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COVID-19 Personal Reflection_Unprecedented Times

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Repository Citation

White, Betty J., "COVID-19 Personal Reflection_Unprecedented Times" (2020). *Personal Reflections*. 18.
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~ Unprecedented Times~

We are waking up each day, doing our chores as usual. Our miniature horse, Esso, and our three Rhode Island red hens look forward to their breakfast. They greet us with glee. It's good to breathe deeply and enjoy the fresh air. These are the everyday things that go on as normal here in Aroostook County.

But, turn on the radio... Corvid19. This is an epidemic that didn't just creep into our lives. It swept like a plague of locusts from one side of the globe to the other. No one saw it coming this rapidly. Fifteen minutes of the Corvid19 update is all I can stand. This nasty virus is here in northern Maine; someone has been hospitalized at the local hospital, a confirmed case. I command Alexa to turn off the radio. It's off.

I look out the front window and see a school bus pass the house. I pause and realize that there are no students aboard the bus, *just* a sign in the side window that says, "We Love You!" and their lunches, of course, their lunches are onboard. The bus stops at our next-door neighbor's mailbox. A young woman steps off the bus and deposits what must be a lunch onto the mailbox for the student who lives there.

I think about my plan for the day. I need to buy groceries and pick up a prescription at Walmart. I have heard that it's best to shop early in the day so I get ready with my shopping list in hand. I place my *pandemic kit* that I have assembled on the passenger seat of the car. It contains a face mask, a bottle of rubbing alcohol, fresh wipes, an empty bottle of hand sanitizer. When I arrive at Walmart, the parking lot is nearly vacant. I sigh with relief as I place my mask onto my face, making sure that my glasses set just outside the edge of the mask so they don't fog up so readily. I no sooner get into the store when a woman passes me, keeping a six-foot distance and sighing at the sight of me in my mask and muttering, "Oh, my God!". I must have been a scary reminder of the epidemic. I feel sorry for her and for myself and for everyone right now. I find the grocery items that are on my list. I head over to the pharmacy where my prescription is ready. A plastic shield has been installed at the counter since my last visit. I insert my credit card into the machine without touching anything but the credit card. The transaction is complete and I am able to pay for all the items at that one place. The pharmacy assistant, the one who looks like Tom Hanks, is smiling behind his mask. I can tell he's smiling because his eyes have smile-lines next to them. "We are all in this together," I think to myself. When I get out to my car, I take my mask off and wash my hands with some of the rubbing alcohol. "Why do I feel as if I am suddenly a surgeon coming from the operating room? This is a job I never signed up for!"

Then I think of my son-in-law who is a nurse. They take his temperature before he enters his place of work. My daughter made a mask for him. She used some Mickey Mouse fabric that was left over from one of her former sewing projects. They have a six-year-old daughter who has been homeschooled and doing distance learning with her first-grade class for several months now. She likes to connect with me on zoom. I never know when she is going to call. It's always a pleasant surprise. One day recently we had a virtual tea party. She drank a cup of hot chocolate prepared by her mother, my daughter. I drank a cup of green tea and we talked about what our names would be if our names were spelled backwards. She figured hers out right away, "Nylada" and mine "Ytteb". Now we have a Secret Tea Society going on.

I am grateful for the electronic devices we have in our lives that help keep us connected with our friends and loved ones. We are not only able to connect with our family members, but we can connect with some of the other social groups such as our church, knitting groups, and my rug hooking group, as well as a book discussion group. I'm noticing that a few people have joined these groups who live in Canada, South Carolina, and Vermont who did not attend the meetings back before the sickness, so perhaps we are becoming more inclusive as a result.

This morning I awoke early and got to thinking about my childhood. I grew up in a suburb of Boston during the 50's and 60's. When I was five years old, my parents sent me to a day camp. When my buddy from camp came down with polio, they closed the camp. Not long after this, I became very ill with a high temperature. I recall my father carrying me in his arms to our car where he placed me laying down in the back seat. He drove me to the Newton-Wellesley Hospital, where after I was admitted, I was taken by wheelchair to a private room. Through the window, I could see an iron-lung with a patient laying inside it. Scary is all I can say! I was soon to learn that I was in isolation. Few people entered my room because they had to dress in special hospital gowns and wear masks, of course. My mother came to visit me every day. I was extremely lonely. She told me they thought I might have polio. As it turned out, the lab tests revealed that I did not have polio. After a week, I was released from the hospital and I was incredibly happy and relieved to be back home. But, the members of my family did not go anywhere that summer; not to the beach, not to friend's houses to play, not to the theater and no one came to visit us. Many people throughout the world were coming down with polio. Relief eventually came with the polio vaccine. I remember lining up at school where we each were given a sugar pill that contained the vaccine. Later I learned that the oral polio vaccine (OPV) produces antibodies in the blood to three types of poliovirus. And, unlike the Corvid19 virus, polio affected mostly children.

After people received the vaccine, life returned to normal, or *did* it? I have come to realize that no *one* year is ever the same as the next year. Some things go on much as they always did but many things changed. With Corvid19 we have been learning to stay well by practicing social distancing, the importance of good hygiene, of science, of staying connected to one another, and of supporting one another. We are reminded by our Constitution to promote the general welfare for the common good.

Today I see that the potato farmers in Aroostook County have been hard-hit. It's time to plant their potato crops and many farmers have so many potatoes in their sheds from last year's crop that much of the crop will probably be wasted. I see that many farmers are supplying potatoes to food banks and I hope that they succeed in distributing their potatoes to those in need, for as we all know, there are *many* in need.

My husband just came into the kitchen and placed three eggs on the counter. This is a first for our three hens; all three of them have never produced an egg on the same day. Hopefully, this is a sign that things are looking up, that a Corvid19 vaccine will be developed soon.

Submitted by Class '68 Correspondent Betty (Loew) White