industry, to name a few. Masks were mandatory at all times. The police would set up random roadblocks checking for IDs and enforcing the mask orders. Hefty fines were issued to those not complying with the orders. No one not meeting the new norm was expected to be on the streets. Period.

As for me, not having a special ID, life almost came to a standstill. Not being able to go out in the afternoon to get my customary “tinto” (as a small black coffee is referred to in Colombia) was one of the most difficult restrictions to face! As luck would have it though, I lived in a gated community, which gave me the advantage of stepping out of the house to get a little exercise by walking around the compound. That, however, did not stop me from thinking of myself as someone under court-ordered home confinement - sans the ankle bracelet.

In Colombia, home delivery has been a common practice for many years, long before Covid appeared. And it is very cheap. Even the corner grocery store delivers whatever item is found on their shelves. If you need one pound of sugar, one pound of sugar is delivered. And ordering your groceries from the supermarket continued being as easy as a phone call away. Well, maybe not as easy. Instead of the delivery person bringing the groceries and unloading them on your kitchen counter, you had to get them at your doorstep. For me though, this became more cumbersome. I had to walk out to the gate of the housing complex, about one block! That meant changing my shoes, wearing a mask, and walking back to the house with the bags of groceries. Sometimes two trips or more. But the ordeal did not stop there. At the house, before entering, I needed to disinfect myself along with the shoes I wore to go out. And it did not stop at that. Each item, as it was taken out of the bag, had to be disinfected, too. It all was very annoying, though better than becoming one of the statistics, I used to tell myself.

All things must come to pass, however, and some six months later the government began to relax its restrictions. Initially people considered most fit, those between 20 and 50, began to be allowed out to run their errands and frequent the few businesses that were open, grocery stores, banks, etc. However, this was done according to the last digit of their ID. For example, 1 and 2 would be free to go out one day, 3 and 4 the next, digits alternating thusly on a daily basis. You

would be turned away at the door of any facility you attempted to access, if your number did not coincide with the number for that day.

At the same time, people began asking to be allowed out to exercise. Reluctantly, the government came out with a plan whereby you could go out for a specific amount of time every day. Each community was given the freedom to establish their schedules. Some cities chose the mornings, others chose the afternoons, as was the case with the town I lived in. If you wanted to go out, however, you were required to wear a mask at all times. Also, in its infinite wisdom, the government established that if you were of a certain age or older you needed to go out in the company of a younger adult. “A responsible adult” said the decree.

A BIKE RIDE

My request, as posted on the WhatsApp group chat, looking for a responsible adult to accompany me on my bike ride, got a few replies, all offering bemused chuckles, but not a single one obliging it.

When going out on my rides, alone, I took the utmost care to strictly adhere to the obligation to cover up, lest a cop, upon seeing the many wrinkles on my face, stop me and slap me with a fine.

Submitted by: Francisco C., September 2022

An Extraordinary Time

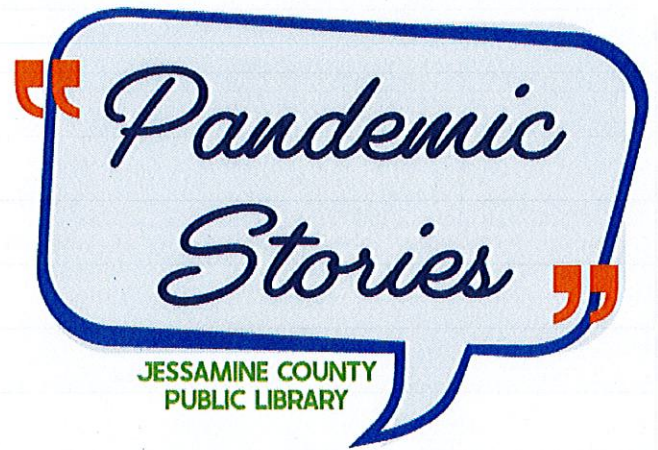
The best of times, yet still growing
Worse. A time when the
Hearse draws near too often
For the heart to bear. And yet
I find myself coming up for
Air when so many find it
Hard to breathe, whether from
A mask, Covid... or from a knee on the
Streets. My greatest of
Feats was born in these
Times, when rhymes are
Not enough. I learned to be
Tough to provide shelter for a
Molten core. The pain that I
Bore was from birth: the way that
The earth never felt right on my
Skin, where living as myself was
The ultimate sin. In these uncertain times, this
Sorrow bloomed into a voice that I no longer
Had to borrow. So tomorrow,
I can keep the faith and make my
Mark. Even in the dark,
Where funeral bells chime, I can
Say for myself, this was/is/will be
An Extraordinary Time.

Submitted by: Claire T., May 2022

Share your pandemic story
and add it to the display.

