

Covid-19 2020 Personal Chronicle

by Christopher Parker

Below is a recollection of my experience with the strange, unique, ever-changing year of 2020 in the United States of America. Currently living in the small city of Flower Mound Texas, I am a “work from home” support technician for a large Healthcare Company. The good news is that for the past eight years I had already been working from home, as our branch office in Irving Texas had closed down. The remaining dozen employees based there were given the opportunity to work remotely. The company gave us computers, monitors, and a printer. We set up our office space, either in a spare bedroom, or in a home-based office. So, one of the side effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, of many people being forced to work from home to adhere to social distancing, had little effect on me. I had already worked out my routine of getting up in the morning, walking to work over my carpet, having lunch in my kitchen, returning to work and finishing up my day with remote meetings (using Webex) and conference calls.

I found some responses of people who recently began to work at home rather funny.

I actually found some of the responses from people who had to begin working from home very funny. Some people discussed if they should still get dressed up. Or wear their pajamas? And if they should still start work at the same time, and not be distracted by the TV, the UPS/Amazon delivery truck, and barking dogs in the background. Luckily, I had learned and applied all of those skills, being determined to be disciplined the very FIRST year that I worked from home. Many of my co-workers have had to make major adjustments, such as the fact that schools also closed and went to remote learning. Having to make all three of those adjustments at the same time (kids at home, spouse or other family working from home, and yourself working from home) was a challenge for many households in America. The good news is that the younger generation is very tech savvy. Adapting to online ZOOM Calls, pulling down online documents, and posting their work back up on-line was probably second nature for many of them.

I remember the day that this terrible disease began to cause such a disruption to us, because I was watching a Dallas Mavericks Basketball game on TV (March 11, 2020). The camera flashed over to the owner Mark Cuban who was looking at the news on his cell phone. He had an expression of shock and dismay! The Utah Jazz player Rudy Gobert had just tested positive with the Corona Virus (2019). The Utah Jazz games were going to be cancelled. Luckily, the Dallas Mavericks were able to finish up their game for the evening, but everyone was forecasting for the near future that probably many of the other NBA teams, and probably all of the other sports (MLB, NHL, Soccer), would follow suit. All of those predictions came true and the sports world came to a halt. This disruption had more

of an impact than WWI or WWII had on Sports teams, as each and every major sport now was basically going to shut down for an unforeseen amount of time.

One big impact on me, was the fact that my brother (who has Special Needs) was also affected in the fact that his Adult Daycare school was also going to shut down. This altered his daily routine. He could no longer take the bus into his school, he did not need to pack his lunch the night before anymore, and the social contact of being around his friends was taken away abruptly. He needed much help with the adjustment. I was able to use my personal home-based computer to gather his on-line projects, worksheets posted by his teachers, and online games/quizzes. I could then help him to complete his work and then re-post the assignments back up on-line.

The fact is that many low income and poorer neighborhoods were not equipped to do that. Many of the Dallas School district students live where their families either cannot reach adequate internet access, or cannot afford internet costs, modems, hot spots, or computer equipment. That caused a large issue for many of the school districts to try and overcome. Many schools had to spend \$30 million or more to order, gather and distribute laptop tablets, and hotspots just to get students the ability to learn on-line. Then there was the major hurdle of having teachers switch their curriculum over to digital learning and helping the students adjust. It was a large impact to the high school seniors, as many of their graduation ceremonies were either

virtual, or in the case of some in North Texas area, involved driving into the NASCAR facility (Texas Motor Speedway), and seeing their car/family on the big screen as they picked up their diplomas.

The BIGGEST adjustment that I had to make was the trip to the grocery store because my elderly mother and a high-risk brother needed help with weekly trips to the store. My very first trip, I used a mask and nylon gloves. I was extremely

Big adjustments involved helping my elderly mother and Special Needs brother with shopping and schoolwork.

nervous about touching many of the products. Then bringing the groceries home, I unloaded them, threw the bags away, wiped down the products and then did a full hand-wash and finish up with hand sanitizer. Over the next few months, the risk seemed to be less and less, as the stores themselves put many new procedures in place. Everyone must wear a mask, having the aisles in a one-way direction, only entrance in one door, and exit out of a separate door, and employees also wearing masks and using hand sanitizer.

Another big impact, which started slowly but picked up steam, was online food ordering. Many years prior, a local grocery store Tom Thumb started an on-line ordering service. The users would pick the products and submit the order. The employees would pack up the products and you would simply drive up to get your groceries placed in your trunk. I think the concept was not well received as many people wanted to see/feel/touch

their produce before purchasing. And there was some confusion about quantities, as ordering one Coke could be a single bottle, or a six-pack or a 12-pack. Now, after the Covid-19 pandemic began to affect people's nervousness, on-line grocery ordering has taken off in all of the major grocery stores in North Texas.

The independent taxi services (Uber and Lyft) have also adjusted by teaming up with local restaurants to be the delivery services for on-line food ordering services. Doordash and Uber Eats, as well as many others, now became the new job of many of the restaurant and bar workers who had been laid off. At one point, the governor of Texas had closed down the bars. When slowly opening them up to 25% capacity caused a spike in positive Covid-19 cases, he deemed it necessary to slow viral spread once again and shut down bars once more.

In the south, where there is still a large influence of the "Bible Belt" mentality of dry counties (no alcohol served), some of the cities and towns (including Flower Mound) only sell beer and wine in the grocery stores. With the on-line ordering of food, and a temporary executive order by the Governor, the

Restaurants began offering alcohol with on-line food orders.

restaurant community began offering alcohol sales (beer, wine, or margarita mix) with the food order. It is possible that the Governor of Texas will relax that law and continue to allow alcohol sales with food, for the near future.

