

COV19 – PANDEMIC OF 2020

We didn't know what it was, what to call it; where it came from, or how to cure it.

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(Activate Adobe Read Out Loud (PC): Shift+Ctrl+Y, or Click <View><Read Outload>)

Memories of the 2020 COVID-19 Virus Pandemic Plague are still fresh, and wounds are far from healed. It is a year and a half since COVID-19 struck the world, and when the Trump White House announced it would ban entry for most foreign nationals who had traveled to China within the last 14 days.

Few could forget the early days of the plague when cars, buses, and trucks seemed extinct as dinosaurs. Today, complaints with smiles about getting stuck in traffic are heard. And TV news is reporting traffic zipping along once totally void of traffic freeways, highways, and streets. Jet contrails crisscross in bluer than ever skies.

Governors and mayors called for a stop to the 'summer of love' or riots, senseless destruction, and murder. Insurrectionists declared their own 'countries' carved from burnt communities in a nation gone half-mad, only to abandon their paradise when TV cameras left. Mayors and governors who stripped law enforcement of budgets and hobbled their ability to keep the peace by restricting arrests and doing away with bail, are now talking about *refunding* police budgets. Hundreds of officers resigned or retired in towns across America. The cry for new police recruits is ballyhooed—but there are few takers.

Rioters stopped their 100 days and nights of burning, looting, occupying police stations, torching car lots, government buildings, mom and pop stores, and commercial businesses, causing billions of dollars in damages. Brutal beatings and murders happened as viewed on wide screen TVs, and all without fear of arrest. No one misses the rioters.

American COVID-19 deaths nudged over Six-hundred-thirty-thousands (<https://epidemic-stats.com/>) Hope is in the air as vaccines are working, or not, depending upon your news network. Televised ballgames have stopped displaying cutout figures of fans, some paying \$50 to have their mug on a cutout in the stands behind home plate. And no one complained about the canned applause, cheers and boos, or fake hawkers calling out, 'Hey! Hotdogs here'.

A National Day of Mourning is supposed to take place when it's all officially over—no hint of that day has ever been mentioned. Still, people seem a little happier and hopeful—but signs that *all is not yet well* are present. Waiting for your party's restaurant's seating number to be called seems a privilege, considering in some places half the tables are taped-off; too few servers working is a problem. Governments giving away your money takes the wind out of sails for small businesses trying to recover.

If you can find a mall that didn't belly-up and permanently close, set a while and study shoppers' faces. People are happy to be out and about, though when smiles fade, expressions can take on haunted-hollow looks as if zoning-out. Early on, few personally knew anyone with COVID. Too soon, most households knew a name of someone who had COVID, or of someone that didn't make it.

TV News, in the early frightening days of COVID-19, found viewers fearing a virus no one could name or explain. The public wanted to understand what was happening. Videos of hospital rooms filled and overflowing into hallways, with four or six beds jammed into some rooms where two was the standard. '*No-room-at-the-inn*', seemed a literal fact.

Hospital hallways were lined with gurneys and stretchers with COVID patients waiting to see doctors.

Lucky patients were examined by doctors, and many were rewarded with a personal ventilator newly available, that all knew to be the kiss of death. Unlucky hallway patients could and did join the growing numbers of uncounted bodies efficiently being body-tagged and bagged, then shuffled to basements to wait in silence as only the dead can do.

A new and horrifying reality shocked news viewers. The pandemic was out of control and gut-punched the nation as TV cameras broadcast the nightmares happening behind some major US hospitals. Receiving docks and parking lots were cleared of cars, and fully packed with trucks backed up against loading docks for body-loading. We watched intently at what was befalling our country. Cameras showed a forklift scurrying about a lot near the rear of an 18-wheeler refrigeration truck, carrying an overloaded pallet of something. When the camera zoomed slowly in, the country held its collective breath, stunned by the forklift's cargo: bodies tied in bundled clusters of sheet-wrapped human forms. Unable to look away, we saw the camera pan-out viewing row upon rows of refrigerator trucks and large trailers, parked head-to-toe. Forklifts driven by Haz-mat suited drivers raced back and forth like ants following a scent trail to the docks and gathering another morsel to feed the queen virus. Speechless.

'This can't be happening', was a common feeling.

The first weeks of COVID-19, street traffic was non existing in towns and cities around the country. National capitals televised eerie views of deserted streets without traffic. News cameras panned surreal ghost-like views as if the Rapture had taken place and you were left behind, cursed to deal with the pandemic's newly dead; or perhaps space-aliens had sucked away all life on Earth.

For a time, Middle East Terrorist countries proclaimed a state of peaceful coexistence, their own ranks dying in 'stop-the-war' numbers. The world seemed to stop spinning as if frozen in the frames of what seemed a B rated apocalypse film. Air traveling virtually ceased, and governments funded airlines worldwide to prevent their bankruptcy, fearing national airlines would never recover. Most every nation's border closed, with border guards in many nations were authorized deadly force against those seeking refuge from the same horrors they fled from.