Name (optional):

E



I have always been homeschooled so I didn't have a big transition but it was almost as if I had been trapped in a time loop it wasn't boring and we had our own little adventures but I was lonely we didn't get to go to church and most of my friends are at church and if we went anywhere I practically suffocated to death! One of the only good things was that now my dad gets to work from home so I get to spend more time with him but post covid world is so different there is more internet and screen time than real world experiences that's all.

20/20 Vision

There is a saying that hindsight has 20/20 vision. When I think back to the year 2020 however, my memory of that time seems to be less clear. My mind wants to ask "did we really live through a time when our country was for all intents and purposes shut down." Did I really drive the streets of Nicholasville and see them deserted and feel I was in a scene from an apocalyptic movie? A trip to the doctor involved wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing - a phrase that evolved and became the norm. Even attending church included struggles between the faithful and the fearful. Our children were no longer able to attend school and the responsibility for their education was through remote means. Life as we had come to know it was no more.

There were, however, positive aspects that came to pass. Families were together in a way that many had never experienced. They learned to talk, laugh and play together. Board games became popular once again. The whole meaning of family became important as new ways of visiting were implemented.

My vision seems to improve, and I see now that, yes, we did live through that difficult and challenging time. We did it together and were better for it. Will the lessons we learned be remembered? Only history will reveal the answer.

Submitted by: Mavonna B., July 2022

J.D.H.
SATURDAY 25 June 2022
Jess. Public. Library

a short memoir of my *life* in the pandemic

a season of greif, a season of tearing down
a season of discovery, a season of renewal
a season of deconstruction, a season of rebuilding
a season for everything. including hope.

Submitted by: John H., June 2022

J.D.H.
SATURDAY, 25 JUNE ")
JESS. PUBLIC LIB.

an objec' *that* helped me during the pandemic

Sitcoms and books. When I'm down down I need escape

So I turn to comedy or books, shows like the office
brooklyn ninenine, parks and rec. I watch clips

of conan and letterman. till to this day. books *and*
and comedy are my escape.

Submitted by: John H., June 2022

I caught Covid (Delta Variant) late August to Early September 2021. My three children got it from school within 3 days of school starting and brought it home. The kids got slight cold like symptoms and one kid got a fever. All four of us lost our sense of taste and smell. I was eventually hospitalized for a week and a half with Covid Pneumonia and was a liter away from being placed on a vent. I went home on oxygen and was unable to work for two months after contracting bacterial pneumonia.

I am now feeling much better, even though I am what they call a long hauler (long term covid symptoms). Covid has changed my life, as I am still not able to barely smell or taste anything. I am also dealing with the fatigue and covid brain fog associated with long Covid. Covid also ended up causing me to have micro vascular disease (small vessels of the heart don't work properly). Life is definitely an adjustment after the pandemic.

Submitted by: Celestine D., May 2022

Beginning – Pandemic

As I was thinking about what to write about the Pandemic, my mind asked me, “did this terrible thing really happen”? When I look at the way we are living now it seems as normal as it was before Covid changed so many lives. People are gathering in huge numbers again at concerts, sporting events, reunions of all sorts, vacations at home and abroad, and other events.

Schools from kindergarten to colleges are back in session in person and not online. Offices have reopened their doors and employees are back to their jobs and no longer working from home. It is also unusual now to see people wearing masks when they go out of their homes to run errands or shop. I would imagine those still wearing masks are mostly seniors and/or folks with medical conditions. I’ve also noticed more of the population have had Covid. Perhaps it hasn’t been so deadly as it was in the beginning due to the shots people have received.

If I allow myself to go back in time and think of all that has happened, I remember how afraid most of us were of this new disease. We knew nothing about it except what the news media was telling us. Even they couldn’t agree on the origin, how it was spread, or how we could be safe. When the CDC and pharmaceutical companies were working frantically on what the disease was and how to come up with a medicine that could stop it, the public had different opinions on what should be done. Some who would take the shots compared it to the polio epidemic. Others, who would not believe the disease was serious, said it was just like a cold or the flu and were not concerned.

We were told to wear masks, stay 6 feet away from each other (except for family members who lived in the same household), We were asked to stay at home as much as possible and not to gather in large numbers. Everyone was feeling their way through this pandemic and trying to make the best decisions to keep their families safe.

One of the most difficult things of being isolated happened to folks in medical facilities or nursing homes and their families. These loved ones couldn’t be with each other in person, which meant no physical contact for people who needed to be held and comforted. A lot of people who died, did so alone with no loved one with them, and their loved ones felt the pain of not being able to say goodbye in person.

Chuck and I were lucky in our isolation because we loved each other and enjoyed each other’s company. We each had things to do that occupied our time at home. He took care of the yard and worked in the garage, two things that gave him satisfaction. We did crossword puzzles, watched tv, read, and talked/texted family and friends to see how they were getting along.

