

Covid-19: WE ALL HAVE A STORY TO TELL



Member Memoirs



Grandparents Parenting Again & Kinship Care





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Through the Community Connections grant, generously funded by The Kresge Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, members of the Grandparents Parenting Again & Kinship Care support group and their grandchildren are grateful for the opportunity to explore their perspectives, find meaning, and uncover the silver linings of their Covid-19 experiences.

**Following are those that contributed to the
publishing of these memoirs:**

Pamela Frank

Beverly Hogan & Aleiya Hogan, granddaughter

Kathleen Hurd & A'Shya & Dontae Bostic, grandchildren

Tina Johnson & Khloe-Marie & Dallas Johnson, grandchildren

Antha Williams

Ora Williams & Aryn Williams, granddaughter

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Covid-19 IMPACTS EVERYONE

By Ora Williams, Founder/Executive Director
Grandparents Parenting Again & Kinship Care



I created this writing project as a cathartic exercise for my members who have lost loved ones. It is my hope that their sharing the pandemic's impact on their lives will be an opportunity for them to purge, cleanse, and find some emotional relief. The experts say that while this is no replacement for mental health counseling, it is productive. Writing during or after a challenging event helps to release buried feelings and thoughts, and that can only be healthy. I participated in the exercise as well because we have all lost something. I have experienced the loss of living life fully and others are experiencing the loss of their loved ones. I pray for us all, and I'm committed to helping all of us to heal.

Our process began with some thought-provoking questions: Who was I before Covid-19? Who am I now? I thought, "oh that's easy." I loved people, I was a giving person always looking for ways to help others, a resale and garage sale shopaholic, an avid reader and internet junkie. My greatest asset, however, is that I was--and still am--a child of God who lives the scripture "To whom much is given, much will be required" Luke 12:48.

As I ponder who I am now, I realize that I remain that helping, giving, and loving person who has figured out ways to do so safely. God's been so good to me that I must give back. With hard times and death swirling around me, I am now more conscious of how blessed I am to survive this non-discriminating disease and its devastating effects. I thank my Father for each and every day.

We were also asked to address what we cared about pre-pandemic. Without hesitation, it was and is, my family. They have always been first and foremost on my heart and mind followed by my dear friends and, of course, my grandparents support group. Compassion is my super power! I have always tried to put myself in others' shoes and to see how their shoes fit. Do they pinch, are they too wide, are they too tight and is the color right? Seeing others' point of view increases one's compassion.

I miss the relationships and fellowship I had with my Red Hat sisters, Vogue Travel Club members, Prison Ministry, block club residents, church members and friends. The bonds are rich and wonderful, and I owe these blessings to my parents who preached, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". I instilled this into my sons and now to my grandchildren.

These connections allowed me to attend meetings and gatherings, hug and kiss if we wanted, visit each other's home, and sit together during a night out. We had so much fun, all of which is now non-existent. Virtual activities are the order of the day. Although it keeps us in touch, it's sterile and impersonal. I especially miss the block club meetings where we were able to see how neighbors are doing. And although my grandparents support group meets virtually twice a month, it's just not the same as when we met in person to "touch and agree".

I've made some Pandemic progress- I've de-cluttered my belongings as well as my grandchildren's. We all had so much that I was able to share with others. Not only did I de-clutter physically, I've been de-cluttering mentally. I've made room for new ideas and strategies that will enhance my organization's mission allowing it to flourish and to explore new possibilities.

It has been hard to hear about members losing loved ones due to Covid-19 because we are family. When we hear of illness or death we respond. Listening to their experiences makes me more thankful for each day that I wake up, and I try to make it the best day I can through service and love.

In the pages that follow, you'll read the compelling stories of our members who have unselfishly given you a glimpse into their Covid-19 experiences. May you be reminded that tomorrow is not promised, and may our contributors move closer to healing by telling their stories. In parting, I preach and pray that you will cherish what is dear while it is near.

With love,

Ora Williams

Ora Williams, Founder

Grandparents Parenting Again & Kinship Care

THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES

By Aleiya & Beverly Hogan



Covid-19 was so frightening to my granddaughter that she began wearing a mask before Governor Whitmer's shutdown mandate. "Everybody is coughing in my classroom, and some teachers are coughing, too," was her explanation. Aleiya wanted no part of the invisible germ.

When her school shifted to half days and early pick-up, Aleiya's proactive plan now made sense. That's when I began to pay closer attention to the news. Eventually, school was closed altogether, upsetting Aleiya who would miss seeing her friends. "You'll see them again," I said, "but we have to do what the governor says to stop the spread." I secretly wondered if we were entering the Bible's prophecy of End Times.

