

Des Moines Area Community College

Open SPACE @ DMACC

Life in the Times of Coronavirus: stories from
students, staff, & faculty

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

4-4-2020

Life in the Times of Coronavirus

Jenifer Owenson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openspace.dmacc.edu/coronaviruslife>

April 4, 2020

Life in the Time of Coronavirus- It's the Little Things

Several years ago, a week after returning from a vacation in Yosemite National Park, a letter arrived in the mail from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). "This letter is to inform you that you may have been exposed to Hantavirus." The letter went on to explain that the rustic quasi tent or cabin combination, which we had nicknamed, "tebins", showed evidence of mouse feces, which, if inhaled, could lead to a fatal virus. The virus's incubation period was up to 6 weeks. Symptoms were flu like. There was no cure and the survival rate was 30%. It was jolting. My husband joked about his mortality, asking that his tombstone read, "He lived a good life, but was killed by mouse turds." I was not amused. I reread the letter which advised to seek medical help immediately, if you experienced a fever or cough. The next 5 weeks crept by, and I watched attentively for any symptoms that might indicate the contraction of the disease. On the last day of the incubation period, I took a deep breath. In celebration, I baked lemon bars and brought them to work, sharing my story and a new lease on life. I vowed that I would savor moments more deeply, taking in sunsets, and celebrate the little bounties of life.

Flash forward 7 years. I'd read about the virus. Read with interest about how the virus had jumped species. Bats, to snakes, to humans. In January, daily news about the Coronavirus, now titled COVID-19, weaseled into my news feeds. Death and fear, with images of medical personnel in space age garb. It was a long way off. No need to worry. Then came Seattle. An isolated instance that we could surely control. No need to worry. Next California.

My daughter was in California attending her junior year of college. Anxiety and fear weighed on my psyche. All mothers will attest that no matter the age of your children, the instinct to keep them safe and healthy is too strong to depress. So, on a lazy Saturday in late February, I started ordering supplies for my two grown children through Amazon. It never hurts to be prepared for something that may never come. Care packages of Clorox wipes, toilet paper, paper towels, chicken noodle soup, Tylenol, and sanitizing spray were dispatched. When I told them what was coming I got text replies with emoji eye rolls. I commented to my husband that it was hard to find sanitizer on Amazon. My husband, seemingly disaffected, asked why I was buying sanitizer. It never hurts to be prepared. He was incredulous, when he came home to find a large package of toilet paper, paper towels, and cleaning supplies on our front step.

Admittedly, when your child is in College, there is an urge to find a way to stay connected without being accused of hovering. The parent Facebook page at my daughter's college seemed to have relevant information through the lens of a parent. A parent post on March 10th read, "I have it on good authority that the College will be shutting down." One parent quickly fired back vilifying the author of the previous post for spreading unfounded rumors. I texted my daughter. "Have you heard anything about the College closing?" Her answer, "No" again followed by an irritating emoji. The next day, students were told that effective immediately the College would begin delivering instruction online, however students could stay in the dorms and

food service would be operating. I sent a text message, not reflecting the immensity of my concern, “maybe you should come home?” Again, the text was “no.”

In a matter of days, after several stressful video conversations, the message at the college changed from a courteous “you may stay” to a more abrupt “get the hell out.” A shelter in place order went into effect the day she departed from California to Iowa. We easily found a ticket home. An eerily half filled plane left from California to Dallas and then home to Iowa. A tight connection was easy to navigate. No need to weave through crowds searching for the next gate since the airport had been left desolate and empty. She emerged from the baggage claim exit door, and the usual welcome home hugs were forgone. Since reports were that most young people were asymptomatic, we agreed that it was best she go into isolation for 14 days.

My ears were sensitive to any sound resembling a dry cough or complaint of illness. The windows were opened so the freshness of the spring air could waft through the halls, mixed with the lingering smell of spray sanitizer. Meals were delivered outside her bedroom door. “How are you feeling?” was a routine part of our daily exchanges. Days are being marked. Reminiscent from 7 years ago, there was a sigh of relief on the last day of the 14 day isolation.

Outside the walls of our home, the invisible virus still rages. The typical sentiments of spring renewal and joy mostly have been stifled. In past Aprils, with the onset of the first warm days of the season neighbors emerge from their homes. Today, the streets are empty. Neighbors are still cloistered in their homes. Milestones of life are being postponed and cancelled. It is a strange, craziness, where the unique human emotions of love, grief, laughter, are relegated to exist online.

By contrast, a springlike rebirth blooms inside our house. The social distancing has gone by the wayside. The cold of winter is shed. I hug my daughter, celebrating human touch. I take in her sunny smile. There are no ingredients for celebratory lemon bars. Yet still, we will have a party. As the day ends, I lay in my bed swathed in a feeling of elation that has been hibernating within my soul for the last month. I am feeling Deja Vu. I don't hesitate to repeat long forgotten vows to enjoy the little things of life..... until I don't.

Jenifer Owenson
DMACC Staff