

Just a Journal

Time Period From 2020 to 2021.

Life and thoughts during the COVID-19 Virus Pandemic.

National Women's History Museum Pandemic Journaling Project.

Written By: Erin Dominick Anderson

Librarian, Records Manager, and Archivist.

Aged 36-37.

Dreamer, poet, human, woman, family member, colleague,
and most importantly: mother.

Lives in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

From Stillwater, Oklahoma.

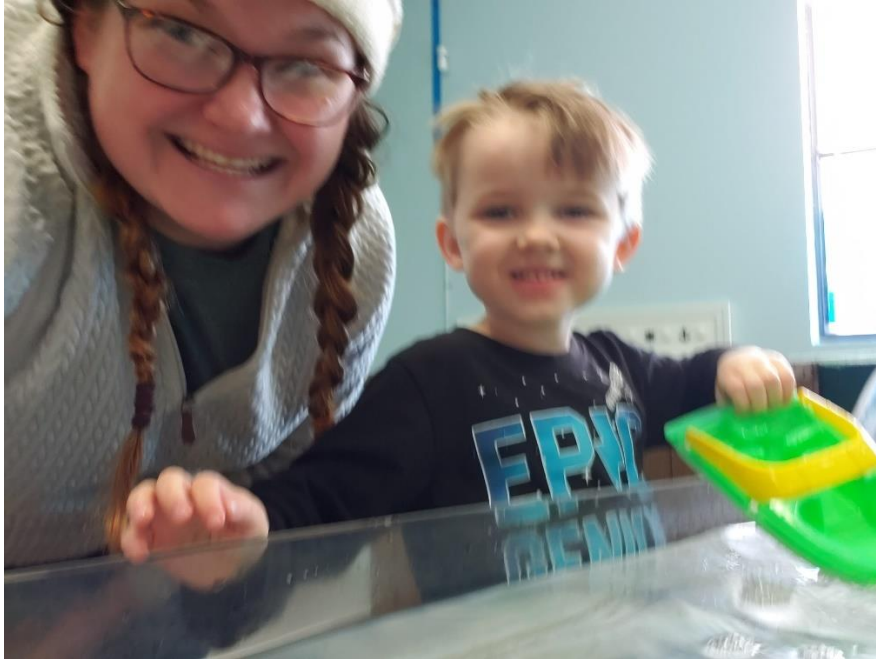
The Beginning:

As a regular American adult - something happening in Wuhan China in December 2019 was barely a blip on my radar. None of "those" diseases like SARS or Middle Eastern SARS had affected us in America much. So, in reality you saw a news article on such incidents, and you filed it away somewhere in your mind, then continued about your everyday life.

I took a personal trip to Vienna, Austria at the end of January 2020. On the way there I was sick with ear infections, a runny nose, and raised temperature, but decided I could tough it out and take a one -legged domestic flight and two-legged international flight journey. No one stopped me from traveling even though I was visibly sick. Through three airports and two international customs stations I traveled with that handy blue US passport. Something highly valued and making it easier to get through those customs lines. I made it to my destination and recovered after some sleep, a hot shower, and ear medicine.

Everything was normal for a tourist visiting a European Union country. Walking crowded streets in shopping and historical areas, riding on crowded buses, standing right up next to others in line for tickets, sitting in close - packed restaurants, breathing the air with strangers.

Just a couple of months later - all of those experiences register as strange, taboo, as something of the past.



February 29th, 2020

I take my son Asher to a big International Festival at the Oak Ridge Children's Museum. There are games, music, dancing, food, tons of people walking around everywhere.

(That day and event stick out to me for all that happened after.)

