

Giving Thanks

I learned to be more thankful in 2020. Thankful my husband and I were able to take our family on a long-awaited, once-in-a-lifetime vacation in January to celebrate a milestone birthday. We were home and our suitcases barely unpacked when news of a virus overseas hit the media outlets. Little did we know our time together as a family would become so precious and limited in the months to come.

On TV, we witnessed dedicated medical professionals from around the world working tirelessly to save lives. News of the first death in Wisconsin from COVID-19 spread quickly. It was a man from the eastern part of the state who had returned from a trip to Egypt. The news was even more shocking when we realized we met him several years ago through mutual friends. There were many more deaths to follow. My heart aches for the families who lost loved ones due to complications from COVID-19. For them, this virus will never go away.

COVID-19 became known simply as “the sickness” during our family FaceTime gatherings—thanks to our granddaughter who turned four when the virus hit. Sickness was a relatable term; COVID-19 was not.

Early on, grocery shopping was a challenge. Shelves were empty due to shortages caused by food insecurities and anxieties. I found myself buying SPAM—then surprisingly grateful for the recipe my mother left me which included SPAM. I was forced to create meals with food from my freezer and pantry which ultimately resulted in a few more dollars in my pocket. Fewer shopping trips gave me more time to organize, purge, and box up items to donate.

Every other Friday was payday, and I was more thankful than ever for employment. Many were without. My husband’s small business struggled, but it survived. For that, I am filled with gratitude.

Weekends were spent “up north.” Our little cabin in the woods was a welcome respite from the stress of daily life during a global pandemic. By its own nature, it was a place to social distance. Simple things like playing card games or cribbage became treasured memories.

We took up a new hobby in 2020 and made our first-ever batch of maple syrup from the trees at our home and cabin. Our neighbors also joined in the process, and it became a

nice way to connect with people outside over 5-gallon pails of sap.

I am thankful for technology that enabled us to stay connected with our family, our friends, and our faith. Sunday Mass streamed from the local television station, and services and songs on YouTube inspired me and lifted my spirits. My faith has taught me there is no resurrection without the crucifixion. The same can be said about our lives here on this earth.

Looking back, I give thanks for the challenges that strengthened me and the blessings bestowed on me in 2020.

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