Everywhere, invisible COVID-19 lay in wait. Evidence of its shadow fell across every village and metropolis. No one held real-hope of a rapid cure, and the mood was bleak and packaged in make-do boxes on forklifts. Most everyone feared exposure to COVID-19 outside one's home. In Hollywood California, the land of plastic super heroes with colorful capes, bounding leaps and arch villains needing dead, the real live everyday super heroes were first responders who dared to venture out where no one else would go. Only medical workers dared enter plague-ridden hospitals. Only law enforcement and fire fighters dared to save the public from their own folly or emergency. A time when there was no cure, no vaccine, and very low hope for survival if COVID-19 fell upon you.

First responders were considered working on the frontline of COVID, as guardians serving the nation. Death fell upon them in staggering numbers, as news reports confirmed. Here are a few early posts:

"May 22, 2020: More than 100 police officers in the U.S. have died from COVID-19 after fighting the virus on the front lines....

Aug 26, 2020: More than 1,000 frontline healthcare workers reportedly have died of Covid-19, according to Lost on the Frontline, an ongoing investigation....

Sep 04, 2020: 1,185 first responders and 287 survivors were confirmed to have tested positive for the coronavirus....

Sep12, 2020: More than 100 have died.

Sep 28, 2020: More than **1,700** health care workers have died of COVID-19 and related complications — after many of them said they didn't have adequate personal protective equipment....

Feb 02, 2021: As the number of COVID-19 cases has surged across the US this winter, doctors, nurses and other first responders have been stretched thin, but so has another less recognized group of people, the so-called last responders. Those are the people working in our nation's funeral homes, morgues, crematories, and more....

Feb 21, 2021: 264 Police Officers have died in Line of Duty to COVID across the United States.”

A grateful nation stopped what it was doing to honor our first responders. Health Care workers were universally applauded. Fire Fighters and Law Enforcement celebrated as heroes. Appreciation was real, and from the heart.

It may be years before we know the true numbers of First Responder COVID-19 deaths.

Holidays came and went. Nothing seemed worthy of celebration. Fourth of July fireworks were canned reruns of previous years. Although occasional neighborhood fireworks could be seen and heard. Conflicting COVID-19 casualty stats for the world, nations, states, and cities abounded. DMVs closed. Armies were sent home to recover. Rumors took wing that COVID-19 originated in China. In every hospital, virus patients died, or stayed home and died. Colorful charts bearing multi-hued grid colors overlapped, crossed, and merged. Chart lines tried to explain the virus's actions, rendered info mostly useless to the layman. One chart-thing was clear: COVID's new-illnesses and deaths, rocketed ever higher. Then one day a new colored graph line appeared on the chart, almost merging with the chart's bottom line, titled, 'Recovered from Virus'. Growing slowly at first, the line blipped like the faintest pulse then began a gentle sloping rise. A new term, 'Herd Immunity' was defined.

In hospitals, something new was heard cheers and applause. People rushed in to the hallways to see what was happening: someone survived and was going home. At the same time, heartbreaking News stories were told of families unable to visit hospitalized dying loved ones. It was too risky to say a final goodbye, or share I love you, or a tender kiss at bedside, or even blow one through hospital room's window.

Then the public was banned from hospitals. No exceptions. Public gatherings, funerals, burials, and gravesides services were banned. Cremations weren't an option. No small flags, flowers or teddy bears were placed on rapidly dug and filled graves. And no one spoke of a vaccine in the coming future. No hope was offered.

Morgues reported overburdened and working at triple-capacity—and refused all new arrivals. Crematoriums refused to consider even placing names on waiting lists months in the future. News photos and stories reported morgues literally overflowing. In Texas, the National Guard was called in to help process remains. But the nagging problem of what to do with the growing overwhelming numbers of bodies would not go away. Many bodies remained in parked refrigerated trucks for days. Manifests were lost. Tagged bodies were out there somewhere, to be found at some point, and new bodies were arriving daily, hourly. Body collectors needed decisions for body disposal.

Drastic solutions were put forth, such as mass body burning, and mass-graves, even if only temporarily. Burning bodies was quickly rejected. And for a time, mass graves were quietly being dug. Rumors said 'they' were going to burn the dead in open pits. The truth was ugly enough: bodies could not be processed fast enough for public health safety in the normal manner, and in many locations demanded temporary mass burials until things returned to normal. Infectious bodies would be cremated if possible, and not be released to relatives.

Body movers were tasked to remove dead from trucks and place them in bulldozed pits to hide-away the disease and prevent the potential spread of the virus and limit the smell of decay. Later, some marked bodies would be, might be, exhumed and released later to families.