Looking back, I realize another negative during this time was the political scene. Donald Trump and his followers caused so much turmoil with his so called leadership. Neither of us voted for him but we made the decision that he was our President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief, and we would respect and support his office. Fast forward to Trump’s time in office and we had both come to despise this man and all the negativity and division he was causing the people of our country. We tried to stay away from the news as much as possible, but could not turn on tv or radio without hearing some divisive thing he had done or said.

Chuck needed to vent his frustration with President Trump and since he wasn't able to be with his men friends to talk about the situation, he would tell me how he felt. I was so disgusted with Trump and actions of his followers, and how so many people could not see the evilness of this man, that I would get upset and tell Chuck I was tired of hearing about Trump...even from him. Of course, that left him with no one to talk to and he had to keep his frustration inside and not be able to express his feelings.

In July, 2021, Chuck was diagnosed with cancer, endured his chemo treatments, had Hospice come into our home to help with his care, and passed away quietly in December, 2021. I have had time to think about regrets and things I might have done differently to help him deal with all that was going on with him. For sure, if I had it to do over, I would have been more sensitive to his feelings and to not let Trump win again with his negative speeches and actions. The fallout from this President's time in office caused so many families and friends to turn against each other. There was no compromise on any problem or situation. You either did things his way or you were wrong. I'm sorry I fell into his deceitful "game". Hopefully, I learned a lesson to be myself and be good to my family and others and no let other people decide for me what to do.

Submitted by: Anonymous, September 2022

Chucky from Kentucky: Living with Death

Whenever I write of Chucky from Kentucky, I think of Joan Didion and her “Year of Magical Thinking”. How do you mourn the living dead? I know he is ash, but all I see is a face perpetually crimson with sunburn. I cannot go home without his ghost saying my name from his comfy chair. Why aren’t his tractor shows on the T.V.? Why is the screen so dark?

My birthday is coming up soon. The part that holds his memory hostage is waiting for him to call. I can hear the off-tune melody, “Happy Birthday, to you. Happy Birthday, to you.” Will the circle be unbroken when the call doesn’t come? Or will I hum along for him? “Happy Birthday, to me. Happy birthday...”

My brother and I used to bond over his repetitiveness. “He always tells the same stories, over and over!” he would say. But I didn’t pay close enough attention, and they’re slipping away. I cling to them with claws sinking, slipping through sands of time. I’d give anything to hear them all again. Maybe I’ll ask him to tell me one, when he calls.

I’m falling, slowly, without time or space to breathe. A four-wheeler lands on me, or it doesn’t. I am not there to feel it. When the light returns, he is there. When my own mind forces me to the bottom of a bottle, then an emergency room, he is there. There’s no time for a shower, so he doesn’t take one. Speed limits are suggestions intended for anyone but him. Why is it taking him so long to call now?

The call will not come. The call will not come. The call WILL NOT come.

...

And yet, it must come. He’s always been there for me before.

Submitted by: Claire T., July 2022

LET'S MAKE A TIME CAPSULE!

Over the past couple of years, we've lived through a big event in history: the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the future, kids will wonder what this time was like for all of us so we should share our stories! Use the questions below to think about the Pandemic with your grown-up and then write a couple of sentences or draw pictures to share your story.

THINK ABOUT IT!

A pandemic happens when a disease or virus (like COVID-19) spreads to many different places around the world and makes many people sick. It can be a scary time, but there are many people who make it better like doctors, nurses, scientists, teachers, parents, and essential workers. Think about the questions below as you tell your own story about the pandemic.

DID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CHANGE ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE? DID SCHOOL LOOK DIFFERENT?

WHO ARE SOME HEROES WHO HELPED MAKE THE PANDEMIC BETTER? WHY DO YOU LOOK UP TO THEM? (A DOCTOR, TEACHER, PARENT? SOMEONE ELSE?)

A LOT OF PEOPLE SPENT MORE TIME AT HOME OVER THE PAST COUPLE OF YEARS TO MAKE SURE THEY DID NOT GET SICK. DID YOU LEARN A NEW SKILL OR GAME WHILE AT HOME DURING THE PANDEMIC?

MANY PEOPLE WORE MASKS DURING THE PANDEMIC. DID YOU WEAR A MASK? WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT IT?

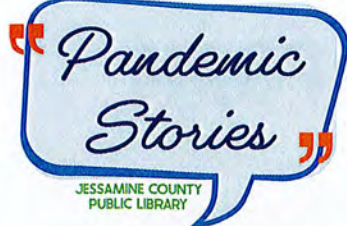
WE USED VIRTUAL LEARNING AND VIDEO PHONE CALLS A LOT DURING THE PANDEMIC TO LEARN AND TALK TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY. DID YOU LIKE DOING THIS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

TELL YOUR STORY!