As non-essential businesses were mandated to close, I thought, "Wow, this is serious." People began to panic: stores ran out of toilet paper, disinfectants were nonexistent, and food prices escalated. Gas prices took a deep dive because no one was traveling. I looked outside, and my neighborhood looked like a ghost town.

Aleiya, an only child, was beginning to feel the effects of house arrest. She wanted to go outside and to visit her friends. She missed school and her church activities. She perked up when we learned that her teacher would host weekly Zoom meetings with her entire class. The teacher made homework packets available for pick up, and the weekly meetings gave Aleiya an opportunity to ask questions about her schoolwork and to socialize.

As Covid cases and deaths rise, Aleiya asks often why people refuse to wear masks. "Some people just don't believe the virus is deadly," I explain. "Why did President Trump tell people to inject bleach into their bodies to get rid of the virus? Doesn't he know that bleach is harmful to the body?"

"You're correct, Aleiya. Bleach is poisonous, and President Trump gives misinformation."

I am a case manager for Michigan Works and our staff assisted Michigan customers with applying for unemployment benefits. So many people were applying, the system crashed. Customers were upset and angry: some had filed correctly but hadn't received benefits while others experienced difficulty in submitting requested documents to continue receiving their benefits. To add to the calamity, our role entailed handling the cases of people who didn't want to return to work. Mostly, we suspected, they preferred to stay home and collect unemployment. Worst of all was the discovery of numerous fraudulent claims being filed. These were some tough days, and my co-workers and I were thoroughly frustrated. Over time—thank goodness—our work became easier to manage and considerably less frustrating.

Aleiya's school is online for the 2020/2021 school year. She says her friends act silly in the virtual classroom, making it difficult for her to understand her teacher. It upsets her and she's convinced the in-person classroom would reduce the "acting up."

I have to chuckle to myself when reminding Aleiya that she cannot attend the virtual classroom in her pajamas like many of her classmates. I preach: "You still have to dress appropriately. You're a responsible and productive young lady who follows rules!"

Aleiya and I continue to be baffled by people who don't wear masks. Our conversations move from ticketing the un-masked to store owners who fail to enforce the governor's mandate. When I asked a gas station owner about enforcement, he said, "It's Detroit, who cares." I was furious at his dismissal and lack of care for our community.....his customers.

I'm deeply touched by the kindness our community is showing one another. People are making sure others have food, providing transportation to doctors' appointments, sending encouraging cards or letters, and showing sincere gratitude to health care providers and essential workers.

Aleiya and I know that "this, too, shall pass" and people will hug and shake hands again. We're hoping that after being socially distanced people will respect one another despite their differences. Maybe the gift of the pandemic is that God wants us to learn to love one another and to show compassion.



GOD'S WONDER

By Kathleen Hurd



A year before the pandemic, my daughter phoned from work to tell me she had a sinus headache and was having a hard time breathing. She said she had just eaten and had lost her taste and sense of smell, too. "It's probably your asthma. Puff your inhaler," I advised. She said she had and there was no relief.

My son picked her up at the end of her shift and explained that on the ride home she laid in the back seat with labored breathing and complaining of feeling hot. When she got home, she took breathing treatments again, but to no avail and spent the night sitting up in her bed, nodding off and on. She awoke unable to breathe and asked her boyfriend to call an ambulance.

The hospital gave her breathing treatments throughout the day, but they didn't help. She was later transferred to the intensive care unit where she received more treatments to open her lungs. The next morning the doctor phoned to tell me she needed a ventilator. "Let me get dressed and get ..." she stopped me mid-sentence, "Ma'am, if we wait on you, she'll be dead by the time you get here."

She remained on the ventilator for 2 1/2 weeks. I sat by her side daily from morning until evening. The doctor explained her lungs were "like ice or glass and they needed to heal." She eventually came home, but her lungs were badly damaged and she had to re-learn to walk and talk.

A year later, my grandchildren came home from school vomiting and complaining of headaches, pain, and

diarrhea. My daughter complained of headaches, too, and my son, a dialysis patient, tested positive for Coronavirus. Eventually, the entire family contracted the virus. I experienced the worse symptoms, but none of us were hospitalized.

One night during my illness, I watched an interview of a virus survivor who had been on a ventilator say, "I don't remember anything, but my doctor says my lungs were like glass or ice." I screamed. Those were the exact words the doctor said to me. And as clearly as I heard this, I heard God say, "I showed you this almost a year ago, so you could be of service to others." I cried like a baby realizing God entrusted me to experience something that would happen in the future.