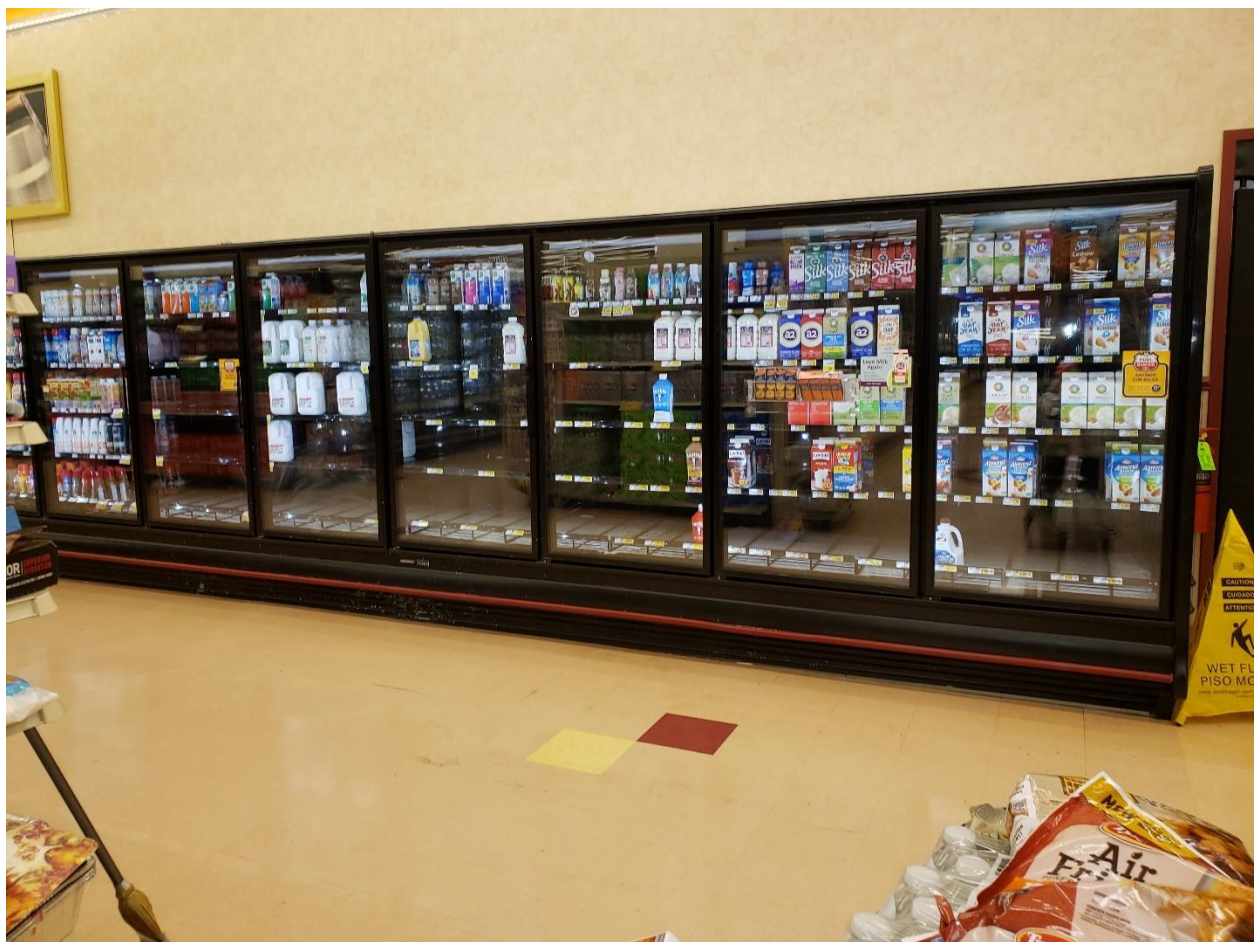


February 2020

News coverage of this virus is ramping up. On a primetime news show interview with a doctor or someone, they asked her if people should be buying extra food. She kind of played it down, saying that next time you're at the store you should buy a little extra.

It was all so calm and downplayed. I'm extra worried now. I called my family about this. Everyone is trying to be calm, I think. But if a major nation-wide news station is making these points I'm going to stalk up on some extra food and water.

March 2020 – the store shelves are emptying out. So much fear right now. People are wearing masks and gloves to shop.









The store looks like some natural disaster is headed our way.

The images are strange. Then within a few days the grocery stores are looking bleak.

March 16th, 2020

We are to work from home, the Department of Energy is supposed to telework for a week or two and see what happens with this virus.

I must set up a home office. I don't have one. Dining room table will be the best place.

March 2020

They sent the kids home for spring break and now have said the kids will not come back for a while. They school will send packets of information for kids to do.

March 2020

Call from Dad today. Mom has cancer and must get emergency surgery. I could hear her screaming in pain. I have never heard either of my parent's in that much pain before.

Dad hung up and I sat and prayed and cried.

They are shutting down travel. Planes and even driving a long distance – 14 hours to Oklahoma – would mean having to stop for fueling, eating, bathrooms, and sleep. I can't leave my son if the world is shutting down, and I can't risk taking him with me.

Mom and Dad have each other.

Will I ever see Mom again? Will I ever see any of my family again?

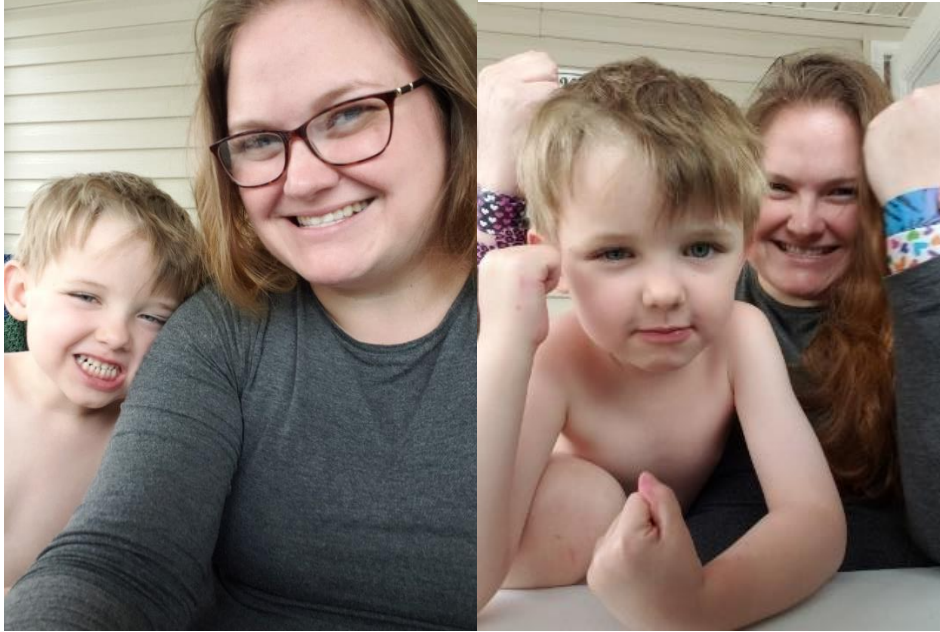
March 2020

Emergency surgery went well, and Mom is in recovery. Dad told me it was eerie in the hospital. They had already shut down the hospital and my mom was the last patient they accepted as an emergency case. The hospital was overall quiet. A whole floor was designated already for COVID-19 patients. The timing is so strange? Divine? That she even got in and got the surgery. But even after surgery Dad told me, cancer is cancer, and chemotherapy is still needed.

It feels like the world is ending inside and outside of my personal existence.

A bright light that surgery going well. Dark clouds coming back for how to get chemo with a raging global virus will be tricky.

They are releasing Mom from the hospital sooner than normal for the extensive cut open surgery she had done. The staff were worried about the risk of her catching the virus if she stayed in the hospital.

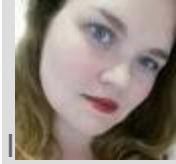


March 2020 – trying to work and be kid entertainment.

At least they are cute when they fall asleep under your makeshift home office desk.



Symptoms



Erin Dominick Anderson <@gmail.com>

Sat, Mar
28, 2020,
9:45 PM

to me

March 28th Saturday

Woke with a sore throat and sinus headache. Advil helped. Headache went away by lunch. Still, lots of little coughs throughout the day.

Little bit sore throat this evening at bedtime. Took mucinex.

Scared this is what I have been fearing.

On Fri, Mar 27, 2020, 9:58 PM Erin Dominick Anderson <[@gmail.com](#)> wrote:
I have to email myself to keep track of everything or I will forget all of these details on where I went and what I was feeling like.

Last time went out was to grocery on Friday March 20, 2020.

Wednesday March 25th woke with sinus. Headache big pain above right eye. Bend over and pain worsens. Take Mucinex to help. Not much in nose. But pain in forehead is intense for 2 and 1/2 days. Mucinex eases pain by 2nd day.

Thursday March 26th went to bed with sore throat.

Woke with sore throat.

Friday March 27th went to bed with sore. Throat. still taking Mucinex and Allegra and. triease. for. allergies. salt water hot for sore throat.
A little bit of a cough.

March 30, 2020

Feeling somewhat better. It was not COVID. So fearful of something. That fear, fear, fear. This is all really bringing my life into focus for me. Times I let slip away. Regrets. Trying to find a balance to life and recognize what is most important to me. These will be key to remember going forward.

March 31st, 2020

It is hard to believe, but I broke down and bought Disney+.

