

Priyanka's Creative Writing Piece

Yesterday, I was doing summer cleaning of my bathroom cupboard and I noticed a pile of bottles of hand-sanitisers, boxes of masks, lateral flow test kits and lots of disinfectant spray bottles hidden behind some other regularly used stuff. You know where I am going from here. Up to few months back, these things were among the most important things of our lives and now they are lying in the dark corner of the cupboard. If I try to recall those days now, a smile passes by my face as those were the days filled with horror, scared of anyone's sneeze and a little hope that our scientists will eventually work out a way through it.

It all started in Feb 2020 when I was sitting with my family at the Dubai airport in transit, travelling back to Glasgow. A strange feel was there that I was not aware of. You could feel the calm before the storm. A lot of the people at the airport were wearing face masks and I was looking at them with great amusement, thinking, why they were doing so. Is it related to what was happening in a country far-far away called China? What was that disease called? Any Idea? Too lost in my own thoughts and my family, who was bothered at that time to think about the new virus (which was soon to be a pandemic) infecting people hundreds of miles away. Suddenly, a sense of urgency emerged in me, that I should have kept myself updated. I decided to check the news with my better half at the airport who was occupied with the thoughts of making sure that his family transits from one flight to the other smoothly. He said, "Yes, this definitely looks like the mask thing has something to do with this China virus".

By that time, we didn't even know what this virus was called! What an irony! The name that every child knows now, even knows how to spell it. Seriously, has it really happened to us? Have we lived our lives for 2 whole years in uncertainty, praying and wishing that our loved ones remain safe? Suddenly, the video calls or should I say, Zoom calls (new thing in the market) to parents and friends increased making us realise how important these relations are, that had taken a back-seat in not so distant past. Unexpectedly, there were large queues outside the "**essential**" shops. While all other shops were closed and the shopkeepers were wondering why they were not categorised as essential that could have saved their businesses, given them some pennies to look after their families. Just in one instance, the whole world had stopped. Everyone was in front of the telly, doing P.E. with Joe wicks, there was a shortage of toilet paper rolls (which I still cannot understand why) and everyone was trying to preserve every drop of hand-sanitiser. The television was filled with frightening news of families losing their loved ones to the deadly virus called the '**Coronavirus**', or the so-called disease – **COVID-19** and how helpless they were being not able to say their final goodbyes to their loved ones.

After few days, I completely switched off my television set as it was making me very anxious and I was carrying a baby in my tummy. The kids were also at home due to "home-schooling." Listening to the news scared them of the world around them which until now was filled with innocence and ignorance. To take the mind off all this, our family started walking daily covering miles and admiring others' gardens (as

there was nothing else to do), taking inspiration from them to work in our garden which we had neglected in the past.

Open spaces again became so important in our lives. Was the nature trying to tell us something; that the humans should pause some time and look back at their actions?

Hugging a loved one felt so precious with the “**2-meter rule**” in place. I learned two more new words during the pandemic (the word pandemic itself comes out of the dictionary and become a local language word in our lives). The “**PCR**” and the “**lateral flow test**”. How do you feel about poking a stick in your nostrils? I don't feel very elevated either, doing so every time I got an appointment with a midwife and hoping that she has done the same before coming to the hospital. The partner of the mother-to-be was not supposed to accompany the mother of their child. Is it fair? If the partner has infection, the mother too will have the infection. But who's listening. The 9-months journey was so emotional for me, not being with my partner was a sorrowful feeling. We had to pay a price which almost the whole society was paying one way or another.

This Covid-19 brought realisation into our lives that how important we are to each other, especially those husbands and wives who were stuck with each other in one closed home for 2 years, surviving their marriage and not ending it. They must award themselves prize of courage, strength, patience, durability and especially, long-lasting love! Covid has also taught us the importance of slowing down in our lives, how important it is for us to take a break sometime and escape from the hustle of everyday life, or from the expectation of others from us. This coronavirus has made us realise of our own potentials that we did not know existed earlier.

We need to learn to be kind to each other and not to judge people around us. It has taught us how we used to take 'non-essential' things for granted. Going to cinema, a short shopping trip had taken a backseat in our lives, which coronavirus made a luxury for us. I never thought that kids going back to school and partners going back to offices will bring cheer to the ladies handling and managing their busy houses in those difficult times. Now, sitting by my bedroom window, I am wondering what I should do with the piles of hand-sanitisers and the face-masks. Should I sell them at ebay? Will anyone buy them? Or, should I give it out to charity? Will they accept it? Or, should I come up with an idea to recycle the masks into something creative? Should I be content having the lifelong supply of these 'essentials' with me and that I don't need to go out shopping for them ever again? With a new member in the house, I definitely need to increase my cupboard space and I am therefore facing the biggest dilemma of my life!

Who would have thought that one casual conversation at the airport would change our entire world? Seriously, if I go back in time and think about those pandemic years and see myself sitting at the airport with my family unaware of the terrible infection happening far away from me, originated by bats (some theories do support that), I feel so little in front of the huge, ambiguous, obscure and puzzling coronavirus. It made me helpless, powerless, full of empathy, weak and dependent.

By Priyanka Gupta, 27.09.2022