

Covid 19 Pandemic

By Dr. Jodi Decker

On March 15th, 2020, my life hit the pause button. On that day, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey shut the state down, due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit the U.S. sometime in late January. With these stay-at-home orders, shelter in place, we could only do necessary grocery shopping, visit the doctor or pharmacy, or participate in social distancing exercise outside our homes. The exceptions were people deemed essential workers, such as police, fire, medical, sanitation, and food-workers. Restaurants converted to take-out and delivery, only. Amazon delivered any other consumables you could think of.

As a college teacher, my onground classes had to be converted to online classes in a matter of 3 weeks. Some students simply could not do this conversion, due to changes in their family or work circumstances. Some college teachers started a “movement” to “teach badly,” as some sort of rebellion against this left turn. I pushed and shoved my students through the class, spinning it as don’t let the pandemic disrupt your education plans. It was like putting lipstick on a pig. I debated, and I’m sure they did, too, how important college was in the midst of quarantining, spotty wi-fi, families in crisis, and having to learn in a new modality. Not to mention the stress of people dying and getting sick. Personally, I was grateful, and guilty, for being one of the “ones” who had a work-at-home income, even if I despised sitting at a computer all day long.

Medically, as a post-cancer survivor, I fretted about potential infection with a compromised immune system. I wore masks, social distanced, disinfected my home, avoided crowds, washed my fruits and vegetables. And, I never left my home, for virtually two months solid. Thankfully grocery delivery took care of food needs; thank-you essential workers. I spent sleepless nights terrified that my self-employed husband would contract something and bring it home, either becoming ill himself, infecting me, or both of us dying in our beds. I watched the news cycle obsessively 24/7, like a trainwreck, trying to know, and understand, and avoid, and control the unknown.

I seethed and raged at those who denied or refused to follow social distancing, wear masks, or protest shut down orders responsibly. How dare you presume your right to protest denies my right to be safe? Morally reprehensible, selfish, and ignorant. We have no-smoking bans, no shoes-no service bans in private businesses, and sometimes laws and policies are put into place to protect everyone and inhibit personal behavior. Even as states begin to open up, I fear the risks of a second wave of pandemic victims. I believe that health policies should be mandatory in this time period in history.

Protestors branded themselves “patriots.” Politicians rode the fence between protecting public safety versus opening up the economy again. The economic reality took its toll...unemployment, food lines, businesses shutting down. Government stimulus checks have been issued to tie families over, roughly in the amount of \$1200 per person. Now there are reports of increasing mental health issues including suicide, domestic violence, divorce, child abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse—and an increase in fatal traffic accidents. The grieving process became complicated by the inability to hold public funerals beyond small intimate family groups; weddings got cancelled and postponed.

As fears increased, grocery stores had to restock a run on supplies—particularly toilet paper, bleach, and disinfectants, hoarded by anxious consumers. Then they began to set limits on purchases, rationing high-demand products. Unfortunately, some carpet baggers preyed on consumers, gouging astronomical prices for common supplies.

New vocabulary was added to our vernacular—“social distancing,” and “zoomed out,” which is too much use of online technology. Even popular newscasts and t.v. talk shows quickly adapted and went full-on zoom for broadcasts. Teachers and students did zoom classes to get through the school year, for the fortunate families; others were quickly indoctrinated into the world of homeschooling. Even children in the foster care system were relegated to zoom parental visits, while foster parents comforted or cajoled small children into participating. Social media memes and parody songs abounded, poking fun at quarantining challenges. Healthcare workers became the new “heroes,” and deservedly so, many of them succumbing to the illness themselves. Some cities arranged nightly times to applaud the workers. Some healthcare workers gave up and committed suicide; the toll of human tragedy, lack of resources, and endless stress simply too much.

Mask etiquette became a “thing.” If you had to be out and about, non-mask wearers were subject to verbal abuse or refusal of service. Some non-mask wearers became ugly and belligerent, demanding their right to service. Mask wearers did the mask two-step, skirting around and avoiding the non-mask wearers in store aisles, or swerving around other outdoor walkers. Or, if two mask-wearers approached each other quickly, you would see them quickly snap up lowered masks in a mutual show of respect.

More pedestrian and cosmetic concerns arose...after two months at home, many people were itching for a simple haircut, a pedicure, or boasted about gaining the “covid-19,” or 19 pounds. On the other hand, online classes abounded for fitness workouts...yoga, dance classes, and some covid detainees determined to get fitter in their isolation.

People got bored with constant media exposure and nothing to do, and an everything-is-old-is-new again philosophy started trending. Hot topics were gardening, backyard chickens, baking,

cooking, in a return to greater self-sufficiency. Grocery stores sold out of yeast. Puzzles became the number one toy ordered. As people confronted their own boredom and lack of mental stimulation, mindfulness and meditation classes became more readily available to soothe the restless soul. Speaking of soul, churches went all online, and those that chose to open their doors in defiance of shut down orders were ostracized for endangering their worshippers.

To be honest, when the shutdown started, I saw it as a paid staycation. Finally, no early-rising, commuting, dress-up, you name it. After 60 plus days of this, even the uni-bomber would crave human interaction. I contemplated that human confinement isn't a new condition. For centuries, before electricity and heating, humans survived long cold winters housebound, or were driven inside by prior pandemics. Women were customarily and modestly confined due to pregnancy or childbirth. Our ancestors had the physical and mental fortitude to endure long periods of confinement or even separation from family members due to wars, or work, or necessary travel for resources. What did they do? They read the Bible. They journaled. They wrote letters. They crafted. They played instruments. This was when they weren't focused on their very survival, of course, hunting or planting, or raising families, or protecting themselves from enemies. Clearly they were able to accept, if not embrace, their solitude. The ebb and flow of human interaction was managed, somehow.

We rankle at our confinement, even with all the technical diversions at our disposal. However, some in poverty literally are in survival mode daily, trying to find food, water, shelter, and medical treatment.

I have no confidence in the current president, who botched the handling of this pandemic early on, and continues to blame-shift and create chaos politically, socially, and spiritually. I believe that history will take a very long, dark view of the lack of leadership in a time of crisis, among the many other atrocities this forever impeached and tainted man did to this country.

There have been many moments, acts of grace in the midst of suffering. People helping others—shopping for them, running errands, nurses holding up phones to the ears of patients so families could say their final “I love yous” and “good-byes.” Many people becoming sharply aware of the things they've taken for granted in life, and particularly the people they live with, and work with, and interact with on a daily basis.

Many suggest that life will never be the same again. What that looks like isn't completely predictable. It may mean increased medical surveillance, testing, changes in human behavior, changes in policies, or perhaps the optimism of a vaccine and a new lease on life. Covid-19, corona virus, the pandemic, has ever changed the lives, globally, of everyone on this planet.