WRITE OR DRAW YOUR STORY IN THE SPACE PROVIDED HERE:

Back when the
pandemic had just started
we would turn on music
out side and our
nabors would come outside
and we would all dance!

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TELL YOUR STORY!

WRITE OR DRAW YOUR STORY IN THE SPACE PROVIDED HERE:

The Covid 19 virus changed the way we went to school, we had to wear masks and we were not allowed to be in the school building for months.

My teachers and my mom cause they helped me a lot with reading, math and literature. Yes I learned to mold clay into art.

I wore a mask it was

annoying.

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I did not like virtual learning.

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mask!
where
had to
We had covid and we

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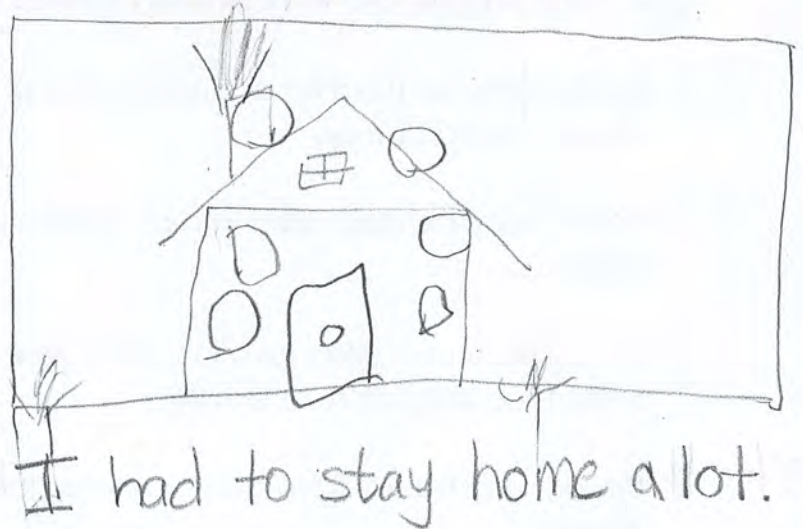
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We wore masks.

Don't get too close to people.

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I did not see
my friends
at school.
and we had
to wear masks

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I stayed home and did Virtual learning. I Played Costumes and made lots of Crafts for my family. I love to dress up as Batman!

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WE USED VIRTUAL LEARNING AND VIDEO PHONE CALLS A LOT DURING THE PANDEMIC TO LEARN AND TALK TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY. DID YOU LIKE DOING THIS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

TELL YOUR STORY!

WRITE OR DRAW YOUR STORY IN THE SPACE PROVIDED HERE:

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If you want to contribute to our digital Pandemic Stories Project record, we will scan your child's story/drawing to include it. Just fill out the submission form on the reverse of this sheet.

LET'S MAKE A TIME CAPSULE!

Over the past couple of years, we've lived through a big event in history: the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the future, kids will wonder what this time was like for all of us so we should share our stories! Use the questions below to think about the Pandemic with your grown-up and then write a couple of sentences or draw pictures to share your story.

THINK ABOUT IT!

A pandemic happens when a disease or virus (like COVID-19) spreads to many different places around the world and makes many people sick. It can be a scary time, but there are many people who make it better like doctors, nurses, scientists, teachers, parents, and essential workers. Think about the questions below as you tell your own story about the pandemic.

DID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CHANGE ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE? DID SCHOOL LOOK DIFFERENT?

WHO ARE SOME HEROES WHO HELPED MAKE THE PANDEMIC BETTER? WHY DO YOU LOOK UP TO THEM? (A DOCTOR, TEACHER, PARENT? SOMEONE ELSE?)

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WRITE OR DRAW YOUR STORY IN THE SPACE PROVIDED HERE:

Back when the
pandemic had just started
we would turn on music
out side and our
nabors would come outside
and we would all dance!

If you want to contribute to our digital Pandemic Stories Project record, we will scan your child's story/drawing to include it. Just fill out the submission form on the reverse of this sheet.

asdfjkl;
~~2022-06-25~~

2

Dear 2020
Thank you for the sunrise each morning
and the sunset each night

When the world takes a rest
from the regular routine
some things remain the same

Steady rhythm
Solid footing
to see us through the change

Submitted by: Jonathan A., June 2022

The most frustrating part of the pandemic would have to be losing three of my grandparents. The first one, my paternal grandfather passed away and we had to watch his funeral via webcast. The disconnect was real and surreal. My grandmother passed away six months later. She was a great cook and very quiet unless correcting my grandfather on the facts of a story he was getting wrong. Then my paternal grandfather died in MAY of this year. That one hurt not just because that was my last grandparent to pass away but he went out of his way to teach me things that other adults in my life failed to do. It was a rough couple of weeks after that. It also occurred to me that my next step up the life ladder had ~~eee~~ happened with that event.

