

## "“Waiting”

By Laurie T. Seamans

One word I use to describe the pandemic is “waiting”. That one word encompasses everything I felt over the past year beginning with the daily coronavirus briefings. I wait and watch the Governor as he discusses what is happening in the world of COVID-19. There are so many questions that I can hardly tear myself away from the television. Where is it? How many people are infected? How many have died? I am retired now, thankfully, and so I have nothing but time to listen to the daily briefings and the global news. One day becomes two, and then twenty, and beyond. Day after day I wait for information, for news that the end is near. After all, there is that trip to Colorado planned for April 2020. I wait to decide if that can even happen.

Meanwhile, the daily grind becomes just that. Grocery shopping morphs into a contact sport – plan out the strategy, put the list in the order of the direction to take when I enter the store, get in and get out. People stand staring at the empty spots on the shelves where food once was, as though it will magically appear again. I go down a different aisle to navigate the traffic. Red light. Green light. This is not a child’s game and it is not fun. My anxiety level rises as I steer toward the self-checkout. Less hands means less germs. Lines resemble a nightmarish snake, twisting and turning around the front end of the building. It never used to bother me how long I stood in line. Now is different. These people, who are taking far too long to scan their items, need to step it up and move on out. I could be surrounded by a million coronavirus germs as I wait in line to pay for my toilet paper and essential cleaning products when all I want to do is get back home where it is safe. A mask, any form of mask, is not comforting. This thing on my face increases my need to blow my nose every time I put it on for longer than five minutes. It is weeks, if not months, before the anxiety of grocery shopping subsides into a workable weekly exercise. Even then, there are bad days at the store.

I have doctor appointments, scheduled and rescheduled, changed to telehealth visits. Who knew you could position your laptop for the doctor to look down your throat? No, there are no problems with my tonsils because they’ve been gone for almost fifty years. When I do manage an in-person visit, the office is quiet, most of the staff sent over to the hospital to help with the COVID patients. I am told I will wait another six months for one of my tests because there is no one there to do it. Weeks later, I am informed that insurance coverage for medical equipment for sleep apnea is being denied because the whole process took almost a year to conclude. I might have to repeat everything. But it wasn’t my fault, I cry. I spent months waiting for someone to call and schedule the sleep test. My case fell into a black hole because of COVID. I am ready to just say forget the whole thing, I will take my chances. The stress of waiting and deciding when it is up to me to push back on doctors already overwhelmed with the pandemic is too much. The insurance company relents after a few weeks of negotiation and I can finally move forward with treatment. One struggle down and so many to go. I just want to sleep.

Election Day approaches and it seems everyone is waiting for this moment to cast their ballot. It is a contentious race and the emotions felt by everyone serves to divide more families and friends, including mine. Mail-in ballots, early voting, or Election Day voting – options provided because of the pandemic. We need to decide for ourselves how we want to exercise our right to vote. I opt for the first day of in-person early voting. It is rainy and cold, but the urgency of what is happening in the country pushes me to go. I double mask – one surgical mask with a handmade one over the top to keep the surgical mask dry. The wind and rain are fierce but, with the umbrella and the hood of my raincoat, I can manage. The voting only just started but the line is long already. I know a few people. We pass the time talking as we make our way to the building to cast our votes. It takes 45 minutes to reach the entrance. Once inside, the room is chaotic with volunteers checking in voters and directing them to the next spot. It is noisy and there is no rhyme or reason to it. I feel anxious but I have to focus on the task at hand. Voting this year is critical. In the end it will cost me and the rest of the country a great deal, but we cannot turn back now. Families are divided over the candidates, the issues, and the future. Once done, I hurry to my car and sit for a minute with the heater on to take the chill off and recover. Time to go home and wait. Days then weeks pass. I wait for any news, especially for an end to the nasty campaign advertisements that persist. We all wait because it is all we know to do anymore.

The holidays approach and we wait for guidance on what we can or cannot do with our families. It seems strange that the government is deciding this very personal aspect of life but we have been programmed to be led. Decisions are made – no Thanksgiving dinner, it is just too risky yet. Maybe we can do Christmas with everyone. Wait, no, we should not gather all together. Maybe a different version – two separate ones – but no that is too much work. Not this year. We need to wait until it is safe.

There is talk of vaccines, so we wait to hear if any get approved. Which one will come first – Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca? Choices to wait for, but how long will this take? Which one is best? Pfizer is approved, but who can get the shot? Healthcare workers and elderly in nursing homes are first. Then first responders, police, fire and others. We wait our turn. Appointment slots are sporadic and hard to get. Information is confusing and different depending on where you live. Over 75 years old, then over 65 years old are eligible. We hear rumors that it will drop to 55 and older but the Governor says 60 years and older. My husband can get his and he gets an appointment quickly. I continue to wait, wondering how long I will be in this limbo as friends and family line up for their shots. Finally, it comes to those who are 50 and older and I am elated. I get the first appointment I can, just to feel that sense of relief that the floodgates are opening. More vaccines are available. The age drops to 30 years and, not long after, anyone over the age of 16 can get vaccinated. Now, we wait to see if enough people get the vaccine so that we can achieve “herd immunity” throughout the country.

Venues for concerts and sports, fitness centers, bowling alleys, movie theaters, restaurants, and so much more that we have lived without and missed over the past year are gearing up. Our Colorado trip is rebooked a year and a half after we were forced to cancel. Life

will never be the same but how long will we wait before we feel ready to reenter the world for good?

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