

## Residents

The following are selections from the serendipitous gallery of Covid-19 "rock art" appearing at Nottoway Park during the pandemic's darkest days. Seemingly placed (and often rearranged) by elves, the whimsical artworks turned routine dog walks into happily anticipated treasure hunts as we scanned the trails' nooks and peeked into tree niches for something new or familiar. Much praise and appreciation to the unsung artist or artists (and helper elves) whose ever-changing gallery delivered a light-hearted diversion, a hopeful message, and a sprinkling of joy when those things were in critically short supply.

David DiFiore, resident

March 2021



## My Life during the Pandemic of 2020-2021

By Amy Gurri

The sudden spread of the Coronavirus (aka COVID-19), throughout the U.S. in 2020 caused a complete shutdown of the country for many months and a big change in the way we all lived our lives. When the Coronavirus pandemic hit, I was fully retired so there was no real economic impact from the "lockdown". During this past year, my life has been filled with many highs and several lows all of which were either created or affected by the Coronavirus pandemic and the rules we needed to follow to try to keep safe. My year can be summarized as follows: 3 deaths, 1 birth, 2 weddings, 1 cancelled road trip, 2 cases of COVID, quality family time, lots of video calls, lots of walking, masks, and vaccines!

January 21, 2020, (which I later learned was the date of the first known case of COVID-19 in the U.S.) was the day that one of my closest friends died unexpectedly. Her distraught husband wanted to take his time deciding the details of her memorial service with the idea that he would have a large one in a few months and then have a more intimate gathering of family and close friends to scatter her ashes in May. Due to the extended lockdown we've all been hostage to, neither of those events

have taken place yet leaving those of us grieving her loss with no moment to share our feelings or to have a chance to say farewell.

One week later, my 99 year-old mother-in-law died in her sleep. A funeral and burial were held the first week in February. Family came from as far as California to honor her memory. At 99, we knew she didn't have much time left, but in retrospect we feel grateful for the timing since we would not have been able to get together for her burial as little as one month later. Also, if she had been locked down in her assisted living home, the fact that we weren't visiting her would have caused her a great deal of anxiety.

In late October 2020, my father passed away just 6 weeks short of his 98<sup>th</sup> birthday. He had mostly spent the year alone sitting in his room in a nursing facility. My sisters, who don't live anywhere near Virginia, didn't get to see him in 2020 except for a few video calls. Some "social distanced" (6 feet apart with masks) visiting in designated areas were allowed on and off starting in July so I was able to visit him several times through September after testing negative for COVID. One sister took a test in early October with the intention of visiting him but there had been a positive test result in the building so all visits had been canceled. Although we all stayed in touch with my father, I know it was hard on him to have so little social stimulation that year and he pretty much faded away. We couldn't be with him when he passed away but a couple of devoted nursing assistants at Goodwin House Bailey's Crossroads sat with him holding his hand until he passed away, telling him that he was loved. We will always be grateful to their loving care.

By the time my father passed away, we were all completely used to the idea of "virtual" events (aka video streaming) so my sisters and I signed up with [virtualmemorialgatherings.com](https://virtualmemorialgatherings.com) and held a virtual memorial service. It was a very different experience from the church service we had for my mother in 2019 or the funeral and burial of my mother-in-law in February 2020. We missed being able to hug friends and relatives after the service but felt that we did justice to my father's memory and were not only able to allow for nearly all the family to speak at the service, but we were also able to put together some beautifully orchestrated slide shows including one very moving slide show consisting of nature photos my father had taken during the 40 years he was a photographer, put to the music of a recording of my mother singing (she had been a professional singer). We also were able to have my father speak about his life in his own words recorded on video when he was 90. I feel that this event showed how far we had come at adapting to the pandemic world.

My husband and I had planned a road trip south for March 2020. The week before we were supposed to leave, his cousin in Miami called to say that she was sick but couldn't take a COVID test because none were available at that time. The doctors believed she had a bronchial infection but just in case, she didn't want us to visit her. Visiting her had been the main point of the trip. As I was contemplating this, my husband told me that baseball Spring Training had just been canceled. That had been another purpose of the trip. We realized at that point that the trip would need to be canceled. We were able to cancel most of the hotel reservations without penalty except for the first night at a Bed and Breakfast in Petersburg, VA where we planned to visit with our daughter and fiancé who lived in Richmond. We decided to go ahead with the Petersburg night. We had a nice visit and have no real regrets but realized afterwards that we did take a big chance. At breakfast, we met people from New York and New Jersey who were on their way to Florida. Several of them had potentially been exposed to people who had COVID. I guess they didn't get it or weren't contagious yet because we didn't get it. Phew...

The next week my son escaped New York with his 3-year-old son, his dog, and his very pregnant wife. They stayed with us for two months. Living together could have gone two ways but it went the right way. We became closer as a family while they were here. I became my grandson's daycare provider, while his parents worked remotely, and I sat with him through his virtual pre-school sessions. My son was able to go with his wife for the delivery of their second son (something he would not have been able to do in New York). Fairfax Hospital was a much better experience than the New York City hospital they used when my first grandson was born. And, finally, we had the added bonus of having a newborn in the home for 2 weeks! They left us the day after Mother's Day.