Before the pandemic I told myself I wouldn't buy another video streaming service. There are too many already.

I bought this to help entertain my preschooler. Schools are closed, and I still must work. We were home and safe, and all other blessed things. But all other stressed-out things as well. I must be mother and teacher and playmate and worker and take care of myself.

Disney is a tool I will use to help us cope with this stress. I shall not feel that guilty! Mickey Mouse hooray!

My son's dad is a postman, an essential worker, out every day delivering the mail to many people. Until they get more answers on the virus, we decided Asher would stay with me and could have outside visits with his dad. Or wave through a window. It is just a sad time for kids of divorced parents. Sometimes simple, and sometimes extra complicated.

April 1st, 2020

They are encouraging people to stay home as much as possible, and only to go out for essential groceries, exercise, doctor's visits.

We need to stay 6 feet apart from others. I saw a sad news report about rectangles drawn with tape on parking lots – 6 feet apart – so homeless people would know how far to stay apart while they slept or ate. It is hard to think on so much sadness in the world and feel helpless for the most part to do anything.

Inbox



Erin Dominick Anderson < @gmail.com>

Thu, Apr
2, 2020,
10:17 PM

to me

When this is over, I want to:

- 1) give my Momma a hug.
- 2) take a road trip to Huntsville and see the rocket museum.
- 3) see my son grow up healthy and strong.
- 4) write a book, or two, or three.
- 5) not be so stressed out and rushed all the time. Slow down more.
- 6) travel the world.
- 7) be joyful.

Saturday, April 4, 2020

I'm not doing well today.

Just stressed? I am lonely and shorter tempered and feel bad about it. The world is a lot of drivel right now. I may go with not watching news this weekend. That helped me one day. Governor signed stay at home order. Death count goes up every day. Need for gear and freezer trucks and body bags was the news every night this week.

Mom is sick so I can't burden her much. Dad is helping her a lot and worrying a lot. Becca is there. But she and I kind of grew apart and I'm not sure how to relate as much anymore for some reason. I'd been already distancing and growing apart from my friends before this pandemic. The social media is depressing. I feel depressing. What to do, how to feel, how to make it through - are all big questions.

I worry Asher will be too affected by this. My crying and being tired and stressed. He is stubborn and won't play by himself to let me focus. Or I play with him 20 minutes and must go back to work, and he is mad about it. I guess I should be grateful he even wants to play with me. I am grateful I have him. But the balance is out of whack.

Maybe a sticker chart or white board chart to mark off for each home toy center he plays at?

My son is so cute and wonderful. I told him today it is not that I don't want to play with you. It is that I must and need to work. To read and type and think and focus. I tried to explain it like I work to make money, and we use money to buy food and a house and toys. So, it is important to work. I think he kind of understood that. 4 years old, he is trying.

Maybe we will be going back to the office next month. We keep gearing up to go back, but then they tell us to stand down and keep working from home.

Shortages of masks and hand sanitizers. Among other things like ventilators and medical supplies. The government is encouraging everyone to leave the high-quality N-95 and KN95 masks for the essential health care workers. People are home making masks out of material and having mask donation drives.

April 7, 2020

I skyped my parents today. My Mom is doing a bit better, chemotherapy has been terrible! Each day she is stronger she said. "Think positive." Her mother, my grandmother Sadie always liked to tell us and write little notes for us with sayings on them. "Think positive."

I keep telling myself to breathe.

It struck me today how much my parents have each helped the other through hard times. It is sweet to see. They are 40 years together next month. A rare thing. But I'm glad they have each other during these doubly troubling times. It does my heart good to see how they complement each other.

I wish for a relationship like that for myself someday. A best friend. A helpmate. My person in the world.



April 12th, 2020

Trying to put some humor into Easter. Maybe enough said about that.



Video calls to family. Video has helped so much with all of us apart.



April 14th, 2020

They have closed the state parks and playgrounds. Yellow tape marks them off.



May 2020

I see how these big changes have impacted my 4-year-old. The routine was up ended. No more friends. No teachers. It was strange for them, and I expect all of us parents were confused and scared and that rubbed off on the kids.

I've been trying to make up little lessons and experiences for my kid. Things like "plant a garden with me". Let's talk about bugs and birds. Let's talk about what we see when our driveway has so much water it runs downhill into the storm drain.

Asher and I did an arts and crafts project here at the house. We took things from our recycling bin and fashioned them into a mortar-board graduation cap for him. An almond milk container cut apart with some cardboard across the top made a pretty good base. He decorated it with colored papers and stickers. I was proud of our ingenuity.

We were told preschool graduation will take place individually at each child's house. Their teacher, Mr. Ted Fletcher drove to our house to give Asher his certificate and tell him what a good job he did in preschool. We all stood on the front lawn a while. Mr. Ted admired Asher's cap. I appreciated that attention his teacher gave to Asher for graduation. That extra effort was super kind.



June 2020

This is life now, doing as many things online virtually as possible. A dance class, a medical session, a work meeting....

Telemedicine meeting invitation

Inbox



Jeannie <@comcast.net>

Mon, Jun
15, 2020,
7:04 PM

to @gmail.com

Hello, this is Ms. - please join me for a secure video call:

Use a computer or device with a good internet connection and webcam. If you run into issues connecting, restart your computer or check out the Doxy.me <http://help.doxy.me>
Simple, free, and secure telemedicine powered by <https://doxy.me>
Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

July 2020

Not the 5th birthday you think about planning for your kid. But it will be a party! A small family party with a superhero theme. We will get to go tacos from his favorite Mexican food restaurant and have a big cake and presents.



July 27th, 2020

Found a small neighborhood outside pool, just right for me to try and teach Asher to swim myself. Not many people there at odd times. Getting out of the house, even for a little bit, is an appreciated rarity these days.



Summer 2020

I am trying different recipes and flavors with at-home cooking. There are ingredient delivery kits now, so I have some mailed to me each week to try out. Only a few have gotten thumbs up from Mr. 5-year-old. But we are both trying new ingredients, on top of me trying to perfect my cooking skills.

Audiobooks from library are helping return my sanity. I have a reading goal of so many books this year. Taking my mind to the biography of someone else helps me escape my life and in equal turns to see my own life better.

Things to do to make it through.

August 2020

So, this is pandemic Kindergarten?

I can't take my kid school shopping; they bring it to the car trunk.