Submitted by: Jonathan A., June 2022

Pandemic Stories Project: Loss and Separation

It was a dark time, a time of death, despair, sadness and loss. Death and the politics of death were upon us. There was isolation everywhere, lives were breaking; some in an instance, a cataclysmic barrage of screams and rage; others in slow ebbs and tears, in stonewalls and cold silences that kill a soul, rob a heart of warmth and joy. A time of death but not necessarily by COVID-19.

There is only one answer for me to the question, ‘what happened to you when COVID-19 shut down the world?’ I got divorced. This came as a complete and utter shock to me. Many spouses have been surprised by that but this happened to landed in my lap when the world exploded which was interesting.

At the time I worked in a department that was of the opinion that we could not be shut down because we processed payments; we were wrong. We found out, as many others did, that we could and would work remotely. The order to go home came in late March 2020 and I was excited. I had always wanted to work remotely; I was going to be with my family every day, all day, this was going to be awesome. Those were my thoughts on Thursday 3/19/20. I worked remotely on Friday.

On Sunday we got online for a remote service, another first that we thought would never happen. After the service, we joined in online games and facetime with other church members. In one session, a friend pipes up “I wonder how many divorces will happen due to this forced together time.” I chuckled and looked across the room to see my wife’s face turn pale and freeze. I thought that was odd but there were many odd things in our relationship and I had learned to or chosen not to ask questions.

That afternoon out of the blue she says we need to go visit our friends right now. Okay, that’s cool, it’ll be good to get out of the house. When we get there, we don’t even sit when she states she has to go and I’ll come along with my friend. My mind is spinning now, coming where? On the drive to church, as it turns out, my friend asks if I want to save my marriage? Now I’m freaking out, my marriage, yes but why? I am ready to do whatever it takes but what’s going on? Just remember that when we get there, he says.

My priest and my wife were waiting for us at church. I am officially terrified now. She hands me a letter that I read and the main items I remember are ‘I regret marrying you’, and ‘I want a divorce.’ It was long letter with 20+ years of resentments and failures documented from a very dark place. It crushed me, a blow out of the blue. By the end of the meeting, I was on my way to being divorced. I slept at my parent’s house that night. I came from a very excited high on Thursday 3/19/20 to an extreme low by Sunday 3/22/20.

Globally, the rest of 2020 and 2021 were as chaotic as any other period of humanity; there was a pandemic, wars, politics, race problems, a container ship got stuck in Egypt and non-governmental space flight took off. Personally, it was therapy sessions, awkward dinners, uncomfortable church services, lawyer calls and more. Some of the darkest times in my life. Toward the end of 2021 the papers were signed and finalized in March 2022, so a full cycle in two years.

There was grace through all this. I was given stronger relationships with family members like my parents, siblings, extended family that I did not know loved me. I built stronger and new relationships with friends that led to a deeper life. I deepened my faith walk, which to be honest was not guaranteed. It turned out to be a wonderful period of growth, I completed some grueling sporting events and started a new job. I was not abandoned; my kids were taken care of. Before this sounds like a testimonial, all is not well; I still have resentment and I am working on deep issues that led me to this place but there is peace even in darkness.

2022 has been living into a new life, facing the living death that is divorce and still breathing. We have a different relationship and that's okay. At the moment, we do much together, my priest once commented that we spend more time together as family than many families he knows. We have adopted a lifestyle that allows stability for us and our kids. This is working for us today and tomorrow belongs only to God.

COVID-19 did not cause the separation, but it may have intensified and quickened what was already on the way. The last two years have been tremendously painful and my pain has been mirrored in others. My friends and family have suffered one loss or another. Yet there is hope. I can say I am grateful for the pain for its birthed something new. I have grown and learned to say, "God is doing for me what I cannot do for myself" and that is as it should be. I wouldn't trade this life, this is who I am, this is where God would have me. I can trust Him.

Submitted by: C. K., August 2022

This is a new typewriter
I have trouble with spaces
This is red.

how how do e s this thing work/?
So this is how it works..

Well, there are many things that we all wish we knew before the pandemic started. as a borderline hypercondriatic, many of my physical interactions were already limited. The thing that that was so surprising was how close we allowed ourselves to exist in one another's breathing space.

The pandemic started when my partner was at Sundance Film Festival in Utah. There were talks of an air borne virus in China and there were rumors that it was something that hadn't been seen before. At one point, I had sent my partner an article and said to be careful while they're there because of her proximity to an international event. She made it back without being sick but news on it started to pick up. We ultimately both got COVID but

oddly enough, it was at the same time but in different locations.

There were some disappointing things that occurred in my job that allowed me to contract the virus. being in a NOC made us very susceptible to catching anything due to the open floor plan and the bullheaded nature of working beside the military. The military side of the work felt it was their duty to continue working in person as you can only be saving the world if someone sees you doing it. The company I worked for felt we should do the same despite having remote capabilities. It didn't help that we worked so close to St. Louis.

