

## Surviving Lockdown And How Catholic School Prepared Me For The Pandemic!

I am at an age where I have not been traumatized by the Pandemic and Quarantine. My husband and I are white, middle class and are retired, and our income has not changed. Social Security checks arrive on time and investments have gone up and down as usual, a roller coaster I have adjusted to for many years, and I have learned to be patient. We have no children at home, so we are not juggling working at home, monitoring virtual learning for a six-year-old, while keeping a toddler busy. We can only imagine how our son would have dodged Zoom math classes and managed to merge Super Mario Brothers with English classes. We are thankful he is an adult and living elsewhere. We have been spared much of the angst that Quarantine has dispersed.

We have however been holed up in our house for a year. I reorganized our pantry last March, and now it needs to be done again because we use it a lot these days. We hunt around the shelves, sometimes searching for a new recipe ingredient, sometimes rummaging for a snack, hoping that something new and exciting has arrived, or perhaps rediscovered from hiding these last 12 months.

Spending more time in the house has left me time to see what's wrong with it or begin to look at some long-forgotten projects. So far, I purchased a new chair for the living room, got new bedding for our bedroom, redecorated a bathroom and painted the laundry room. The bathroom project included painting the walls with stripes, a new shower curtain and pieces of art. The laundry room project unfortunately required moving the washer and dryer which was accompanied by a great deal of toil and sweat in putting them back. The new light fixture and yellow paint has brightened up the room and we have recovered from the aches and pains that resulted from these DIY projects. Anything else that we find is wrong with the house will be corrected by professionals.

Avoiding the virus was the harder task, but what I learned in 13 years of Catholic School was a good preparation. For as long as I can remember, I have been a rule follower. Just tell me what I am supposed to do, and I will usually do it. It keeps my world orderly and it generally works for me. In the beginning of the Pandemic and subsequent lockdown, we were told not to touch things or people, to wash our hands, use sanitizer, stay six feet apart, then we were told to wear a mask.

When in school, we had to sit at our desks with hands folded, walk single file, be quiet, do our work. All the nuns made sure we followed the rules and it was my main goal not to cross them. Back then the consequences of not following the rules could lead to anything from getting my knuckles cracked to eternal damnation. So, I made sure I followed the rules and most days it worked!

With the Covid 19 the consequence of not following the rules is sickness or death. So, I have made sure to follow the rules. My hands have never been so clean! My first time in a grocery store, during senior hours, I used my sanitizing wipes, quickly made my selections, and turned

my cart away from the woman who was coughing endlessly. I swore I could see the virus all around me and quickly made my way out of the store. I wear my mask religiously and have only recently gone to indoor dining because I am fully vaccinated. I will only patronize restaurants that adhere to the 50% capacity restriction.

The biggest loss for me was not making my annual trip to Ireland. While I understand this is a small sacrifice compared to the loss of loved ones and the economic toll this has taken, it hit more than other concessions I had to make. What I did to compensate was take day trips to small towns in New Jersey, where we could partake of outside dining and nice walks. I called it our "Not Ireland Tour."

We were lucky in getting vaccine appointments. We live in a retirement community and our activities director sent us the Ocean County Health Department website the day it opened. We got appointments for early February in Toms River. The process was well organized and very efficient. We had few side effects and are relieved to have immunity. We tried to help others get appointments and were not so lucky. I understand that this was not an easy task to get everyone vaccinated, and glitches were to be expected. It seemed to take the state awhile to rectify the oversight of the elderly, who could not manage navigating websites during the day, let alone at 2 a.m. Sixty-five-year-olds could more easily get appointments than those over 75.

Our neighbor is 85 and has pulmonary and mobility issues. A friend got her an appointment at the Convention Center in Atlantic City, a good 45 minutes away. That trip would tire her out, then her husband would have to put her in a wheel chair, park the car, find her again and then wheel her into a long line. I made calls to the local hospital about getting her on their list, and then called Congressman Andy Kim's office to see what else we could do. A staff member immediately returned my call, genuinely listened to my concerns and gave me a senior center number to call. The next day he called again, but we had just learned that the hospital called my neighbor and gave her an appointment for that afternoon. I later called Andy Kim's office to thank them for their efforts. I am thoroughly impressed with Congressman Kim and his staff. Two more neighbors needed appointments and I learned that our local Walmart was scheduling appointments for residents over 75, so I got them appointments twenty minutes apart, something we couldn't possibly do on the internet.

It's been a long haul and had I known it would last this long, I would have paid for a full Zoom account to speak endlessly with friends. I have tried to make lockdown work, I found ways to stay connected and keep the rules. I know of some people who contracted Covid19, but luckily I don't personally know of anyone who died. I'm concerned that New Jersey's numbers are rising, I wonder when this will really end and what our lives will look like in the future. I will continue to follow the rules and live life one step at a time. I hope to see information published about coping with a return to new normal. I'd like to see programs offered through our local libraries that help people process whatever trauma they have experienced, from just the lockdown to surviving Covid19 to losing loved ones. This may take a long time and it will hit people differently. We need people who will listen and without judging. Losses big or small need to be acknowledged. We need to do this together.