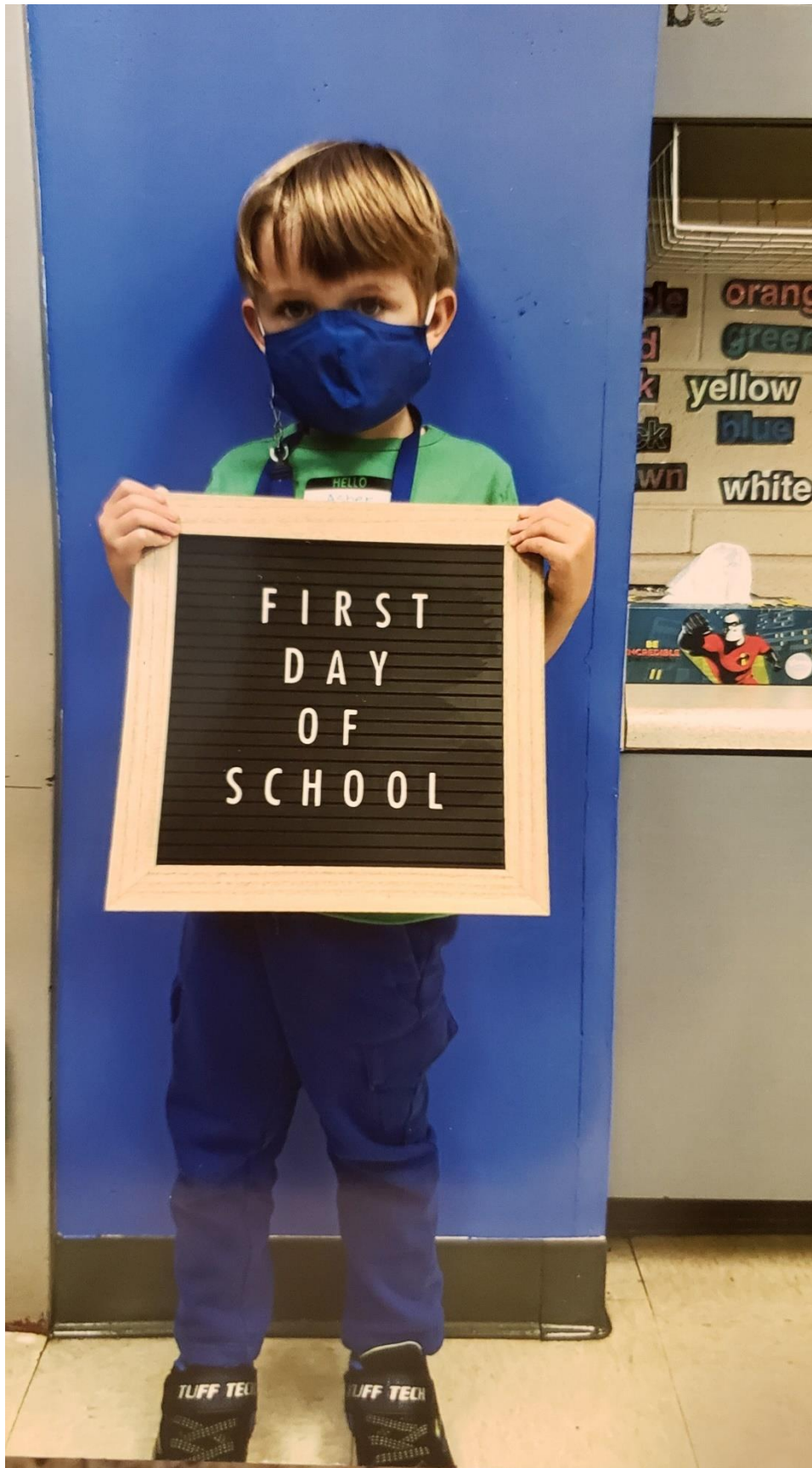
I can't walk my kid inside the school or meet his teachers in person.

He must walk off into that two-story building on his own. He looks so small with that backpack on.

But we made the decision that it was important for our kid to go to school in person if it was possible. I'm glad we made that decision. He needs a real trained teacher. Now we've just got to keep him masked, hand-sanitized, and healthy.

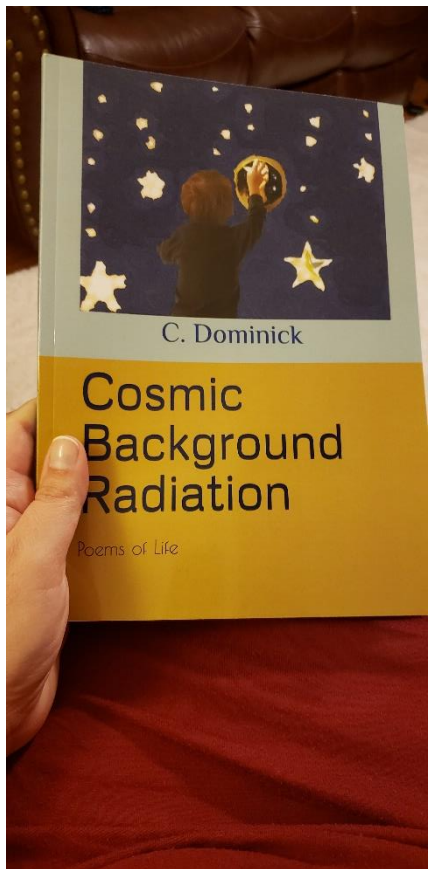
The school told us special classes like library and art will have the teacher come to the student's classroom and not the other way around. The kids will stay in "pods" for playing on the playground. They will eat lunch in their classrooms and not the cafeteria. I see all the teachers and staff trying hard to make this successful. Their attitude helps a lot.





September 2020

With Mom's illness, the pandemic, and the focus on life and death, I decided to finally put together a book of poetry. I wrote new and edited also edited poems from years ago into a little book. I self-published it and bought a few copies to send to family and friends. It was such a good feeling to finally do something for myself! To feel like I was expressing myself creatively and putting myself out into the world. Pandemics can be good motivators.



October 2020

Getting outside more this fall. Lots of hikes. Seeing state parks. Drives in the mountains.

We will try Halloween trick or treating, but we'll wear masks and try to stay out of big crowds. Wipe the candy down before touching and eating it. It is hard to know what precautions to take. Or even if we should skip the holiday?



November 2020

They are having the kids go to a virtual school for the days around thanksgiving week. They have tablets and paperwork packets. And they have a class virtual meeting each morning.

The virtual meeting is cute with kindergarteners. They are so genuinely happy to see their friends and super excited. They all waved at each other and pointed "oh it is "friend's name" "Hi! Friend!" Giggles of glee everywhere.

November 29, 2020, full moon

The loneliness grabs at me. Creeping slowly into and onward through my mind.