Most of my apprehension was developed early on in my life from reading Michael Crichton's "Andromeda Strain" and an appreciation for zombie movies. The concept of molecular chaos was amplified during my time in the military. The biggest fear, we were trained to believe, was chemical warfare. There was a large segment of training dedicated to protecting yourself from chemical attacks. If "Andromeda Strain" hadn't steered me towards sanitation, my experience on deployment re-emphasised the importance of sanitation in close quarters.

One Pandemic Story: The Mental Toll

I admit, if I had been paying more attention to the news and to my loving and ever news-conscious best friend, I may have seen it coming more than I did. Looking back, I remember the warnings from my best friend, going back to late December of 2019 and into the new year, about the international virus that he was very worried was coming for us all. But my life was already so busy and everything he was telling me seemed so far away. In December of 2019, I graduated from college with my bachelor's degree. I was one half of a very young married couple that was struggling everyday just to try and build something resembling a happy life. We were very poor and living in a (very, very) small town called Kirksville, just 15 minutes outside of Richmond Ky, and I had just spent the past semester commuting over 3 hours a day, five days a week to finish my degree at Morehead State, while also working two jobs on campus, while my husband began working at Eastern Kentucky University and began his graduate program. We were already exhausted when 2020 began. It was my husband's second semester of graduate school, and I began my first semester in a different graduate program and working at Eastern Kentucky University. Everyday was busy. We collapsed into a routine that left us exhausted at the end of every day. The weekdays were spent mostly at work or school and ended usually late into the evening, with a quick run through a drive thru for dinner or collapsing onto the couch and eating something that could be made in no more than 15-20 minutes. From there, there was usually schoolwork to be done or, if we were lucky, some quick time to decompress with a show or video game before falling asleep to repeat the next day. Weekends were usually just as busy because that was the only time we had for anything that fell out of our work and school responsibilities.

We trudged along each day and by the time March came, we were desperately waiting for Spring Break, a week of recovery and excitement for us, as we intended to buy a new car that week. The week rolled around and that's just what we did. We rested, we visited with friends and family with whom we'd had little time for lately, and we bought a new car! It was a good week for us and I didn't pay much attention to the news. But as the end of the week neared, I remember my husband telling me about something called the Coronavirus and I began seeing the news articles and social media posts appear in mass on my phone. I felt confusion and worry but it wasn't until I got the email from my university that I truly started to see the magnitude of the situation. Spring Break was being extended. No more work or class for another week, due to concerns about the Coronavirus. That was the beginning. I never returned to my office or to a classroom that semester. In the blink of an eye, everything changed. I went from someone who left the house everyday to working and going to school exclusively online and in my own home. At first, I enjoyed being home. I enjoyed the break as things shifted to an online setting. However, other people in my life were feeling the negative effects much quicker and faster. My husband has a disabled aunt with two teenage kids and the stress of having them home around the clock was already proving to be quite taxing to her health. She needed a break, for her own physical health. Just like that, we had two teenagers living in our spare bedroom. At the time, I was just about to turn 22 and felt just barely detached from being a teenager myself. I felt wholly unequipped to be taking on this task and felt a great deal of responsibility for these kids who I knew really needed someone in their corner. I also felt a tremendous amount of anxiety and worry over every aspect of caring for them and the longer they were there, and the worse my mental health was, the worse

my anxieties were. It wasn't long until I could feel the effects of my already existing depression dive to new depths. As spring turned to summer, so began the depression that still at the time of writing this, has never fully dissolved. It was hard to do anything. I was home constantly and yet my house was a mess because I could never muster the energy to clean it. I felt as if I should have more time for things like cooking at home and yet, I could hardly manage it at all. Just the economic effects of this depression are shocking, as the primary outlets of joy and comfort in those months seemed to come from ordering food or random things we 'needed' from Amazon. I could see online the other people sharing about their similar struggles but even still, I told myself I shouldn't feel this way and I was riddled with guilt about everything I wasn't doing or accomplishing that I felt like I should be. I saw so many stories of people starting their own business or picking up a new hobby or redecorating or renovating their homes. Meanwhile, I couldn't do any of that. I could barely exist every day. It didn't help that my personal life continued to change just as quickly as everything in the world seemed to be. Before summer ended, the teenagers were gone and back with my husband's aunt. When the school semester began again, I found that things just weren't the same as before. I was struggling to keep up with what had seemed so easy just the semester before. I had also lost all my motivation and passion for my degree. I just couldn't bear to do it anymore, to go back to how busy and lifeless things had been before. So early into the semester, I decided to take a break from school.

