

## A Covid Story

In the weeks leading up to my long weekend at Virginia Beach, I kept seeing a New York Times story in my Facebook newsfeed about how it was becoming increasingly rare to find anyone who had not had COVID-19.

After nearly three years into the pandemic, I was beginning to think that I was going to be one of the ones who would not be affected by the virus. Feeling nearly invincible, I was beginning to get very lax about wearing masks in public. I have always been kind of a nut when it comes to hand washing so I was still being very cautious about keeping my hands clean.



It's hard to tell where I picked it up. COVID cases were soaring in the area in late August and early September. I've become a hermit during the pandemic. I only leave the house to go to work and to the grocery store. No one had been sick at work so I probably skipped sanitizing my shopping cart while shopping for groceries and then touched my face.

I was feeling fine the morning of the drive to the beach. We had said we were going to leave at 8 a.m. and we were in the car and beach bound by the appointed time. We wanted to get there in time for lunch at Waterman's Surfside Grille so that we could start our vacation with some hot she-crab soup, a Waterman's speciality.

I should have known something was wrong when the soup I had been dreaming about consuming for a whole year didn't taste the same. I knew it wasn't a bad batch. Roma ordered the soup as well and was raving about it. My allergies had been acting up and I thought that maybe

the medicine I was taking was somehow altering my tastebuds.

That night I felt chilly in the hotel room. I changed into a sweatshirt and a pair of warm pajama bottoms. Being out in the wind had given me a chill, I thought.

The next morning I woke up feeling fine and ready for a big beach breakfast. We walked a couple blocks to the Sunnyside Cafe. I ordered pancakes, eggs, sausage and bacon. The pancakes were the size of hubcaps. I managed to finish the eggs and the sausage and made it halfway through the pancakes, but the bacon had no flavor.

We spent a fun and educational afternoon at Cape Henry. We opted not to walk up to the top of the one lighthouse that was open to the public because I have a bad knee and Roma has asthma.

On the last night, a Saturday, we had dinner with my college roommate, Anastasia, and her boyfriend, Dan, at an Italian place on Atlantic Avenue. We had such a wonderful time, sharing a bottle of wine and a

lot of laughs. The food was amazing and they picked up the check.

I was feeling tired that night and went to bed at 11. We had spent a lot of time on the beach that day and I thought I had just had too much sun.

At about 1:30 I woke up with fever, body aches, chills and a dry cough. There was no denying what was happening to me any more. I was 99 percent sure I had caught the COVID.

I remember very little of the drive home. I bundled up in a beach towel to ward off the chills.

We still had four COVID tests in our linen closet and the minute I got home, I took one. That second line didn't take very long to appear. It was as obvious as the sniffly nose on my face.

I made a call right away to Anastasia to give her the bad news. She and Dan had both had COVID in August and she felt sure they still had the antibodies to protect them from getting it again so soon.

I went to bed right away, rising only to eat a baked potato Roma bought for me at Wendy's. The next

day she, too, tested positive for the virus.

By the second day, my major symptoms were already in retreat. I still felt very tired and reported to bed at 9 every night, something I had not done since Donny and Marie Osmond had their own weekly variety show on TV.

Three weeks later I am still battling fatigue and brain fog. I was vaccinated, which decreased the severity of the symptoms. My sense of taste is still not back 100 percent, nor is my sense of smell.

But I'm not going to complain about that. The COVID-19 pandemic has been brutal to so many families here in the area and there are hundreds of new headstones in our cemeteries because of it. My heart goes out to all who have lost family members and friends to this virus.

I had hoped that the pandemic would be over by now, but it seems like we're just going to have to get used to COVID being an illness we're all going to have to be collectively adamant about fighting.

JOANN WARE

## When The Lions Roared

I never liked going back to school when I was growing up. School meant an end to reading the books I wanted to read, day-dreaming about the stories I would someday write and staying up past my bedtime. But one thing that made a new school year bearable was that in early September, the Lions Club Carnival would make its return on top of the hill across from the Farmers Co-op.

