

Parents

I'm so glad to have the opportunity to share my experiences of the covid pandemic. In February 2020, my two kids (ages 3 and 5) attended a local preschool. My husband and I both worked and our wonderful nanny cared for our kids outside of school. Like so many others, the pandemic brought our hectic, over-scheduled, social lives to a complete halt, and suddenly we found ourselves home 24/7.

For the first 6 weeks, I attempted to both work from home and care for my two preschoolers. Hoping to distract my kids from the global situation and determined to make "home-schooling" as fun for them as possible, I meticulously laid out a daily schedule filled with circle times, Pinterest-inspired arts and crafts, and extravagant scavenger hunts. I even asked the kids to call me "Mrs. Aggerwal" and pretended to have a different "teacher-like" persona. While they had a blast, watching them while also trying to work was *exhausting*, and that level of effort lasted about 4 days until their "home-schooling" morphed into more screen time than I'd care to admit. Soon after, we brought our nanny back to watch the kids while my husband and I worked from home, thankful to still be employed.

It's so interesting to reflect on the "waves" of those first few weeks and the corresponding emotions, fears, and stress that accompanied the ever-evolving narrative on the news. For the first few weeks, we had Zoom calls with friends and family nearly every night, and I'll never forget how shocked and stressed so many of them looked. I was terrified for one of my best friends (and former Vienna native) who was an ICU nurse caring for covid patients in New York City, the covid epi-center. We held our breath as more and more cases popped up in Virginia, then Fairfax County, then Vienna itself.

Once it was recommended that we all wear masks, my mom used her quilting skills to make each of us a homemade mask. I remember putting it on and thinking, "This looks ridiculous! There's no way I'm going out in public with this on!" and now a year later, I rarely go out in public without it. It's amazing how we can adjust to our "new norm" and adapt based on need.

While there have been so many losses of the past year – cancelling countless plans and events, seeing friends and family lose family members to covid, struggling to keep my kids in a "normal" environment – there have also been many silver linings. My coworkers and I quickly transitioned to video meetings and we've grown closer in the past year than we had in 5 years of working together. I've loved taking a coffee break during the work day and getting to spend a few minutes with my kids and husband. I'm more grateful for each and every interaction that I have with friends, neighbors, and family. More than anything, I've been blown away at how this town has really come together to creatively support one another. Local Facebook groups like Vienna Foodies (led by Lydia Russo, who has become a local celebrity!) and Vienna Virtual Community Page are only two of many that have made me feel connected throughout the last year. While the pandemic has been unimaginably hard for so many, I am so thankful to have been part of the Vienna community.

Lauren Aggerwal, working mother of 2
March 2021



When this all started in mid-March of 2020, we had no idea the magnitude of what extreme emotions, stress, and chaos were in store for not only our Vienna family of four but our entire great country and world as a whole. County schools were closed indefinitely, offices shut down, corporate travel banned, and politics abounded with all decisions made. My husband and I are both full-time working parents who were now thrust into doubling as our two young children's teachers and daily IT support. I always had the utmost respect for any and all teachers, but that doubled last spring. I did not choose to be a teacher or educator by trade and it frustrated and saddened me that this was now one of my new "jobs." The spring of 2020, to say the least, was one of the most stressful periods of our lives, especially, with all the worldwide health-related uncertainties and unknowns. Our children thrived (with some, to be expected, virtual learning hiccups along the way) but this mom did not. I, personally, experienced some of the lowest of the low feelings, as I tried to continue being the best mom, wife, daughter I could be while working a now 100% at home full-time job, maintaining our home and just trying to comprehend the complexity of this world-wide virus that was literally affecting every single aspect our normally simple and happy lives. Over time, just as with anything, things got a little easier in terms of the virtual school and all four of us all being home all the time together. There were more fights, tears, and stress YET there was also more true quality time together (all 3 meals almost every day!) and more outdoor family walks, my personal favorite pastime, plus family movie night much more regularly now that I will forever cherish. When summer hit, we were lucky enough to be able to go our family's beach home frequently and relax by the water. This didn't mean we still weren't scared of all the unknowns and saddened by all the deaths and sickness caused by this terrible virus, but, rather we were able to "escape" somewhat and enjoy the simple and joyful normal pleasures of the summer and the beach. After about 9 months of fully working from home, I, personally finally got into a "groove" as did my realtor husband, and I finally didn't feel like I was going to suffocate being home ALL the time (and not at my office or travelling once a month as I had done for my entire 20 year career.) Our children loved playing outside with their wonderful friends and neighbors and even inside sometimes too. I was able to become much closer with several of my remarkable neighbors and friends, as we instigated daily weekday lunch time walks and standing weekend morning runs plus some fun socially distanced Happy Hours and birthday celebrations too, of course. Staying active, healthy and having caring loving friends and people surround us is what literally kept me going over this last unusual quirky year. I can't say I would do it again, but I can say that I have learned a lot about myself, my relationships, my limits, and my amazing husband and children. We are all healthy and happy and I am beyond grateful for that. I am still a little scared of all the health unknowns and, of course, saddened by the sickness associated with this cruel virus but it's not as crippling and debilitating to me as it was before. I have my amazing loving family and friends/neighbors to thank for satisfying my constant extrovert needs and have truly learned the definition of giving yourself and others "grace."

By Jenny Wintermute, Proud mother, wife and Vienna resident
February 2021



Pandemic Haiku

By Emma Lynch

February 2021

Cold isolation

Wanting normal life again

Fear controls my thoughts

Time passes slowly

Kids missing days of laughter

School is not the same

Near the one year mark

Will the summer bring relief?

Hoping for kids to see friends

There is one bright spot

Family is everything

Thankful for this gift



The start of the COVID-19 pandemic in our household still feels like a blur. Schools closing, vacations cancelled (as in the Grand Canyon closed - who knew that the Grand Canyon could close?), virtual school delays, more virtual school delays, difficult decisions about spending time with friends, and cancelling family visits all filled those first few days and weeks. Positives certainly made their way in too. These included lots of time outside, creative ways for kids to see their friends, grandfathers preparing Zoom science lessons, teenagers who know Vienna like the back of their hand after spending hours biking around town, drive-by birthday visits, and a wealth of family time we wouldn't have otherwise had.

As these things filled our days, so too did the knowledge that my uncle, who had contracted COVID-19 in mid-March was in worsening condition. Since our extended family is spread out in various states, we couldn't visit (even outside) with anyone; even as he passed away. My aunt was "fortunate" to be allowed into the hospital in full head to toe PPE for a final visit, alone. This situation leaves you feeling as helpless as any description you may have read in the news.

While we move forward after loss, we also recognize the privilege in those day to day experiences (cancelled vacations, school delays, etc.) that felt like inconveniences. We never had to question whether we could obtain food for dinner, or whether the kids would have WiFi or a laptop for school. We worried about jobs, health, and our families - but so did everyone. We were and still are surrounded (at a distance) by friends and neighbors who supported us in so many ways - both big and small. I'd argue it is some of the smallest ways that make us feel the best. If this experience has allowed us anything positive, it is an understanding that small moments and small gestures matter.

Mother

March 2021

