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## UA94/6/1 COVID-19: The New Plague

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### COVID-19: The New Plague

This pandemic has driven the entire world mad, understandably. It feels like it came out of nowhere, and essentially it did. I am still not entirely sure what the story is on its discovery. I first heard about COVID-19 either late January or early February of 2020. It was not considered a big deal yet. No one knew much about it, other than it was like a very bad cold. I worked in a call center and noticed they started putting up signs on proper handwashing everywhere. They also added hand sanitizer around the office. I had already had my own, as well as tissues constantly stocked, so I did not worry about it too much yet.

In March, COVID-19 gained more traction. We started hearing about other countries that went on lockdown because of the spread. I answered calls for the health marketplace in Massachusetts and the open-enrollment period was extended due to COVID-19. People were getting scared as it drew closer and closer to home. In late March, we learned that there were documented cases in Kentucky. Other projects in our building started getting ready to work from home. The client of my project did not want to send us home to work claiming the systems weren't equipped to handle it. They were not planning on renewing our contract when it ended in July of 2020, so they did not think the number of reconfigurations needed was worth it. Instead, management spread us farther apart after the other projects moved to work-from-home. We had to be at least six feet apart according to the new CDC recommendations.

It was early April of 2020 that cases of COVID-19 were reported in Bowling Green. Management fought with our client to allow us to work from home. Everyone was afraid of this virus that we still knew so little about. Italy had locked down completely and the news from that country was horrific. We heard that there were too few hospital beds for all the sick and thousands were dying. My job finally started testing systems to move us out of the building.

One of my supervisors worked from home already, trying to work with IT to get the kinks out of the system. Group after group was slowly moved home. I was part of the last team to be moved.

I had worked from home for other jobs before the pandemic hit, so it was not a new sensation. The lockdown was though. I suffer from anxiety, so I did not like going out even before lockdown. We had already been taking advantage of Wal-marts grocery pick up and Amazon was my preferred mode of shopping for non-food items. Not being able to go anywhere was odd, though. I turned 30 at the end of February and we celebrated by inviting family and friends to dinner at Cheddars in early March 2020. By April of 2020, a group like that in a public restaurant was unthinkable.

My oldest child was in preschool and when schools closed for spring break, they did not really reopen. They just had children completing their NTI schoolwork like it was a snow day...week...month. It was so close to the end of the school year that everyone just agreed to let the kids stay home while we figured this out. My husband worked for Warren County School Systems, but the teachers still went in, much like during breaks. They wore masks and social distanced. However, even they ran out of things to do in the building with no students, so they were allowed to work from home also.

Masks became the new normal. I make sure to order my family some on Amazon. People had been stockpiling toilet paper and water due rumors were floating around about complete lockdowns where they would not be allowed to leave their houses at all. My husband's best friend is in the military, so my husband asked him what he made of the rumors. The friend said that he had not heard anything about forced lockdowns, but it never hurt to be prepared. We did not stockpile water (there was really none to be had) but we did buy toilet paper whenever possible, mostly because there were four adults and a potty-trained child in the house. People

later attempted to sell what they had stockpiled at ridiculous rates but that was quickly shut down.

The governor of Kentucky handled the situation marvelously well, I thought. Many other people thought so too, forever earning him the nickname “Daddy Andy”. He would have a news briefing every day at 5pm, and the highlights could be emailed to anyone who wanted them. The ASL translator, Virginia, was the second biggest star in Kentucky’s sky, dutifully translating the governors’ messages to the deaf and hearing impaired so that no one was left out. One of my coworkers followed those briefings religiously, so they were our source of news while we were still in the office. I signed up for the emails, personally. It made me and everyone I knew feel much better knowing that we were not alone, that we were in this together.

This all happened in just the beginning of the pandemic. Everyone was hoping to get back to normal as soon as possible. Numbers of cases and deaths continued to rise, however. People were getting antsy and demanded the restrictions be lifted. Many governments, knowing their re-elections depended on it, capitulated and loosened restrictions, allowing businesses to decide for themselves what mandates they wanted to institute. This meant that not only were we watching the cases in the US rise to the highest of all nations, but now we could watch certain states rise higher than others, depending on how their governments handled the situation. Places like Florida and Texas are doing poorly to this day, while other states tried to hide their cases by simply not reporting them.

My job kept pushing back the date they were going to try to move us back into the office, trying to stay optimistic that such a thing would be possible. Finally, in July of 2020, they gave up. They made every single agent work from home, giving us an extra \$20 per check as a work-from-home bonus, and offered us up to \$200 for new home office equipment. We were allowed

to go back into the building to gather up any belongings we might have left but we still had to follow strict rules to enter the building. We had to set up an appointment time (they gave us time off the phones to do so) and make sure to wear our masks. I only had some office supplies and knick-knacks to pick up. Fortunately, I had thought ahead enough to take the snacks I kept in one of my cabinets, not knowing when we'd be able to come back.