Asher and I had a great weekend. I did some of my big chores, but I also had time to really play with him and focus in for stretches of time. Or last night in his giant bath of bubbles, I could simply lean my head against the wall and gaze at him in wonder. My little boy. Real. Amazing. Growing. Learning. Playing. Those moments feel wonderful.

Then tonight he had a temper tantrum and yelled and cried and threw down my things.

Usually, I can hold it all together, but I just burst into tears over everything in this world. Eventually he wore himself out and apologized to me. Life is hard on kids too, and they don't know how to process these great big emotions. I don't know if us adults know how to process these big emotions either. I told him we still love each other even if we are upset. I told him we could make ourselves do better tomorrow and be better tomorrow. It all still sucked. Seems to come out of nowhere to me, these little emotional outbursts. He is 5. I am 36. I can do better.

I just think I am so damn lonely. Here is my diary at least. I feel weak. I feel like I'm aging. I feel like I'm falling apart. I feel worthless. I feel lost. I feel alone. I feel scared. I feel worried. I feel alone. I feel like I overwhelm the few people I do have to talk to, because I'm so lonely.

Then I feel even more stupid for opening myself up. I take a few risks. Risks for me. They may not be seen as risks to someone else. To me I am trying, I am opening, I am willing. Sometimes I'm ponderously slow. But I'm moving. I'm trying. I just need someone to understand and give me a little time and attention. To build something with me.

About 5 years divorced, I keep thinking there is some man out there for me. The feeling of rightness as two puzzle pieces join together. Where is that feeling? Where are you? I think if I can find you and you can really see me, really enjoy me, well, I keep thinking I'll be able to see that about myself as well.

How to feel "enough" for yourself? for a partner? for a child?

Random thought, a pandemic really squelches a dating life.

Dream lover: I am alone. Please come find me, question me, talk to me, love me, laugh with me, date me, and dream with me. Where are you?

-E

December 2020

Holiday season is tough. We skyped my parents today. Chatting and showing off robot toys.



December 31st, 2020 – New Year’s Eve – my house, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

Hoping, hoping, hoping for a good 2021.

My Mom had the bright idea that she, my sister, and myself should dress up fancy for at home New Year’s Eve parties. We put on fun dresses, did our hair and makeup, and took pictures to send to each other. We had such fun.

I threw a festive party for little one and I here at the house. We video called different family. We had party blowers and glow lights. I let him stay up until after midnight – he did it. We watched the New York Times Square ball drop, and seemingly all the tv shows.

There is a music group AJR, and they have this popular song with the lyrics:

I’m way too young to lie here forever
I’m way too old to try, so whatever come hang
Let’s go out with a bang
Bang! Bang! Bang!
Been a hell of a ride, but I’m thinking it’s time to go.

So put on your best face everybody
Pretend you know this song
Everybody come hang
Let’s go out with a bang
Bang! Bang! Bang!
Here we go!

That song alludes to a lot of feelings right now. Man, we are all feeling something about saying goodbye to the year 2020.

January 6th, 2021

President Trump supporters with flags and guns and sounding crazy are at the U.S. Capitol building.

I'm watching on TV and trying to explain to my 5-year-old why I am shouting in disbelief and have my hand over my mouth. Of why I am trying to flip from station to station. I land on the C-SPAN government channel who was broadcasting the vote tally. We were all warned 'something' could happen. I just can't believe the government didn't take it seriously. Or the police if the federal government couldn't act. I don't know, it seems strange there were not more police at the Capitol building. The guards are overwhelmed, and the crowd is just flowing past and over them. I am standing up pacing and blinking rapidly as armed people break down windows and doors and get into the capitol. My hand over my mouth again in disbelief. The Trump Supporters are walking through the rotunda with the beautiful statues and art. Some of them have their cell phones out and are taking pictures! I've been to the capitol several times and walked through there. This is so surreal. I call my parents and they are watching too. We keep watching this unfold and stay on the phone together for a long time. I think this is scarier than the pandemic. This doesn't happen in our country. Just like what I said when I saw the grocery store shelves empty at the beginning of the pandemic. This is America. Our government is strong. Right? Now I'm questioning so much truth and lies. What in the world are these people doing and thinking? You protest sure, you elect people to try to change things you don't like, but we have a government so there should not be a need to riot. They must be so upset and mean and disillusioned? Something. But our government for several decades now swings back and forth like a pendulum with this viewpoint and political party for this point in time, and then the next political party and viewpoint for the next point in time. It is just how it is. So, I'm looking thinking they are stupid because in four years power will come back to them anyway. This is just our divided country. Scary, scary, scary. I've never thought about what would happen if the government fell apart. We're America. We are over 200 years old. We have an enviable life here for the most part. Not today, but for the most part. Why are we still in some strange, imagined Hollywood movie? This doesn't really happen, but here we are, and it looks like this could be bad.

Endo January 2021

My son's aunt, Kathy Anderson-Bradbury, has died suddenly. Funeral services on the 26th. Asher and I won't go because of the pandemic. They asked us to stay home. It used to be funerals were supposed to be attended and the grieving start.