The most scarring memory I will never forget are night photos of huge open pits, some looked half the length of football fields, with trucks backed up to the rims or ramps of the pit. The photo told the story clearly. Several bodies remained abandoned in trucks on the rim or in the pit. All pits were still open, and bodies were yet to be aligned. No workers remained to handle what others must still dream about today. The closest end of the pit, beyond the jumbled bodies, had walls gouged, ripped, and scraped by tooth-like bulldozer buckets. The length of the empty pit gapped like the maw jaws of some Hollywood monster hoping to devour its prey.

At the far end of the open pit, several trucks stood empty, and workers were arranging boxes of bodies as others carried bodies in to the pit, aligning them in neat rows, much like the crosses on Arlington's manicured lawns. You could see the rows of arriving boxes had become misaligned, and some appeared carelessly shoved in together as if everyone was in a hurry. Other boxes were laid in rows, head to toe. And finally, sheet-wrapped bodies were tossed helter skelter, piled like pick-up-sticks without concern for which way the head or feet pointed, and appeared as if dumped from trucks into the pit. I do not have that photo, but there are several online showing open mass graves with boxed bodies stacked three and four deep in lengthy pits.

I can still see the still-photo. To me it told an evolving story of a ruthless sudden pandemic, where good men struggled to bring dignity and justice for the remains of COVID-19 plague victims. I prayed the pit men were summoned away but feared the real reason might be their illnesses or falling to the virus. I wondered if they might join countless others in the pits. I recalled partial lyrics of the centuries old poem attributed to the great plague of London in 1665: *"Ring Around the Rosie...A pocket full of posies..."* and those words seemed to fit the tale of the photo, except there were no posies to mask the scent of death arising from the pit.



Photo Caption by New York Times quote: *"Up to a tenth of New York City's coronavirus dead may be buried in a potter's field."* (unquote)

Hospitals and good deeds: Tender and heart-tugging moments for the nation to witness began to make news. Innovations by hospital workers demonstrated a great kindness and allowed a few families to say parting words of endearment over Smart Phones and iPads held by nurses or doctors and viewed over FaceTime by patients and their relatives. TV News played such scenes without comment, words were unnecessary where human drama unfolded. Anguished loved one's longing to touch or hold a dear one,

expressed more than words could convey. We all watched, our hearts and prayers rising. National television shared wretched emotional scenes viewed time and again, and no one with a heart could feel unmoved by all we shared. No one felt like an intruder as we grieved for fellow citizens comforting one another. Whether a spouse of over 50 years marriage, siblings, adult children, or small grandchildren, hearts broken were powerful to see. They were grateful for the opportunity to say fare thee wells and tender final words this side of heaven.

Thanksgiving 2020 arrived, and Family tossed the COVID-19 dice and gathered at Grandma's house for Turkey. COVID proved us foolish to have risked a major family holiday together.

Shortly before Thanksgiving, unknown to us, a good friend of our grandson lived next door to his girlfriend. The friend's extended family all lived together, and their grandfather got very ill, and died. The friend's family went to the funeral and within days everyone in the entire household contracted COVID-19. The friend's uncle and Aunt were soon hospitalized, and they both died a day or two after Thanksgiving.

Our daughter, husband and grandkids, and our son and his wife came over. Their daughters had enlisted in the Army; one is a Combat Medic and the other with the 82nd Airborne. We had a wonderful time. And all was well afterwards, *until it wasn't*.



Several days *after* Thanksgiving, the grandson's girlfriend tested positive for COVID-19 and was quarantined at home. Our grandson 'came down' with COVID as did daughter's family of five shortly thereafter. All tested COVID-19 positive and quarantined at home. The parents were very sick, but not hospitalized. The oldest grandson was ill, and the younger kids did not present any symptoms, although testing positive. Our daughter didn't believe they would be able to make it over for Christmas. By then, we were reconsidering that anyway, as we are on the endangered elder's species list. We gently *uninvited* the grand-daughter's family to Grandma's house for Christmas.

Christmas Eve 2020 was handled more wisely. No one got sick and no one died. A year earlier, around November 2019, our son and his wife become very ill, as did many others across the country, just before COVID-19 was publicly identified as the cause of the illnesses and deaths. Their doctors could not identify their illness, but agreed it wasn't the Flu or Pneumonia. Our son and daughter-in-law recovered fully, and later believed their illnesses were the COVID virus, as both are in law enforcement and have had two-dozen or so COVID tests administered to them, and all have been negative.

Safe-Spacing and Mask wearing were the order of the day everywhere. We were true believers wearing our masks regardless of growing debates about mask effectiveness, and pro and con issues about constitutional rights. I could envision my grave marker epitaph: 'He had a Constitutional Right to be Maskless'. No one was supposed to go outside unnecessarily, and we didn't. Groceries were delivered and everything else was done at home.