Meanwhile, my daughter and her fiancé self-quarantined and came to stay with us for 3 weeks after my son's family left. They left the day after Father's Day. They felt so comfortable working remotely from here that on and off through the year they would self-quarantine, test for COVID, and then come stay with us for a week or two. Our middle son, who was already living with us while writing a novel, found that during this year of self-isolation and distancing, he was having more of a social life than he had before the pandemic.

During their first visit with us in May, my daughter and her fiancé decided to postpone their wedding which had been scheduled for September 2020. They had a strong vision for what they wanted out of a wedding – to say their wedding vows in front of around 150 friends and family, and to get to hug and dance with everyone. This vision clearly could not be fulfilled during the pandemic. On the other hand, for various reasons, they still wanted and needed to get married in 2020. Based on the best offer available from the wedding venue, the wedding was postponed until May 2021. But in November 2020, the parents of the couple, along with the grandmothers of the groom all self-quarantined and got COVID tests before coming together with the couple to witness their union in legal matrimony. It was a small but moving affair in a park in Richmond, VA on an unseasonably warm autumn day. The couple exchanged vows but are saving the exchange of rings until the big wedding – which, in January of 2020, we decided once again needed to be moved because there was no guarantee that venues would be open enough, and people feel safe enough, to have the wedding of their dreams. Heaven help us if there is a safety problem with the new date in June 2022!

My first experience with a private virtual event was the wedding of my nephew. He and his fiancée had been engaged for several years but between their busy work lives and doubts about how and where to have the wedding (West Coast near her family or East Coast near his family and most of their friends), they had been paralyzed and hadn't made any wedding plans. Once the pandemic lockdown happened, they moved out of Brooklyn to my family's summer home in Connecticut. After four months of near isolation, their desire to become a married couple increased and they decided to hold a "Zoom" wedding in September 2020. The outdoor setting was beautiful and gratifying for those of us who know and love the property. The wedding party was about 10 mainly family members who had, of course, self-quarantined and COVID-tested before gathering. The bride's family couldn't come from the West Coast for safety reasons but played roles in the ceremony over video. There even was a recorded video (in Chinese with subtitles) of the bride's grandparents sent from Taiwan and a pre-recorded video of the wedding couple talking about when they first met. After the ceremony there was a reception with toasts and dancing. The central video image changed to show different participants in their homes dancing. It was very festive and we all felt very much a part of it since we could see the other participants in video and could chat online during the event. A very different pandemic-inspired choice from my daughter's, but lots of fun.

There is no doubt that video communication has helped a lot of people feel connected during the pandemic. My two sisters live in different cities but over the years have visited Virginia frequently to visit my parents who lived here. In 2019 when my mother passed away, my sisters came within a day or two to spend time with my father and myself. This wasn't an option in 2020 when my father passed away but we did immediately spend time over video to reflect together on my father's passing. It wasn't the first time we had talked on video. I was very comfortable with video conferencing from years of work in that field but my sisters had never done it before 2020. Both are private music teachers and had to move to teaching over video to maintain their teaching practices. Once they became comfortable with the medium, we held frequent video calls.

This became true with my son and his family as well. We had one last opportunity to see them in person in August but we haven't seen our grandsons in person since school started because there is no opportunity for them to self-quarantine before seeing us. This separation has been hard—especially since infants change so much during their first year—but through video calls, and photos/videos posted on Instagram, Facebook, and messaging, we at least feel connected and have watched our grandchildren grow.

In February 2020 we saw some people wearing masks at the grocery store but it seemed like an exaggeration. By March, when my son's family joined us, we started wearing masks and gloves to the store mainly so we could protect our pregnant daughter-in-law from contagion. At that time, we would see people in the store without masks and would have a sense of defilement. Eventually rules were enacted to require everyone to wear masks. Since then, people have struggled with social distancing etiquette. At the grocery store, people tend to glare at other people as potential dangers and make as wide a berth as possible around them. We are lucky to live in a suburban neighborhood with plenty of space for social-distanced walking. Sometimes we see the same reaction from other people as in the grocery store but mainly people automatically make enough room to pass safely and wave or say a greeting as they pass.

Over the summer months, when the pandemic numbers were slightly lower and the lockdown was partially lifted, we decided to ease up a little on our personal restrictions. We dined, mainly outdoors, at some local restaurants and even spent a few days in Staunton, VA in July. Some tourist locations were closed but we really enjoyed the outdoor Frontier Museum which we practically had to ourselves. After that experience we felt confident enough to drive up to Connecticut in August. The Rt 95 corridor was amazingly lower in traffic than we had ever seen and most (but not all) people in the rest stops followed safety protocols.