February 19, 2021

Brick wall glass window
Glass is gray and smudged with time

Little hand prints streak up and down

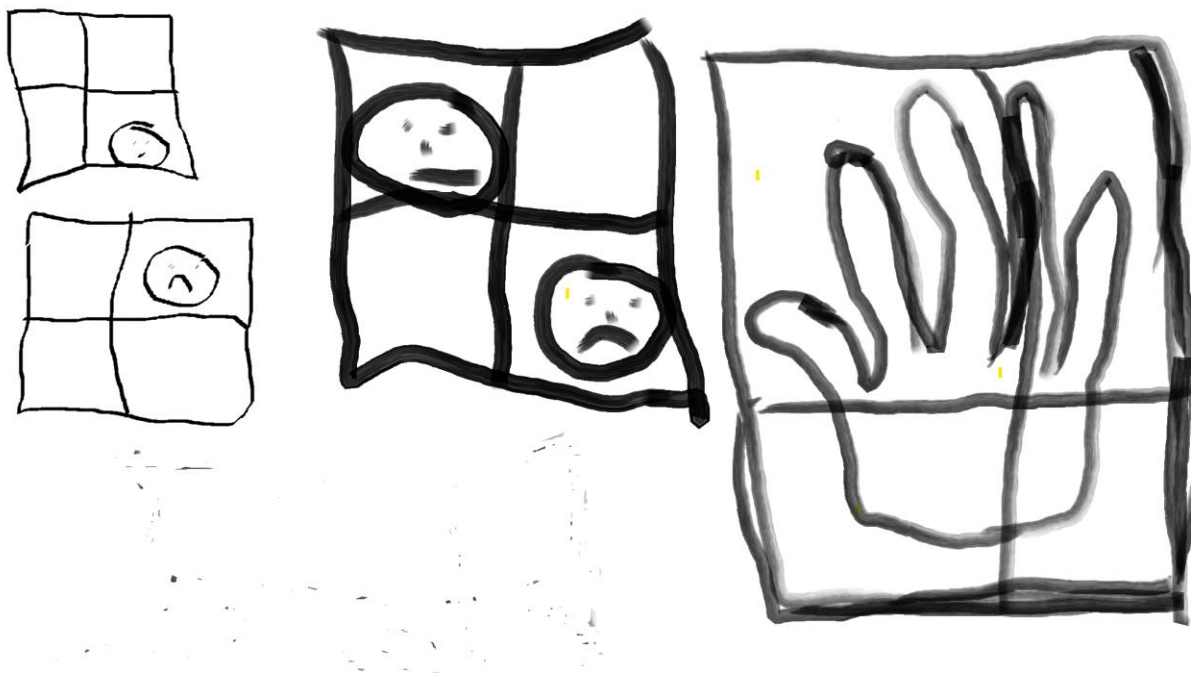
Boxes

Boxes

Boxes

Little round faces smudged with wet eyes

Now we live in so many boxes



Wednesday, February 24, 2021

My house, Oak Ridge, Tennessee

I bought a physical journal for 2021, and it arrived today. I had something similar years ago. Things in our lives now are depressing and isolating. Buying the journal is something positive I wanted to do for myself. Writing about this time, I hope will make it easier to face, and not feel like each day I walk in a strange bad dream.

Thursday, February 25, 2021

I miss human contact. A hug. A HUG!

Saturday, February 27, 2021

Took a virtual Reiki I workshop. It was given by my cousin Gen in California. My Mom in Oklahoma, and I here in Tennessee joined in to learn. There were around 7 women, I guess. A reminder that we are each seeking something. It seemed each woman had a reason different from another for being in the class. It was interesting to observe our different paths, and to end up reaching a point of “coming together” – at the same time, for the same purpose – if not being able to be in the same place. Energy healing is interesting. I’m skeptical, but I feel a lot of energy in the world. If you stop and think a bit, we all feel energy in another from time to time. You can feel anger coming off someone, or sadness. Our perception comes because of seeing something in someone else or feeling it.

I don’t feel settled enough in myself to be of much help to anyone else though. Maybe someday I will be able to help someone else. I need to read more about the practice and expand my knowledge. Being in a class with my mother was a lovely experience. I have been so beyond scared this past year that cancer would take my mother.

And I’m alone.

There is such a fear with the potential or actual severing of a connection with a mother or father. There is something so human about the nuclear family still being the driving force of human emotion.

March 2021

Searching online for vaccine appointments. They've put people into categories by age, disabilities, and underlying illnesses. So, I need to keep waiting. Rumors are flying around town that you can go here or there to get it.

But then there are cautionary tales telling people not to bother, because you still must be the right age, or they will turn you away.

Fighting for our lives again. Survival mode.

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

I am scared I am failing at work. It is honestly hard to keep my motivation. Working from home is nice in many ways, challenging in many others. Even with video cameras and chat boxes, we all mostly keep to ourselves. I enjoy being home for the sense of overall calmness it gives me. Home is home after all.

I do miss people. Colleagues. All the people I would have met being interactive at my kid's school, that will have to wait. I miss being in crowds with little fear. As a woman who went out at night to concerts or shows or restaurants, pre-pandemic my fears were watching out for rough men, not going through dark alleyways, and staying away from drunk people.

From now on, if I ever go out to those types of events again, I will be watching others for death. An invisible sickness in the air we breathe in and breathe out. Just think of it in those terms. Almost everyone becomes a "potential killer". It all happened suddenly, and humanity is trying our best to figure out how to help ourselves. But that is the thought process we are up against. So here I am stuck inside (for the most part) for my leisure time, and for my work time, and for my family time. 85% of me is now too fearful to do anything else. 15% of me just wants to break away. I would take the risk. But I am responsible for a child, for myself, for some sort of future for the two of us.

STUCK.

Saturday, March 6, 2021

Made progress on cleaning out my garage. These things in tubs and totes which I've brought from place to place. Pandemics are helpful in some ways, yes? You are in one space so much, you finally must take time to organize and cleanup your life. Otherwise, you are surrounded by junk and memories. Some sort of 'old life' staring you in the face.

Relieving lots of emotions in this cleaning.

People I miss.

Parts of myself from long ago that I miss.

Throw away.

Donate the things and sort the feelings.

Memories to keep.

A life half-lived.

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Steel feeling lost. Only barely motivated. What do I focus on? Such a scary time. I feel alone and I am lonely.

I woke this morning from weird dreams. Dreams are so strange. I was lost in a huge multi-level mall or shopping center. I was searching for something, something unnamed, something I never ended up finding.

I'm about to collapse into the pool of loneliness. Trying not to hate myself for being human.

Where is *my* person?

my someone?

my partner?

Lover?

Champion?

Adventure buddy?

Where?

Thursday March 11, 2021 - My first dose

After some online searching yesterday, I stumbled upon an appointment just an hour drive away today! Today! Oddly on this anniversary we have decided to mark.

Well, I slept some, but still awoke an hour early, being nervous and excited. I hit the road driving through the Tennessee hills. Winding round the mountainside I felt on a quest. Something long overdue.

The bright red sun cresting over the mountains to cover the valley in the friendliest warmth. The location is not auspicious - a strip mall in a small mountain town. Poor freedom gracing the walls of the old-style big box store, where classic rock blares and the line turns long.

The occasion is normal on the outside. Scuffed tile floors and high fluorescent lights bely normalcy. Idle chit chat of nervous, nervous people starts up and it doesn't serve but to grate as I am drawn into the blah blah blahs through social niceties. Where I just want to be present in my mind to be alone with my thoughts. As we have been so alone this past year in so many ways...

I'm still human, just out of practice at it.

Not long now, and counter stepped up to, and forms are filled out. The precious 'club membership' card is filled with my name, and my birth, and signed over and given -- to me. A small piece of hopeful paper.

The man two in front of me steps out to roll down his sleeve and give a little jig and reel dance. He must be grinning ear to ear under his mask. It is good to smile and laugh.

This name, my name, is called by the white coat and kind eyes. Her chit chat envelopes me without harm.