I truly believe my being able to sit with my daughter, talking and praying, and calming her down when she got agitated helped to keep her alive. I believe that experience prepared me to care for my family.

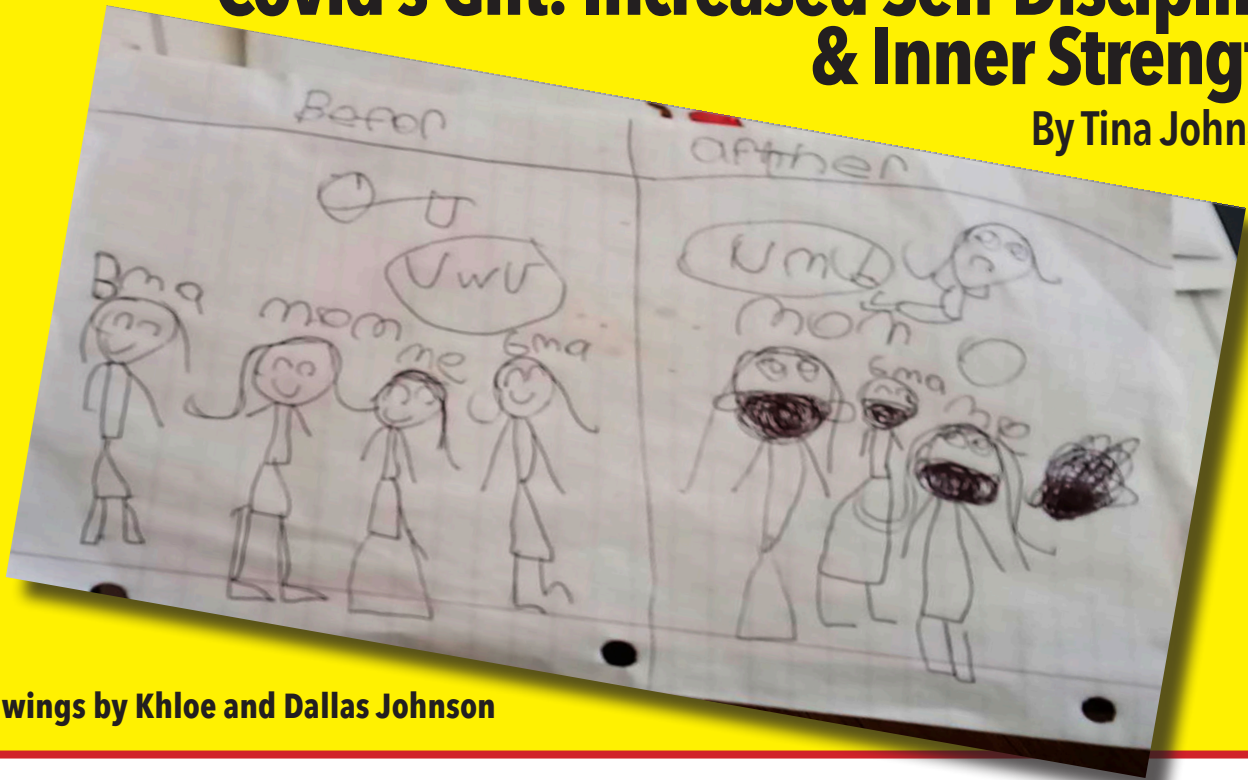
In the midst of being ill, it also gave me the strength to collect donations and to distribute 100 Christmas care packages to frontline workers at Providence Hospital, Beaumont Independent Living & Nursing Home, Boulevard Temple Nursing Home, and my son's dialysis center.

With all of the hurt and pain, death and heartache, and chaos the virus has caused, I am thankful I have experienced the virus from different perspectives, I listened to God's voice and I obeyed.



Covid's Gift: Increased Self-Discipline & Inner Strength

By Tina Johnson



Drawings by Khloe and Dallas Johnson

Covid-19 seemed to have appeared out of nowhere, and it has robbed many families of loved ones including mine. The lies and disrespect we experienced were ruthless and corrupt. How could they withhold vital information that would have kept us safe? It has tossed my life: I lost my mother, my life-angel; three cousins; and a step-grandfather. Back-to-back. Like lightning. I think, I cry, and I wonder, "Is this the rapture? Has God come to take what is His?"

It's hard to comprehend that my mother is gone and never coming back. And yet, in the midst of this hurt and pain, our family is still able to hold our heads up and fight for our lives. We're doing everything we can to stay safe. It's like playing a game with a stalking murderer. Playing a game with death is a miserable way to live especially when you know firsthand that the virus is real. I pray, in the name of Jesus, that He spare me and my loved ones.