Truthfully, I could write for a very long time about all the eventful and in many cases traumatic events that have taken place just in my own life since the pandemic began, some more directly pandemic related than others. But all the stories I could tell you would likely lead you to similar conclusions about my pandemic experience: my life has been changed forever. Looking at my life now, it is almost nothing like it was before the pandemic. It's only really been in the last six months I've felt like my mental health has really improved. Through a lot of hard work, patience, and tears, I am a stronger person than I was before the pandemic. I've learned a lot about myself and my ability to persevere. However, I do mourn many things from my life before the pandemic and I'm still working every day to find my 'normal'.

My experience is not dissimilar from the stories of many others. Many people struggled and were affected in so many ways and disenfranchised individuals with inadequate support systems were hit particularly hard. The effect of the pandemic on the minds and on the lives of individuals will continue to be felt for years to come.

Submitted by: Casey N., August 2022

My first 2 years of high school, my freshman and sophomore years are mostly a blur. I can recall very strenuous times within my family. We were experiencing hardship like we never had before. Some of my siblings were staying with my aunts and others with uncles. My family split up as it became increasingly difficult for my mother to navigate the ins and outs of raising children even through the hardest of times. Watching her mental and physical health crumble made it extremely difficult to enjoy an 'average teenage life.' Most of the hardships we faced were out of our control and my siblings and I did not start to see true change in pace until the end of my junior year. When my junior year had ended, I was very hopeful throughout the summer, and my mom was starting to make necessary changes to improve our lifestyles, and to be better for herself. Considering the new beginnings, I felt very relieved that what seemed like years of challenging times were ending. I blossomed into a better person, as I had already been working two jobs and saving for my very first car. As senior year came about, I was more than excited. Ready to take on the entire world and jump into the last year of high school before the real world. My senior year was nice, but nothing short of what it could have amounted to. All the hard days, work put in, and long sleepless nights, (where dropping out felt like the only plausible option) never received proper recognition, or at least a last Hoo-rah. The pandemic of Covid-19, seriously added to the dramatics of a stressful life and a hopeful year. There is pain and frustration in knowing you may be the only one in your family to never have had a proper graduation, feeling like the oddball out. To have never experienced a graduation party or celebrated with all your peers also comes with the loss of lifelong memories. I gained an overwhelming sense of anxiety in my senior year and only recently has the feelings of it all started to subside. Regardless of a rough end to the year, the summer before I took off to college strengthened the bonds I shared with my mom and siblings. We took a trip to the lake at least once every week, ate smores at home, and enjoyed the splashing safari created by the garden hose in the backyard. I had not seen a summer that fun since 2016. I bombed my first year of college the following school year. Because Covid was still new and being taken seriously as so, the colleges were shut down and it made it exceedingly difficult for me to stay on the right track and focus on getting work done. My mom and siblings were now 3 counties away, and I still had not gotten my car. I became extremely homesick and felt as if I had little to no support. It is easy to blame the pandemic, or even scapegoat the situation, but it did force a lot more people and businesses into isolation and waves of depression. The pandemic truly had a significant impact on everyone around, and the light at the end is how hard we all have worked to get back out here and prosper despite all the trials and tribulations. Although the first year of college was a mess for me amidst the pandemic, I never gave up and I have continued to grow even outside of my college education. I am at a very content place in my life and a part of me does believe without the push of the pandemic, there's certain aspects of my life I would have remained stagnant in.

Submitted by: Juana S., August 2022

My COVID Journey

Have you ever been held under water, on purpose? It's a frightening feeling. You lose all sense of place and security. You forfeit control. You struggle...to breathe, see a stream of light, or fight your way to the surface into reality. My personal journey leading up to, during and after COVID has been a lot like the helplessness you feel while being held under water.

The arrival of this silent monster and the ongoing battle to understand it, eradicate it and accept its devastating mark on all of us is, at its basic core, like that suffocating experience of being held under water with seemingly no escape route. At first it seemed unbelievable that such a small, invisible droplet could contain something as sinister as a virus that continues to wreak havoc wherever it makes its debut. It invades bodies and brings an end to so many parts of our lives that seemed untouchable by such a foreign invader...a war waged on home soil that, according to authorities, had its origin in a lab in China.

Near the beginning of the COVID pandemic, I had relocated to Lexington to be nearer my daughter. She invited me to live with her as I was "starting over" to regain my sense of self after my dad died. The resulting pandemonium and family dysfunction surrounding my dad's death was the precursor to the pandemic that swept our country and so many others. The vulnerability that left me and unimaginable numbers of others on edge and full of anxiety, was the beginning of a battle we were all very unprepared to fight.

I got a job with a large retail grocery corporation that put me on the frontlines of this scary battlefield. The ongoing fear of "catching" this virus, even with mandated safety protocols in place, created a monster of fear that followed me and everyone else on a daily basis. IT was unnerving doing a job that exposed me to a large number of people every day, that may or may not have been an unsuspecting carrier that could infect myself or others.