Starting in early November, after my daughter's wedding, we decided that between the rising number of COVID cases and the promise of a vaccine in the near future, we had better tighten up our personal restrictions and no longer dined at restaurants or traveled. On January 18<sup>th</sup>, people in our age group were able to register in Fairfax County for the vaccine. We are part of the baby boomer generation so that is a large group. It took several attempts that day to get onto the registration server but we did it – along with 42,000 others. It took about six more weeks before we got our vaccinations but, ironically, in the meantime even though we had been so careful, we contracted COVID. I woke up February 1 with a dry cough followed by cold symptoms, severe fatigue, and occasional headaches and stomach problems. I took a COVID-19 test on February 3<sup>rd</sup> and it came back positive on February 6<sup>th</sup>. I heard from the Fairfax County Health Department on February 9<sup>th</sup> and then began filling out a daily survey online until I was declared free of contagion (based on my survey responses) on February 14<sup>th</sup>.

Starting February 1<sup>st</sup>, of course, my husband, son, and I all self-quarantined and only got groceries through the Giant Food delivery service. My husband began showing similar symptoms to mine on February 3<sup>rd</sup> but my son, who stayed at least two rooms away from us at all times, never had symptoms and eventually tested negative. At one point we were in desperate need of electrolytes and I called a friend in Vienna who dropped off some Gatorade for us. We were lucky that our symptoms were fairly mild. My husband was able to continue his post-career work from home, writing articles, and even doing video interviews and meetings without giving away the fact that he was sick.

On February 25<sup>th</sup> we finally received notification from INOVA Health System that we could schedule our vaccine appointments. Our experience was much easier than the scheduling nightmares we had heard of from people with earlier appointments here and in other States. We were able to get appointments together for the next morning. The INOVA site, which was very convenient to our home, was well organized with hundreds of people in a social-distanced line outside the building moving through to their appointments quickly and on schedule. While we were there we received the invitations for scheduling the second shot and we expect to be fully super-immunized by March 23<sup>rd</sup>.



We now see the light at the end of the tunnel. With many family and friends immunized, we plan to head south in April to finally do the trip we had planned to do in 2020 and have already planned some reunions with friends here in Northern Virginia. In the summer, we plan to head back to Connecticut with family and hope to be able to finally see our grandsons again!

Amy Gurri, resident  
March 2021



That day in March 2020 seems eons ago now. It should have been just another day, walking home through Nottoway Park from the Vienna Metro station, after giving tours at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, where I am a volunteer. Of course, I didn't realize it would be my last trip downtown, as the world was shut down, due to the corona virus.

My own creativity as a fiber artist dried up, and art venues were closed anyway. Everything was just depressing. However, I sewed fabric masks for months, donating over 600 to hospitals, social workers, Black Lives Matter protesters, Indian Reservations, and of course family and friends. Just a few are in the first picture. Eventually, some craft shows figured out how to go virtual, and as the winter holidays approached, some light began to glimmer again.

I miss my two children, who live out of the area. For my 2020 holiday card, I used a screen shot of a Zoom call (second image) - that grid of faces in boxes defined 2020. I miss my mom - who is 92 and lives alone in Wisconsin, getting through the cold months with her reading. I miss seeing so many people, and all the everyday things we took for granted.

No close family or friends became sick with Covid. It wasn't really luck. We all were very careful to wear masks, wash hands, limit trips outside our homes - we took the quarantine very seriously. But sadly, two distant, older relatives in Wisconsin died. So many people have had more heartbreaking stories.

As of this writing, in mid-March 2021, my husband has gotten his two shots, and I am somewhere on the waiting list of thousands and thousands of people. I can't wait for life to resume, but will it ever be the same?



Eileen Doughty

April 2021



1. I took all of my college nieces and nephews in my house and fed them. Together, we learned how to make empanadas and baked simple recipes which is messy but a lot of fun and bonding...
2. From the Internet, I chose simple basic yoga poses and do them at home for 1 1/2 hrs every MWF...This feels really really great! I feel like a wholesome person each day...
3. I do SENIOR FITNESS at the community center last fall and in the spring...
4. I did Zumba at the community center last fall...
5. I walked on the W/OD trail or around the blocks from my house for 20 minutes to an hour 3-4x a week, weather permitting...
6. I took online courses and got certificates in PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY, SOCIOLOGY & ADVANCED PSYCHOLOGY— courses I've been wanting to take and curious about after retiring...

7. Met one or two friends out for bring-your-own-lunch or snacks in a park like Nottoway , under a tree by the caboose, Burke Lake and on the porch of Freeman House...

8. Took a walk around the Tidal Basin and the National Mall alone on one sunny beautiful day which feels wonderful and rejuvenating...

9. Went to Merrifield Garden Center to look at fruit trees and flowering shrubs for planting. Admiring the fresh blooms of spring flowers is a feeling of renewal...

ALICIA MEAD

April 2021



**Silence has new meaning....**

By Leigh Saunders

April 2021

Silence has new meaning...

Used to be the awkward spaces in conversations

Or the peace found intentionally...

Now no one moves around from hours after sunset

To hours after sunrise....

The church bells no longer ring for worship,

For wedding celebrations, or for mourning....

The wind no longer carries fragments of music, the crack of bats,

Cheers of encouragement, or squeals of children's delight....

Silence all day, not speaking for hours...

Maybe even days...there's no one to talk to....

The voices one hears only in one's heart...

Never to be heard out loud again...

Silence still has new meaning...

Once familiar sounds are returning...

But the heartbreak never leaves.