I am blown away by people who refuse to wear a mask. They see people dying and, yet, they are refusing to protect themselves and their loved ones to stop the spread. What's on their minds? Don't they understand that the virus is killing people every day? Why don't they care?

Between the death of my beloved family members and my numerous health issues, I am committed to playing by the rules and adhering to the science. Our family is doing what it takes to avoid being candidates for the virus. They say

some good comes from every experience. I have emerged from this devastating, life-altering experience with a super boost to my self-discipline and a deepening of my inner strength.

I say to the challenges, the disappointments and whatever else, Bring It On!

And so, I've decided I will not give up on this fight. I rebuke it in the name of Jesus. I do not believe that God has brought me and my remaining family members to live in fear and doubt. I won't allow government's gloomy predictions to make me fearful nor will I let the global spread impact how I live. I will move forward sensibly and safely while having faith that the blood of Jesus is covering our family.

Daily, I move closer to the belief that Mother is in a better place. After her death, she came to me and showed me a heart, assuring me she loves me and is watching over our family.

The grandchildren, on the other hand, have a much easier time accepting her death. They hold conversations with her, play with and straighten up her toys, and put snacks on the table for her to enjoy. How a 5-year-old and an 8-year-old process their grief is sweet and refreshing. They loved her so much, and rather than to be stuck in grief, they hold on to her loving spirit the only way they know how. They loved her deeply and she them. Real love supersedes death.

Covid-19: OUR NEW NORMAL

By Pamela Frank



After working 30 years and retiring from Ford Motor Company, I joyously spent time traveling, catering, entertaining, volunteering, and parenting my 8-year-old great-granddaughter, Ka'Lei. I also visited my mother-in-law in the nursing home regularly. She's been in my life since 1977, and I call her Mom.

Three times a week I would visit Mom filling her and two of her friends' meal order requests. Since I love to cook, I was delighted to bring meals. How could I say no? After all, the dishes she requested were meals she taught me to make. The memory of those visits is vivid. I would be there for 3 or 4 hours, and we would spend quality time talking and laughing, and just loving one another. I would leave and pick up Ka'Lei from school and drop her off at one of several after-school activities. We would return home after a long day for dinner and homework followed by well-deserved bedtime.

In March 2020, Covid-19 attacked my favorite brother, Bobby Wilkerson. He was a United States Postal Service employee who arrived at work coughing and was sent home until he could see a doctor. He went directly to the Veterans hospital but did not see a doctor because it was too crowded. The next day he returned but was told he did not have symptoms that warranted Covid testing. Two days later he called EMS, too weak to drive himself to the hospital, and was told his temperature was not high enough for him to be seen. The following day we went to his apartment. After knocking for a considerable time, he eventually answered the door and then passed out. He was rushed to the hospital, where he was intubated and died two days later, alone.

My emotions were--are--many: confusion, sadness, hurt, and anger. Bobby had done three tours in the U.S. Army.

He served in two wars and battled Legionnaires' disease, all of which he survived. I'll never understand how the U.S. government doesn't take better care of its veterans. My life has changed forever.

It's been almost a year since my great-granddaughter started virtual learning and we're still at it. No more after-school programs, movies, skating, or shopping. And, my 13-year volunteering of feeding the homeless with 2 Fish 5 Loaves Street ministry almost came to a standstill. The homeless were taken off the streets and placed in temporary, undisclosed housing. Fortunately, we located 75 of them, and we're able to cook and deliver meals.

March 12, 2020, was the last day I took a tasty meal to Mom. After that, we only communicated through phone or video calls. In August, the nursing home called to say Mom tested positive for Covid-19 and was admitted to the hospital. She was discharged after a week. I was able to visit-through a window-but I quickly sensed she was not herself.

A couple of months later, Mom passed. Unlike my brother's passing, we were able to have a funeral to say our final goodbyes although it was not the celebration of life for a 95-year-old I would have liked. There was no repast, no hugging, and few in attendance.

Covid-19 has been tough for me because I love to entertain, socialize and serve God's people. I especially miss cooking Sunday dinner, inviting the family over, and taking my beloved Bobby his dinner to his job.

Now, we sit at home, all day, for the most part, virtually learning, conference calling, and Zooming. Extraordinarily little socializing and face-to-face interactions. This, unfortunately, is our new normal.

Covid-19: GIFTS AND HEARTACHES

By Aryn Williams



It's odd, but Covid-19 brought gifts. Even though I've gained Covid Calories, I have also gained confidence. I wasn't skinny before Covid but I had a great "shape" and I liked it. But I didn't appreciate it. My self-talk was negative, and I cared too much about what others thought about me. I wasn't Team Aryn.

