

## Couple sticks together through COVID-19

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BY ANNE ADAMS • STAFF WRITER

MONTEREY — The toll it took mentally was worse than the illness.

Frightened, isolated, and anxious, Bonnie and Loy Harvey of McDowell felt their lives upended when Loy came down with COVID-19 last month.

“We’re still taking our temperatures every day,” Bonnie said. “The way it gets you, psychologically — it really is awful.”

Fate was twisted, too, for the well known Highland County couple.

The Harveys had sold their home in Ocala, Fla., this spring, ready to return to Highland. They left a city of more than 60,000, in a “hot bed” state where more than 1,000 people a day were coming down with COVID-19, to come home to a county that had only two reported cases, both long recovered.

And yet, Loy ended up with case No. 3 here.

Loy, 67, grew up in Highland and married Bonnie in early 2006. While they had lived in Florida off and on in recent years, this time, they insisted, they would stay in Highland for the rest of their days.

They sold their home with most of its furniture, packed up a moving trailer with the rest of their belongings, and made a harrowing drive to Virginia, complete with a terrible accident along the way. They were not hurt, but it cemented their determination to stay put in Highland this time.

The Harveys quarantined themselves in Ocala for two weeks before they left, and when they arrived April 29 at their new house in McDowell, they quarantined another two weeks. They knew Florida was exploding with coronavirus cases, and they did not want to risk spreading it to friends and family here, who have largely been spared.

They were vigilant, too, as Bonnie, 71, has an underlying health condition that puts her medically at risk. “We had our facemasks, hand sanitizer, everything we needed,” Loy said. “I wore my mask everywhere. And I’d shop in the morning, when there were fewer people in the stores, and she rarely got out of the car if we went anywhere. I never went anywhere without a mask on.”

Like everyone else, they mostly stayed home throughout the month of May. Loy built a new shed in the back yard; they unpacked and arranged their new home; he added a small front deck.

Then, the night of June 3, Loy turned over in bed and got a slight chill. “Maybe just for about 10 seconds as I rolled over,” he said.

The next day, he had an already scheduled checkup at Highland Medical Center. He had no fever when they took his temperature, and he got his normal blood work done.

“That night, I got another chill,” he recalled. “And by Friday, I was feeling dizzy, light headed, basically I felt like crap.”

By Saturday, he couldn’t sit up he was so weak. His children had planned to come visit, but that afternoon he called them and told them not to come. But the kids stopped by anyway on Monday — Christian and Tammy Harvey and three friends visited on the day Loy had his highest fever. “They even hugged me goodbye and I was burning up and sweating at the time,” he said.

Tuesday, he returned to HMC. His fever was 99 degrees, and they tested him for the virus. The test results didn't come back until Friday, and confirmed his suspicion. He had been sick for nine days already when he found out for sure he had COVID-19.

The fear and anxiety over those days gripped them both.

The house is small, and Bonnie and Loy are inseparable. "We even sleep like pretzels," Loy said. "We are always touching, always all over each other."

In spite of her fears of contracting the virus, Bonnie had no intention of leaving him, no matter what. She kept him in fluids and cared for him while he suffered through it. "By the time we knew that's what he had," she said, as tears sprang to her eyes, "I figured I was already exposed and was going to get it. Plus, if he goes, I'm going with him. This was not going to keep me away from him."

But the dread was tangible. Every twinge in her body could be the first sign. She took her own temperature as often as he did, just waiting. "I couldn't do anything," she said. "I got no sleep; I could feel the heat coming off his body at night."

At one point, Loy had failed to clear their thermometer from its reading, showing his fever, before Bonnie used it. The fever reading still showed when she took her temperature, "and we both just burst into tears," she said, as they thought the worst. "It was several hours later before I realized what had happened," she said, "and I took my temperature again and it was fine."

Meanwhile, Loy's left lung burned when he coughed hard. His eyes hurt so badly he couldn't move them. He lost his sense of taste and smell for 12 days. His highest fever was 102 degrees. "It was so scary when that temperature would creep up," he recalled. He did not have a sore throat, and he was able to eat and drink, but the fatigue was overwhelming. "I've been sicker with the flu," he said, "but it's never been this drawn out."

Finally, his symptoms cleared and he was fever-free without Tylenol by the evening of June 18. But now, weeks later, "I'm still scared of getting it again," he said.

Bonnie never got sick; neither did the kids or their friends. "That's the Lord's work," Loy said. "The good Lord did that."

After Loy was fever-free three days, HMC instructed Bonnie to start another quarantine, to make sure she was in the clear. Miraculously, she never came down with it. After her two weeks without symptoms, HMC asked the couple to come in for an antibody test.

The results showed Loy had the antibodies for COVID-19; Bonnie did not.

Both had been longtime blood donors, so when Loy was asked to donate his blood for the antibodies, he was quick to agree. He has rare AB-negative blood, which makes him a "universal" donor; he had donated gallons over the years. He didn't hesitate now to help others with COVID-19. He gave for the first time at the Red Cross in Harrisonburg last week. It took about 90 minutes.

"They're taking what's called convalescent plasma," he explained. "They use it to treat the really critically ill patients. One pint of mine will treat four people, and I can donate every 28 days, which I plan to do as long as it's needed," he said.

"If anyone else has had it, please give your plasma," Loy stressed. "It will really help people."

To this day, Loy does not know where he picked up the virus. In the few days prior to that first chill, he had been only four places — two local county stores, and two larger stores in the valley, Aldi's and Sharp Shopper. He had his mask on in each place, and

carefully sanitized after each visit. “Of those stores over there (in Staunton), I only saw three or four people without a mask on,” he said, “and I stayed away from them.” In the local stores, he said, people were not wearing masks.

“It just goes to show you, no matter how careful you are, you can still get it,” he said.

Bonnie added, “It makes me so angry that Loy could have been spreading it, too, not knowing he had it, if he had not been so vigilant.”

Covering your face, they both emphasized, is the right thing to do.

“Man up. Wear your mask,” Loy said. “This is not about your rights. It’s out of respect for others. It’s your responsibility to wear them, dammit. This is not political. It’s not a scam. Do it.”

They have nearly stopped compulsively taking their temperatures. Life is better now, they agreed.

“But it will never be the same again,” Loy said.