One stick.

And I wish balloons and confetti would fall on me from the sky. I feel that good. I feel that separate. I feel that connected. A big weight of worry is subsiding in the recesses of the mind. This greater consciousness of easier breaths to freedom.

Tuesday, March 16th, 2021

1 year anniversary of being sent to work from home.

(This day also happens to be my 5-year divorce-a-versary. Not sure if that word or even a need for that word truly exists. But there you go. All my thoughts caught up on the odd alignment of happenings in dates).

Tuesday, 30th March 2021

My self-esteem is so low again.

Reality twists and turns in my mind. All of the past bumping up against the present.

And I have too much time to think now. Not enough to distract me.

Stuck at home.

Monday, April 5th, 2021

Trying to take more solace in my role as mother. I read the book "peter rabbit" to Asher today. We had such a good night overall. I love to hear my son's laugh. Such freedom and joy in a laugh. That is my true blessing tonight.

Monday, April 12th, 2021

Spring is feeling as if it is here. I had a good day. I feel more balanced. I am trying to see the positives of life and of this pandemic situation.

A sunny day in the park with my son, and a picnic dinner to do me worlds of good. Nature is wonderful to help.

Thursday, April 8th, 2021

MY SECOND VACCINE DOSE!

In a couple of weeks, I will be “fully vaccinated” they say.

There weren't appointments for Moderna open near me at the Walmart store. So, I drove up to Campbell County Health Department. Their vaccination spot was a drive thru. That was nice. But the National Guard were there helping them out. It is a little scary to see that there is a need for the military to be involved.

Saturday, April 17th, 2021

I've been trying to find us positive outside of the house experiences that are low risk. I took Asher to the Knoxville Botanical Gardens today. Neither of us had been. It was pretty and he could run around. There weren't many people, so I wasn't as scared for him and I. Little bits of time to relax.



Tuesday, April 20th, 2021

I woke up too early. Without a chance to go back to sleep, I cleaned the house, and sanitized the kitchen while little one still slept. I made muffins to make my house smell good, and to be honest, for the simple comfort that food can bring in times of stress.

Sleep is sporadic this past year.

Thursday, April 22nd, 2021

I am trying online dating on a new dating app. In 5 years after divorce, I feel I have tried and tried again. I don't want to settle unless I am settling into a good connection and fit with someone. (Trying to be a little funny there).

May 2021

I've started an online pen pal relationship with an interesting man who lives in Arequipa, Peru. He is smart and seems kind. We write back and forth beautifully to each other. Most of it is about our day to day lives. Our hopes and dreams. We can still have those now, right? (humor).

This sort of friendship is the best during a pandemic. We're lucky to have email and video chats. I can't imagine in the past waiting long periods of time for letters to arrive. No wonder people say we are an "instant gratification" generation. So much can happen in short periods of time. And I want a response now! (Stamping my metaphorical foot).

If you find a good person to share back and forth with, I suppose it makes any wait even more worth it.

Friday June 4, 2021

This is the night of the "First Friday Art Walk" in downtown Knoxville. I am brave enough with a two-shot vaccination army behind me, and mask in front of me, to go out to an art gallery with a bunch of strangers. We in the world are hoping this will be a summer as close to back to normal as we can get.

Update is, tonight I had a "video date" with Peruvian pen pal Rommel at the art gallery. Exhilarating. Strange.

I was proud of myself for actually going out of my house to somewhere not the school drop-off-line, or the grocery store. Even driving to a place with lots of cars, lots of people was odd. Not pre-pandemic levels, but more people in one place than I had seen in person in a long time.

Hope is here in full force with so many now.

Monday June 21, 2021

I continue to have the fear --
That every parent fear!
Where my child is taken too soon!
I can play the agony and the screams and cries in my mind
I hate myself for that small increase in fear...that blip of my heart before it goes into
rhythm again.

As a kid I would often believe you could "think" something into happening. Part of that
lingers inside my mind at age 37.

And I find it hard to even think for fear now. I've had these fears since right before being
a parent. As at that time, my safety and security were taken away. Now, as a single
Mom in a pandemic, the fear resounds an echoing refrain behind my masked mind. Tat-
a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat.

My brain can tick through all that is lost. The loss of an entire future and futures which
touch other futures. Poof! Gone! Utter loss. Utter loneliness.

Those other we have heard about for over a year, over 600,000 in the US alone; well,
most of them did not expect to pass away. We all keep asking why.

They took the mask mandate off for school aged children. These little souls we are
supposed to protect. These little souls who have no vaccine option yet. They took away
our best defense! I'm livid. I'm helpless. I can do nothing but send mine with a mask and
hope the peer pressure isn't too great.

We take each day one at a time.

I do still hope. An anxious hope, but a hope.

July 2021

Planning 6th birthday for little one. Just a small family occasion again this year. I'm kind of liking that though. Not so much pressure. A transformers robot theme for the party and cake.

We are optimistic that summer overall will be better than last year. With vaccinations maybe. I still find myself cautious though.

So, we are staying away from group activities, like sports, and scouts. The goal is just to keep him healthy and able to go to school, and all we have been doing has worked so far! I'm grateful and feel blessed there.

July 2021

Starting a new school year. I feel like we are "old pros" at this now. I don't worry about little one walking into the building by himself. Or knowing the importance of a mask and clean hands.

People have been talking of "normal" practically since this pandemic began.

Do you know though? I feel like we are in normal now. Normal life is wearing a mask in crowded places. Normal life is bringing sanitizer everywhere you go. Normal life is limiting your activities, and people you see.

But we still have life. We have an opportunity.

July 2021

The virus is mutating. This one seems to have the people in charge concerned – Delta. Ravaging India and spreading really fast among people.

Saturday, August 28th, 2021

*My ex-husband called, and he is pretty sure he has COVID. He is the last of the post office workers to get it. All the rest have had it sometime over the last year. And he is double vaccinated. They call this a breakthrough case, I guess. He will go to a clinic and get tested.

Thankfully little Asher had already been staying with me a week, so hopefully no risk that he has it.

*My ex-husband's sister drove my ex-husband to a clinic. She spent an hour in the car and the clinic had no available appointments, so they must go back tomorrow.

Sunday, August 29th, 2021

*My son's dad is positive for COVID-19.

Monday, August 30th, 2021

*My son's aunt feels a scratchy throat and congestion now. She is positive for COVID-19. This variant is spreading fast within a couple days of exposure.

*I pull out an at-home COVID-19 test that I bought "just in case". Pretty simple, but I read the directions three times to make sure I do it all correctly. Little one did well with me swabbing his nostrils. We were both negative and had no symptoms.