Our Christmas Eve plan was to have both families together again, but daughter and family were just recovering from COVID, afraid to go out, and didn't want to risk nuking Grandma and Grandpa. We figured how to comply without jeopardizing the grandparents (us) and placing wrapped presents in our car's trunk drove to our daughter's house. They took out their presents from us and put their gifts to us in the trunk.



Christmas Eve, with windows rolled up we then blew hugs and kisses and pressed hands against both sides of the car's window, grateful for that little bit of imagined pressure pressing felt, ala Star Trek's Science Officer Spoke's 'mind-mel'. With COVID still raging, this was the last time we would see them for months.

Photo Caption - Star Trek: Rumor has it - Science Officer Spoke is 'Mind-Melding' Captain Kirk to see if he really believes he is merging with his brain. Secretly, Spock tickles his face trying to get him to laugh on live TV.

When Christmas morning came, our son and wife arrived around noon for a day's visit. We set up a video tripod and iPhone to receive FaceTime from our daughter's phone, then iPhone's FaceTime to AppleTV and our Smart TV (got it?). In turn, they would receive FaceTime from another iPhone at Grandma's house and mirror our video to their Smart TV. It worked. Kathy was cooking our traditional Christmas dinner.

We already had our cameras setup and son, and dad were rapidly testing the dip-chips to make sure they weren't poisoned, and ready to sagely give unwanted advice as soon as son-in-law had his toys ready to video hookup on the other end. Son-in-law finished hooking up everything, then he and two grandsons, and granddaughter began playing catchup testing for poison the dip-chips they had planned to bring over. Then pointing out they were my favorite chilly-flavored-BBQ Frito dip chips. How low can you get? I countered by teasing our daughter by holding up grandma's biscuits and yams (her favorite) and making yummy sounds; multi-tasking, I also smoothly double-dipped-gouged son's chip in the dip, snapping and scooping it up it mine in one practiced victory.

After a glorious Christmas dinner and following tradition, we settled in at both homes, and adjusted video devices to make sure everything was just right. Santa had fled the scene and we were ready to start opening gifts including those received at curbside last evening. Our video pointed at our Christmas dinner, was turned toward the living room. The plan was taking turns opening gifts by alternating from each house, and one at a time (It works for us). We watched and laughed, bouncing from grandma's house to daughters, as the next-in-line opened a gift. We marched our way around the family rings of well-wishers, again leap frogging from our video-house to theirs and loving every moment hooing and ahhhed at whatever was just opened. The ladies took fifteen minutes of so slow *men tormenting* minutes opening packages, saving every scrap of heirloom-paper (.29 cents a ton) or ribbon for another year. Gents ripped upon paper and destroyed boxes with chainsaw nuke-powered precision littering debris on every stick of furniture in the room. The cycle repeated until sometime later there was nothing left but piles of colored crape and crumpled papers and stacks of goodies beside each person—the wads of Christmas paper were just perfect for crunching and tossing like snowballs at backs of heads of unsuspecting persons, then quickly turning away so they might think whoever first met eye-contact was the culprit. The time of joy and special moments continued; the rooms were national-disasters (briefly)—just like it should be, in normal times of cheer.

As we men cleaned up our messes (and it was ours, so the ladies pointed out), "real" Christmas Carol music played in the background. We finished the last eggnogs as hot coco waft deliciously on Christmas saucers beside us. Soon we were spooning marsh mellows floating in hot chocolate, we settled down to enjoy each other's company and conversation while keeping an ear tuned to the kitchen for dessert. Then, it was time for apple or banana-cream pies (or both), and someone assured all the calories were prayed out of both (I hoped that was true).

Thank God for Smart Phones that allowed us to share Thanksgiving and Christmas 2020 together.

Today, August 5, 2021, many are uncertain about COVID-19 future. No one trusted government's conflicting directions 'To mask or not to mask'. All are aware others are yet to die, but in greatly reduced

numbers. Nevertheless, Americans seem more like Americans with each passing day—demanding our freedoms and for government to cease political interference in our lives, just like normal.

Restaurants have waiting lines; new menus prices have skyrocketed adding add on fees and new wage requirements, higher than the value of meals. People are walking dogs—and neighbors complaining about pets on their lawns. Newspapers are tossed on lawns, and the homeless are staking out their favorite panhandling corners. Binge watching films online and cable TV series are not so popular and are short get-away to outdoors entertainment.

Maskless crowds are everywhere. The quarantine is over, except to mayors and governors missing the good old days. COVID-19 deaths today are fewer than May 2020, and people are set on going back to normal and a maskless society.

COVID-19? Nobody wants a return to the year we want to forget, and the Troubles of 2020.