Some of the other very obvious side-effects are the light traffic patterns. Now with work-from-home families and with no commuting, the streets were nearly empty. The price of gas at one point had dropped from well over \$3.00 per gallon, to as low as \$1.89 per gallon. Many co-workers made the comments, that instead of having to fill up their tank weekly, or every 5 days, many people are going 2 weeks before having to fill up, and at almost half of the cost.

The on-line profiles of many people have picked up in activity. Friends and family that are long distances from each other, now have more communication on text groups, Facebook, Twitter, and other

At this time, everything seems to have political upheaval behind it.

groups. One of the funny companies that grew in popularity, TikTok/Douyin, is a Chinese video-sharing social networking service. The videos show people in silly situations. The issue, in this time and age, is everything seems to have a political upheaval behind it. President Donald Trump said that the Tik Tok application was a security leak that the Chinese were using to spy-on and steal intelligence from Americans. He lobbied to have the application banned and stopped.

The future is uncertain, and it seems that things change daily and weekly. The start of the new fall school session was scheduled, postponed, re-scheduled, then only virtual learning was offered, and then some schools offered a blended in-person and on-line option.

I have a feeling that people will not feel completely safe until effective treatment and a full vaccine will be available for ALL Americans. With the rapid advance in on-line ordering, the health industry has also seemed to step into high gear trying to get an effective vaccine available and passed through the FDA.

It used to seem strange to see the news clippings of people in China and Japan wearing medical masks in the airports. Many thought that it was unnecessary or seemed silly. Now, out and about in town, including any of the stores, it seems very strange to see someone WITHOUT a medical mask -- almost as if that person is defying the

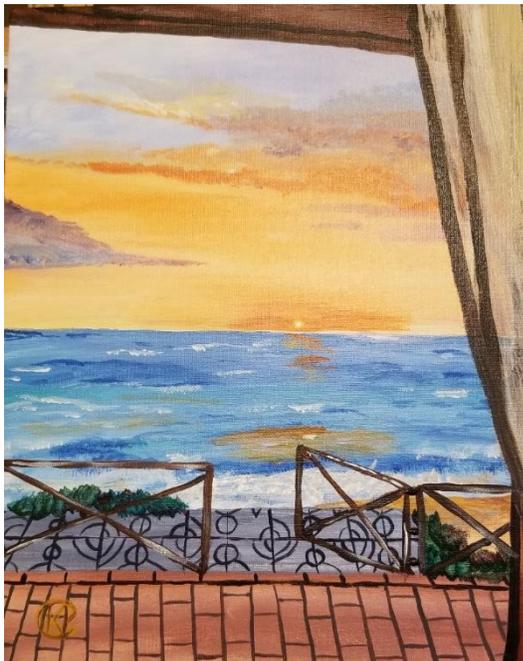
authorities and flirting with danger, opening the door to get the virus.

As we move forward, many of us just hope that nothing else arrives that is more strange than this pandemic, with its fall-out including restaurants closing, record unemployment in the service industry, sports world shutdown, daily school routines uprooted, long hours from our frontline healthcare workers and just general fear of this invisible disease.

We all hope that 2020 ends quickly, (Skip over Halloween, and any further life-disrupting events) and get to a point where we can celebrate Christmas season together with family. Then **FLIP THE CALENDAR over to 2021 ASAP.**

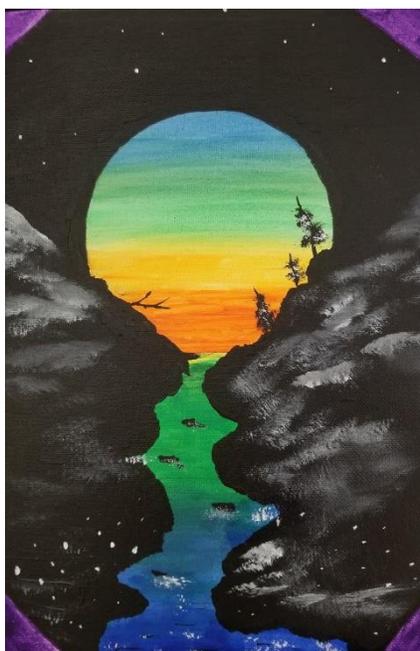
Finally, as people have more time, arts and crafts at home have become more popular.

Below as some examples of time spent while being conscious of social distancing. With time on my hands, I completed these oil paintings for friends or neighbors.



Above, representation of a sunset from a postcard that a friend sent.

Left, from a photo of a sunrise out the back door of a friend living in Rhode Island.



And the above, is a star-light funky colored moonset painted on a carboard canvas.

It is my wish that people continue with good health, good fortune, and well-being.

The author. Christopher Kenneth Parker currently resides in Flower Mound, Texas, a small but growing residential town that can be considered a suburb of Denton, Texas. He has lived in Texas since 1992, after moving from Connecticut for two reasons: his company re-located there, and Texas does not enforce a State Income Tax. He is somewhat using his degree of Bachelor of Science in Business, as he currently works as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and PO for a large Workers Compensation Insurance Company.

This piece was sent to SDIS in August 2020.

Reprinted from *COVID-19: getting through with wit and grit*, published by the San Diego Independent Scholars. 2020 (<https://sdscholars.org>) © Christopher K. Parker