This was the one fun thing we had to look forward to when September put an end to summer fun. The pools closed after Labor Day and all the other carnivals in the community had taken place in the spring and mid-summer.

The Lions Carnival was like Christmas for me. I remember visiting my grand-



mother's sister who lived in an area that overlooked the fairgrounds. Seeing the carnival come together from the picture window in her living room was so exciting. And I could report to the kids at school what rides were being assembled. Even though they were the same rides every year – the swings, a carousel, a ferris wheel – it was nice to have confirmation that the favorites would be there to ride many, many times.

Ascending the graveled hill to the carnival grounds seemed to take forever, especially since I had to stay with my mother, who walked very slowly. I didn't want the fun to run out before we got there.

"Come on in and fool me a win!" a man bellowed into a microphone. He was always there at the entrance, a man with sandy colored hair and a matching mustache. He would guess your weight, your age or your name. If he guessed wrong, then you won a prize. I can't remember what all the prizes were; mostly I recall the roach clips, which we used as hair accessories. As kids we were completely ignorant about their real purpose.

When I was 5 years old, I was determined to leave the

carnival with a goldfish. To win a goldfish, you had to throw a ping pong ball into a tiny goldfish bowl with the golden prize swimming inside. This seemed so easy for the older kids, who would leave the carnival with multiple bags of new pets.



THIS AD for the Lexington Lions Club Carnival appeared in the Sept. 9, 1981, edition of *The News-Gazette*.

At 5, my hand-eye coordination needed work and I missed time and time again. Eventually the man running the booth saw my frustration

– and probably felt guilty for taking so many dimes from me – that he said, "We have a winner!" And he handed me a fish. I felt like I had won the showcase showdown on "The Price is Right." And it was silver, not gold.

My mother would spend the entire evening park on a bench under the Bingo tent. Only the game wasn't called Bingo. No, Bingo was gambling. At the Lions Carnival it was called LIONS. Kernels of corn were used to cover the called letters.

I have always been afraid of heights, so the ferris wheel was not something I immediately ran to at the carnival. I think my friend Frances finally convinced me that there was little chance I'd fall to my death when I reached the top. It would take someone with super strength to push me from the seat and she wasn't that strong and she would never put me in danger.

I don't know when the Lions Club officially ceased putting on the carnival. I went through early 1980s editions of *The News-Gazette* looking for ads for the carnival. The last one I found was from 1981. I was in my first year at Lyburn Downing School at

that time and I remember all the kids in Miss Thompson's homeroom talking about going to the carnival like taking a trip to Disney World.

Sometime in the early '80s, the ferris wheel did not rise. The fool-me-a-win guy was silenced. The Bingo tent that wasn't a Bingo tent was not pitched.

My mother told me that the club members had gotten too old to run the carnival. It wasn't coming back, ever.

I drive by the place where the carnival was held almost every day. I look at the hill to the former fairgrounds. It's now paved. A subdivision had been planned there, but never came to fruition. I have day-dreamed about winning the lottery, building a cancer research center on that hill and naming it for my mother, who battled that horrible disease.

It appears that Habitat for Humanity is going to buy the former Scott-McCoy Park, the place where the Lions Carnival once roared.

When volunteers break ground on the first house, there's no telling how many goldfish skeletons and rusty remnants of roach clips they will find.

## Back To School Again

I have a recurring dream that I'm back in college. Nothing looks familiar. I recognize some of the people, but the buildings are strange to me and I don't know where anything is. I know that I have classes to attend, but I don't know when they take place or what subjects I'm taking.

The first weekend in June I found myself back at college, but it wasn't a dream this time.

I was there on the occasion of alumni weekend at Longwood University, in which all classes are invited back to the school for a weekend-long party.

This year, because there hasn't been an alumni weekend since 2019, the weekend was extended by one day. So it was on a steamy hot and humid Thursday that I arrived in historic downtown Farmville to begin the festivities.

Coming into the town, I observed right away that things had changed in the sleepy burg where I had spent



four of the best years of my life. There were more hotels, certainly. I think when I was there lodgers had their choice to spend the night in the Kit Carson Motor Lodge or a Super 8. Now the two-lane highway into town is all fancy with inns a plenty.

