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## COVID-19 Personal Reflection

Jennifer Bergeron

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## The Corona Pandemic -2020

As I was listening to the news this morning, half asleep in a kind of dream like state, a story from Sharon Rose-Vazniz on News Center Maine out of Portland caught my attention. She was talking about a historical archive that somebody from the University of Maine, at Fogler Library was collecting about the affects of the corona virus on the families in Maine. At least that is what I heard, but as I mentioned earlier I was half asleep. I will look into the details later about how to submit my writing; but for now, I'll just put these few words into writing.

This story interested me on so many levels. When Sharon Vazniz mentioned Fogler Library in her story, I was awoken from my morning fog, as if a glass of water was splashed on my face. I pretty much lived at Fogler Library while I was studying mechanical engineering at the University of Maine, and the mention of this place was like mentioning an old friend.

My father was a graduate of the class of 1944, as was my mother. They both graduated as civil engineers. My family takes great pride in the fact that my mother, Margaret Chase Morrill, was the first female engineering graduate at UMO. My parents married in Philadelphia soon after their graduation, while my father was on leave as he served in the Navy during World War 2.

When my father returned from the service, they started their ever expanding family. I have 5 brothers and 5 sisters, and of those siblings there were (4) graduates of the University of Maine at Orono, (4) graduates of the University of Farmington, and (1) graduate from the University of Southern Maine. Our successful careers are a strong testament to the quality of education in University of Maine system. In total there are 60 direct descendants of the Richard and Margaret Morrill family, and over 90 including in-laws and our extended family.

Having such a large close-knit family makes this pandemic extremely difficult. Our family typically gets together on every holiday, and we spend much of the summer enjoying family picnics and barbeques at our camp at Clearwater Lake in Industry, Maine. When our family was just our nuclear family, we would spend the major holidays like Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving at a family members' home. However, as the family expanded, we have had to resort to renting larger spaces for these occasions.

In the past 15 years, we have been holding most of these family celebrations at the Ladd Center in Wayne, Maine. My oldest brother, Eric, who passed away in 2014, was a resident of Wayne and he was an active member in the Wayne community. This was and still is an ideal location for our family, as there is plenty of room for such a large gathering. The Ladd Center has a large kitchen, plenty of tables and chairs, and most importantly a playground for all ages. My favorite family celebration and probably the most meaningful to the entire family is Easter.

After a long winter in Maine, Easter is such an excellent holiday to celebrate family, sunshine, and love. To keep the fun going, every Easter we would have an Easter egg hunt for the younger kids and some kind of craft, such as Ukrainian egg decorating complete with the kitska and beeswax. Others who wanted to get outside would play basketball on the court adjacent to the Ladd Center.

Easter 2020 would have been a typical year for the Morrill Family at the Ladd Center. However, the Corona Virus and threat of Covid-19 had other plans for our family. Instead of getting together, holding hands, and singing "The Johnny Appleseed Song", (which is our preferred way to say grace before a meal), we were instead left to celebrate Easter sitting in our living rooms, kitchens, basements and

porches in front of the computer tuned into Zoom on the internet. Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service where people can communicate virtually, on-line.

In our family, with over 20 participating screens on Zoom, communicating with such a large and diverse group was challenging. A person would ask somebody a question, and before the person could respond, another question or comment was being thrown out there. This was virtual chaos, but then again, our family thrives on chaos! I loved seeing my family members, (even if on the television screen), and hearing those wonderful stories of their lives. For example, my niece, Haley, who is 6 months pregnant, was able to show us her “bump” even though we could not touch her belly and give little Viola our love. We could see the joy in my Haley’s face whenever a new comer came into the conference and asked to see her in profile.

Then there was my sister, Ida, who lives in Washington and never makes it home for Easter. It was really nice to see her and her family, especially my grand-nephews, one of whom I have never met. It was like being in her home, when she showed us the pictures of her grandchildren’s’ art work on her refrigerator using the camera on her laptop.

There are so many other conversations to discuss: one nephew flying across the screen seemingly floating; distant cousins showing up thousands of miles away; nieces who escaped New York (weeks before the onslaught), quarantining in Maine; the Cross of Jesus; Einstein; and It.

My family has taken quite well to “zooming”. One of my sisters, Sarah, who was an art teacher in Augusta for over 30 years, has been doing weekly art classes for kids, meaning her grandchildren and grand nieces and nephews. Every week there is a different theme to the art class, from Easter eggs to swimming ducks. During these art classes, my sister-in-law, Glo, teaches elementary French. While the art lesson is progressing, she repeats the words of the art subjects in English and then in French. The kids have a great time “hanging out” with their relatives, learning and having fun.

As far as my own life is concerned, I am still working full-time. Luckily, I have a job that allows me to work from home. I am a manufacturing engineer at Pratt and Whitney in North Berwick, where I have been employed for over 33 years. I have been through various work force adjustments, such as: lay-offs, furloughs, down-sizing, mandatory over-time, and unprecedented growth – but never have I experienced anything like this. The company is encouraging telecommuting, which in the age of cyber security at a company that deals in classified information, is mind-blowing!

While the world is on hold and stopping normal activities, Pratt as an essential business to the world’s defense and economy, has been allowed to stay open for business. This is great in theory. However, if the rest of the world is at rest...according to Newton’s first law of motion...it’s only a matter of time until Pratt will be “at rest”. Just yesterday, I had my first true indicator that things will be changing.

After two weeks of mandatory “Stay- At-Home” for most of the state of Maine and it has been business as usual at Pratt and Whitney. Now, salaried employees will be forced to take three weeks of unpaid time-off as a cost cutting measure. While this will be a hardship, and believe me, I have bills to pay and lots of them; I say “Yee-haw!” I am 60 years old. I have worked most of my entire life. I have a strong sense of work ethic and family responsibility, but I also have a strong sense of fun. I have never had the opportunity for take more than two weeks off in a row, and I’m not sure that my employer will allow

this now. I want to travel, while I am still healthy and relatively fit. Specifically, I would like to drive to Alaska and see the midnight sun. If me boss will let me, I will be taking three weeks in June, maybe four!

Life is too short. Corona, or cousin-Corona, will be here for years to come, this is our future. We just need be smart about it. We in the United States had better get used to this new normal, but living in fear is not an option.