Although I could wear smaller clothes, I'm happy with my 15 extra pounds. Yes, 15 lbs. Those fifteen pounds brought me self-love, self-appreciation and self-confidence. I know this for sure. When I was 15 pounds lighter, I was unable to tell myself "You're cute," "You're strong," or "You're a queen". Now, I am. I'm even able to tell myself, "I can do anything I put my mind to". I feel this in my body, in my bones and in my heart. I needed this because I allowed people to put me down. Social distancing has given me the time to think and to find my inner confidence. I feel great now. I've met and love Aryn Williams.

Corvid's other gift was that it brought me closer to those in my household. Before Covid, Aniya, my older sister, and I were not close. We disagreed, we argued, and we just didn't get along. Actually, it was like this with the other members

of my family, too. I was always "into it" with someone in the household.

But during the shutdown, things changed. I've gotten to know the real Aniya. We can sit in our pitch-black room, in our bed, and talk. Like sisters. We've talked for hours and we both have learned a lot about one another. She's kind, she's calm and she's respectful. We've stopped fighting and we've each gained trust in one another. I guess being in the house 24-hours a day, 7 days a week forced us to create a sister bond. I've gotten to know the real Aniya and I hope she knows me.

Along with the gifts, Covid-19 brought sadness and pain. I miss going out and seeing my friends and family, I hate staying in the house most of the day, and I really, really dislike wearing a mask when I do go out!

It feels like the world is coming to an end, and Donald Trump is not helping us to get out of this. He's the president and I wish he would do his job. Doesn't he care about the lives of Americans? I'm looking forward to what President Joe Biden will do to stop this virus so we can live life again.

Covid-19: THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

By Antha Williams



It came like a thief in the night, leaving wicked evidence of its existence: coughing, fever, headache, labored breathing, and loss of smell, taste and appetite. It goes from city to city, state to state, and country to country stealing lives by the thousands leaving behind destruction and fear, pain and sorrow, and death. This thief, Covid-19, crippled mankind in a blink of an eye. When you meet the thief, be prepared to live or die. Sadly, it can't be deleted like a virus invading software, or arrested by police or extinguished like a fire.

Covid-19 changed my life. Like an inmate in solitary confinement, I'm angry my freedom is halted. I'm quarantined and lonely, unable to travel, unchurched, and missing the movies. I'm reduced to temporary trickles of living, bouncing between pandemic fatigue and pandemic depression.

I battle the thief at home and at work. As a nurse on the frontline, I fight with every bit of strength I have, although--at times--I'm exhausted and unsettled from fighting its wrath. I fight to keep the virus from taking another life. I repeat "Keep breathing, keep breathing," hoping they escape an inevitable ending. I see so much death at work and in my personal life. I've lost friends and family members. Too many deaths, so much sorrow and so many tears.

I constantly pray the virus will not invade my body, and I meticulously follow and utilize the guidance, tools and

resources for healthcare workers. Along with my faith in God, these are my protections as written in Ephesians 6:10. It reads, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might".

As a wife, mother, grandmother raising two grandchildren, and an aunt raising a special needs nephew, I have little time to myself. When I do, I reflect on how things were and how things are while anticipating pleasant times to come. I use this time to feed my soul and affirm my self-worth and my capacity to stay mentally and physically strong to meet my obligations and care for my family.

The tasks and reminders are often and constant: Wear your mask! Where's your mask? Wash your hands! Did you wash your hands? I'm thankful that the reminders are balanced with the many opportunities we've had for positive family activity. We've baked cookies, cooked meals, played games and watched movies.....together. I treasure our family conversations allowing the children to express their thoughts and feelings about virtual schooling and other things the thief has stolen. Children need to be heard and I patiently and lovingly listen.

As 2020 dwindles away, the thief is predicted to slow its steal. A newly created vaccine is soon to be available and help us to live fully. In the meantime, I'll fight and stay protected, keep my family focused, provide loving care for my patients and wait for the day the Covid-19 thief is laid to rest.



Grandparents Parenting Again & Kinship Care Support Group

Who We Are and What We Do



We are the caretakers of children that have lost their parent's parental guidance and involvement in their lives due to various situations. Our purpose is to offer support to those thrust back into the role of parenting again. We offer resources, fellowship, workshops and share ideas, knowledge and lessons learned in this 21st century world. It is our hope that grandparents as well as kinship care participants know that they are not alone on this journey.

There is help available.

If you are interested in joining with us or want more info,
please contact Ora Williams at

313-531-2025

or grandparentsparentingagain221@gmail.com



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