September 1st, 2021

* My son's paternal grandfather has started feeling bad, coughing, sneezing, many of these symptoms we have heard about. He is having a worse and worse time finding breath. They call an ambulance to take him to the hospital.

*After a few days in the hospital we can see it is not going well with a positive COVID-19 test and double pneumonia.

*My son's other aunt is with her father at the hospital. We can connect Asher with his grandfather for one last video chat. Mr. Lynn Anderson had a catch in his throat as he told Asher he loved him and goodbye. It was heartbreaking.

September 9th, 2021

Lynn Anderson died.

Lynn Anderson had a big white beard. He often dressed as Santa Claus during the Christmas season. Through my mind passes the phrase: "And COVID killed Santa Claus." A final injustice.

....COVID Killed Santa Claus.....

These times are challenging for the living trying to grieve and remember. No funeral services were held for Lynn. A lot of people now are saying a celebration of life ceremony will be held later. Meanwhile the pandemic rages. I doubt most of these ceremonies will ever happen. We must all deal with the circumstances in our own ways. There is much sadness though, much sadness.

I had to explain death to a six-year-old. Souls, and bodies, and God, and being human. And that we all will die someday. But hopefully he and I will have a long time to live together, because we have many things to see and do in this world.

October 2021

We skipped Halloween this year. We dressed up at home and had candy at home. Not the same. But this Delta mutation is stronger. And with his dad and aunt just recovering from COVID-19 it seemed the prudent thing to do.

November 7th, 2021

Kid's Vaccine

The buzz for months has been the testing and approval process of the Pfizer vaccine for children aged 5-11!

I really would cross my fingers and say to myself, just a little bit longer, just a little bit longer.

We made it! Victory!

I found a vaccine appointment for my little boy! His father and I took him. He was so brave and had no side effects. This was one step towards a weight being lifted from my shoulders.

The vaccines are protection for having the virus not be as strong and bad. The vaccines are supposed to keep most of us from getting bad and into the hospital. So, when you know your child has the beginnings of that protection you are overjoyed.

I got a BOOSTER shot for myself while we were there. I “mixed and matched” they are allowing it. So, my third shot is Pfizer mRNA vaccine, and my first two were Moderna mRNA vaccines.

November 19th, 2021

Against what I thought were bad odds, my parents were able to make the 14-hour drive from Oklahoma to see us for the Thanksgiving holiday!!

The first hugs were indescribable.

Two years, and two forms of death were in between our families' togetherness, health, and happiness. Another victory this.

They will stay almost two weeks. We can celebrate our triumph of simple togetherness.

Sunday, November 28th, 2021

Second vaccine for little boy went off without a hitch or side effect as well.

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

It is hard to believe the public radio station said it had been two years since the world first heard of the SARS-COV-2 virus. I had not thought about this weird anniversary until I heard that broadcast. And I am starting to think back about how SARS-COV-2 seemed to me at the time; it was some scare in China. A blip on the US news stations here. December 2019. I didn't think about it because that was all happening on the other side of the world. The first SARS, and MERS camel virus, bird-flu, zika virus – well these all never seemed to make too much impact in America. They were news stories for a few weeks at most and then gone.

Two years.

December 2019.

I was looking forward to Christmas then.

I was looking forward to the New Year.

I was looking forward to the new decade! (The '20's. The 2020's – it sounded cool and fun).

Very much it feels I still live in a dream. Did this all really happen? Are we in some alternate universe? A feature film? An apocalyptic storybook? It is hard to even know what to think. I'm not sure I even know what I feel about the past two years.

Pieces. Jumbles. Thoughts. Numbness. Analyze. Risk. Stress. Anxiety. Peace.
Simplicity. Overwhelming. Communalism. Tribalism. Divisiveness. Loneliness. Fear.
Death. Life.

When I was 13 years old my teacher submitted a poem of mine to a contest at the University of Maine. It was my proudest moment to win second place. To beat all these adults. I won a set of magnets with words on them. Words to move around and make into poetry. Words that mean one thing on their own, but so much more paired with another. That is what is flashing through my mind – seeing each word individually, then moving them visually around in my head. Some of these words are large and fierce and

singular. Some of these words I have been trying for two years to make smaller, and smaller, and smaller. Some of the words are backwards, and even upside down. This is life now though. My way to process and pick apart the concepts and thoughts about all I was forced to feel, think, and do.

I see now how sheltered I was in all my life leading up to December 2019. There would always be food on the shelves. More than we all needed was available twenty-four hours a day, and it came in so many flavors or scents or whatever kind to suit your taste. If I didn't find it at the store, or was tired or lazy, I took for granted I could go and sit down in a restaurant full of people and be catered to for over an hour. Then I could cheerfully go to a full concert hall and hear the symphony. Or laugh at a comedy show, not caring if someone behind me laughed so much, they ended up coughing on me. Then I could stroll around the crowded downtown square to see the Christmas lights, and people skating, and little boutique shops open late. I wouldn't care to then get in a crowded elevator in the parking garage.

When I think of all the inconsequential worries, I had each day, it is unfathomable to me now.

I felt safe. There was a safety net of government entities to help me if I needed it, I mean the police, the medical system, the school system, the local governments; an entire system that worked for me if I was ever in need.

I knew I could get in a car and travel wherever I wanted. I knew I could get on an airplane and travel to see my family in Oklahoma. I knew I could get on an airplane and fly around the world if I wanted to. I was privileged and did not appreciate that enough.

Background options. Not questioned. Not doubted.

December 11th, 2021

We prepare for a second Christmas after the start of this pandemic. Lights around town are beautiful. Christmas events and Santa meets are being held as safely as possible, as well as the Christmas parade. People are trying to be festive.

We hope for a good 2022. Hope, hope, hope.

I still work from home, but we were told this week of plans to head back into an office building at the beginning of February. Changes coming.

What a strange time it has been overall. December is usually that time to reflect anyway. On what was done, and what can be done the next year. Dreams and desires.

December 2021

The news is full of the name of a new COVID-19 mutated virus variant called Omicron. Omicron has some 50 mutations they say, and it spreads faster and easier. Concerns today of Omicron combining with Delta variant and causing some double wave of the virus.

There is a song line that comes to mind:

“And it goes on, and on, and on.

And it goes on, and on, and on.

I throw my hands up in the air sometimes.

Saying ey-oh, got to let go.”

We must keep moving forward, it is one of the important lessons I have learned. We need to find meaning and depth to life. Those are not necessarily wise words, but they are my truth right now. Hope. “Think positive.”