There are more fast food places now too. In my day (I'm really sounding like an oldster here) we had a Burger King, a McDonald's and a Little Caesar's within walking distance of the campus and they had to be within walking distance because not many of us had our own cars. There are plenty of places to chow down now, including the usual places you find in a college town like Cookout and Starbucks.

I located the alumni welcome center and was greeted by a friendly phalanx of shiny happy people ready to check me. I received a lanyard with my name and graduation date on it, a blue Longwood tote bag and a Longwood T-shirt.

After that I was bound for Wheeler Hall, which in my day was referred to as "the virgin vault" because it was reserved for freshmen girls only. To my surprise now Wheeler is coed and houses the college's honor students.

Also to my surprise, all the dormitories are air-conditioned now. I recalled my first few weeks as a freshmen feeling like I was being baked alive on the third floor of Main Cunningham hall. The box fan in the window did nothing but

shred beetles and moths seeking the light within.

It took me three trips to get all my stuff to my dorm room. The alumni office had sent all of us attendees a helpful list of things to bring, like blankets, desk lamps, toiletries, etc. Because I'm an adult now and I don't have to hide alcoholic beverages from the RA, I also brought several bottles of wine to share with my sorority sisters who would be staying on the hall with me.

I was one of the first to arrive. This was good, as I needed some time to cool down after hauling all my stuff from the parking lot to the second floor of Wheeler Hall.

Slowly the group came together. And it was as though only a long summer had separated us, not decades. I was seeing some of these ladies for the first time in nearly 30 years. They had changed very little, all of them still recognizable from their 1990s sorority composite pictures probably packed away in some closet in Stubbs Hall, the sorority dormitory.

They are all mothers now. Their children are either approaching the age we were when we were undergrads or they are that age.

Some of them are teachers and were enjoying the first few days of freedom from lessons plans and first bells as the weekend commenced.

Whatever they were at home they were ready to shed as the familiarity of our surroundings made us

feel like college kids again. Drinks were poured, laughter roared and the party began.

For four days we became the collective again, making decisions as a group. On the first night several of us made an excursion into town and enjoyed drinks and a nice dinner at Charley's Waterfront Café down by the old warehouses in Farmville. We then met up with late arrivals at the Taproot Tavern in the Wyanoke Hotel across from the main campus. The Wyanoke had been a retirement home when I was an undergrad and it is now a boutique hotel with a rooftop bar, which we kept saying we were going to check out, but we never got around to it.

On Friday morning three of my sisters and I went for coffee at a local coffee shop that seemed very popular with the locals. My sisters ordered sophisticated coffee drinks requiring a shot of this and that or steamed milk. I had just plain brewed coffee with a splash of cream. My taste in coffee hasn't changed much since the early 1990s. We joined the rest of our group for lunch at a fun gastropub (yes, Farmville has one of those now!) called The Brew House. We sat and bobbed our heads to familiar '80s hits rearranged in house music format booming from the speakers overhead.

A two-hour period of free time had been scheduled on Saturday before the big party. It was suggested that we use that time to go back to

our rooms and take a nap. We kind of laughed at that. The alumni office thinks we're old and needs naps, we said. However, I think most of us did use that time to catch up on some rest.

Like most things one looks forward to for an extended amount of time, alumni weekend went by very quickly. Sunday morning arrived and brought an abrupt end to our fun. We lingered in long hugs for as long as we could before feeling the internal nagging to get back to our real lives and our responsibilities elsewhere. We made promises to not let a whole year go by before seeing each other. A year is too long, we said.

Our sorority consistently won awards for sisterhood when we were undergrads. There is a reason for that. We had each other's backs then as we do now. People can say what they will about sororities, that we pay for friendship and all they do is party. But in a true sisterhood like the one I am part of, we have a bond that time and tide can't touch.

*As sisters together we go through the years*

*In joy and in sorrow, in laughter and tears*

*Wearing the colors of emerald and gold*

*The friendships we've found with our sisters will never grow old*