My family has been very lucky that we have not contracted COVID-19. My husband and I got the vaccinations as soon as it were possible to do so. My husband was able to get it before I was since he is a teacher. Since I work in insurance, I was considered essential as well so got it only a month later. We plan on getting the booster as soon as it becomes available to all. My children are both under age 12, but now that they are working on getting the vaccine for ages 5-11 approved, I fully intend on getting my oldest (age 7) vaccinated when I can. My parents live with us, so their vaccination status is of even greater concern to me than if they lived on their own. My mother has multiple sclerosis so is worried to get the vaccine without talking to her doctor first, which is understandable. I have had numerous arguments with my stepfather, however, who has no reason not to get vaccinated.

My son started kindergarten in August of 2020 when the schools attempted to reopen, but I kept him at home. He attended virtually and did well in the beginning when he was attending the school my husband worked at. His teachers set up zoom meetings in the morning, then had math and reading group meetings at other times during the day. Knowing the attention span of kindergartners, they were rarely more than 15 minutes long. My son is autistic so also had a meeting with a speech therapist once a week and the special education director twice a week. This system worked out well for my son and well for me since I was helping to keep him on task.

My husband accepted a job at the local head start, so my son had to switch back to the school he had attended for preschool. This school was not as prepared for virtual learning. At his previous school, my son's class was entirely devoted to virtual learning, they had other classes and teachers for in person. At his new school, they strongly encouraged in-person, and spread out the virtual students among all of the classes. There were no more zoom meetings, just a set amount of classwork to do per day. It felt more like I was the teacher. In fact, we never spoke to his actual teacher while he was virtual at this school. A friend of ours, whose son goes to the other elementary school in our county, said she had the same problem with his virtual learning.

When my son was at his old school, it was easy for both of us because we were able to get his schoolwork done in between meetings and then he was finished for the day. It usually only took a few hours and hardly affected my job at all. Without the schedule of meetings, it was harder to keep him focused on his work while working myself. We decided that after spring break 2021 it would be better for all of us if he went back to in person, even though it was just a few more weeks until the end of the semester. I wrestled with the decision and was terrified about sending him to school. I was afraid he'd get sick, or maybe he'd just be asymptomatic and bring it home to his younger brother. We made sure to get him a mask and hoped that they made him wear it. He finished out the year strong, however, with good grades and a higher-than-average reading score.

This school year, my youngest was able to start preschool himself. He has cerebral palsy and is not walking on his own yet, but he is a very quick little boy. We felt that going in person would be the best option for him as well because seeing the other kids moving around and walking might encourage him to do so. I'm still terrified, but both boys have been good about

wearing their masks, and there have not been any cases that we've been notified about in their school this year. We did get a call before fall break that the preschool teacher had possibly been exposed to COVID-19 so there would be no preschool for that week. There were no warnings that the children were exposed or that they should quarantine or be tested. The schools did just announce that they are no longer requiring masks to be worn, that they will be optional. This has me frightened and frustrated all over again.

We have had a couple of scares. My husband's boss contracted COVID-19, shutting down his job and quarantining everyone. Fortunately, my husband tested negative. I feel like it is circling around us like sharks. Our babysitter's mom came to pick her up early one day because the mom had been exposed to COVID-19 by a coworker and they both needed to get tested. They both tested negative also. My 11-year-old nephew tested positive for COVID-19 a couple of months ago. It seemed to be a mild case and he is well again. Another nephew of mine caught it in September. Fortunately, his seemed mild as well; my brother was able to hold my niece's birthday party after my nephew tested negative again.

My younger son's physical therapist caught COVID-19 last year, right before the vaccinations started rolling out. They were already doing virtual meetings so none of us were exposed. She said that she has had some long-lasting symptoms, but she and her family have all recovered for the most part. My older son's therapist caught COVID-19 a few months ago also. She was in her second trimester of pregnancy, so while I was worried about my son, I was worried about hers as well. She's recovered enough to be doing in person meetings, and her pregnancy is still going well as far as I know.

I have not really missed anything pre-quarantine. I enjoy working from home and I never liked crowds to begin with. Like I mentioned, I was already utilizing many of the at-home

shopping options. I think the worst of society has decided now is the perfect time to reveal themselves since they are the ones that are out more often. There are so many people getting angry at workers for rules they do not like (that the workers have nothing to do with), verbally and sometimes physically attacking them. We are seeing more documented cases of this, but at the same time, no one is stepping up for these people. People already treated the service industry poorly, but it seems to have gotten worse.

The United States government has mishandled this pandemic, and some state governments have been worse than others. It has gotten so bad that people actually think the pandemic is a hoax and have turned a GLOBAL PANDEMIC into a political issue. The entire world has been affected; what possible explanation do people have for thinking that it is a government conspiracy that the whole world is participating in? Fear has given the stupidity of people a spotlight and it is ugly. While there have been some people who have stood up and stood together for the good of humanity, there are just as many, if not more, who have done their best to make everything worse. This pandemic has shown us peoples true colors and has changed what “normal” is forever. Only time will tell if it is for better or worse.