One day I asked a customer, who was Native American, what he thought of the situation, and he said he believed the media and our government were making us afraid of ourselves. It was a simple enough theory that stuck with me, and in the days, months, and years that followed, proved to be true. We became afraid of ourselves, others and our world in general.

Masks, physical barriers in places of business, social distancing and disinfecting common surfaces all became our "new normal". Life suddenly became scary and unpredictable as schools, restaurants, businesses, churches and other public and private areas limited in-person contact. Schools began implementing "virtual" learning for students at home. Vaccines and boosters were created to reduce our risk of getting this horrible disease, yet even now, to hear someone cough, or get closer than six feet away from us, makes us suspect they could be a carrier and infect us with the dreaded disease.

As COVID became more and more of an imminent threat, my daughter who is a surgical nurse, was, on a daily basis, performing her job in an environment that put her and others in the medical field at risk. As a result of the new challenges required to protect herself, other medical staff and patients, she developed a written procedure for safely dressing and getting prepped before entering the operating room. I was proud of her for creating this procedure to protect herself and

her coworkers. She was consistently on COVID call, which required her to be at the hospital within 30 minutes. We were both concerned she would bring the virus home with her and we would contract the disease. Thankfully, we have both stayed healthy. Tension, stress and an ongoing state of hypervigilance saw those in the medical profession rethink their careers and numbers of them left the field. Medical facilities, as well as those in the medical field, found themselves forced to conform to a whole new set of protocols designed to protect them and those in their care.

We were regularly screened for COVID at our places of employment, public spaces, and especially medical facilities, before being admitted. Seeing a doctor was something we did, and still continue to do, over a computer. Although mask mandates have been lifted two years later, the thought of being infected stays at the forefront of our thoughts as we step outside our homes and out of our comfort zones.

I know it seems strange, but COVID has been a blessing by being a catalyst for me personally, and hopefully others, to step outside ourselves and reevaluate those things that are most important to us as we walk our journeys here on Earth. COVID has forced me to look inside myself, at the authentic core of ME, in all my mess. I have experienced highs, lows and everything in between during this unexpected interruption. I am going to CHOOSE to embrace and reframe the COVID experience as the beginning of the end, the end of FEAR, intolerance, and self-absorption, to name a few, and look toward a future that will be forever altered, good or bad, by this imposed threat. My sister often asks me, and these observations may or may not be credited to her, “How is that workin’ out for you?”, and “Stop looking in the rear-view mirror”. That’s a pretty good advice for how we can all move forward into the life we were created to live. Afterall, God IS in control, and we were meant to trust His plan and timing. Rest Easy.

“For God has NOT given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of Power, Love and a Sound Mind (self-discipline).” 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)

Submitted by: Millicent O., August 2022

As the Covid-19 pandemic began, I was working in a hospital setting. From the role I had, I was aware of the seriousness of the illness (I know personal friends who had the virus and some died from complications.), yet I was also privy to and a witness to the manipulation of data that hospitals, the government, and the media presented to the public. Having been in the healthcare field for over twenty years, I had seen many changes in how care was provided. For-profit and not-for-profit facilities had become more about the bottom line on a balance sheet than about the line on an EKG. The pandemic and the shutdowns intensified financial concerns for everyone, and healthcare would never be the same.

Due to the shutdowns, hospitals and their satellite services began to reduce services such as non-emergent surgeries and routine office visits. These actions produced a domino-effect of lost jobs for healthcare workers and poorer care for patients. Then, there seemed to be ever-changing protocols for the remaining workers who were sick or possibly infected with the virus. Societal shutdowns also had a trickle-down effect and the closing of schools and daycares resulted in tough choices for whether a parent would stay home with children and lose employment or continue to work and not have childcare. A shortage in medical staffing was reported, yet open positions remained unfilled even after job-seekers completed applications. Confusion and a questioning of the presented narrative would become the new standard in employment.

The entire situation was frustrating and everyone seemed to talk about “getting back to normal.” Well, there was no going back to the way society was before the pandemic and nothing would ever be the same again. The near-hysteria brought on by quarantines divided society even more.

I have always had a very positive personality, yet I am often skeptical of people and situations. I generally question motives and reasons behind actions. It also frustrates me when people do not think independently and take most information that is presented to them at face-value. The result of the pandemic that has amazed me the most is the lack of individual critical thinking on the part of the population. The pandemic has resulted in my being more discerning and leier of any information that is presented to me; I feel there is more often than not an element of deception that the government and media present and that there is constantly an underlying agenda for everything.

The changing face and structure of healthcare led me to retire early after twenty-seven-plus years of working in a career I once truly enjoyed. I now feel a sense of disillusionment of many things for which I once felt secure and meaningful in life. For me, and I think the world as whole, the pandemic has made people more fearful and less trusting, and society has become more cynical. I guess that is the new normal and it makes me sad.

Submitted by: Mark H., May 2022