

What we went through the last 2 years  
By John Thorne

My name is John Thorne. I am 37 years old, and I live in Long Term Care at the Kalkaska Memorial Health Center. I have been here for almost 4 years now. I'd like to tell you what we went through during the pandemic. As we know, it was very hard on everyone. I'm here to tell you it was very hard on us also. I live with people who don't understand why they can't see anyone.

On March 10 2020. I went shopping with my mom. I had a good day just getting out for a while. My mom asked me if I wanted to go out for dinner, but I said "no, let's do that on Friday, like we always do". She took me back to my room at the Long Term Care. The very next day, on March 11 2020, everything changed. We were locked down because of COVID-19. They locked all the doors and would not allow any visitors in. It was very sad because I didn't know what was going on. The next day we had a meeting with the boss who works here and with some others on the management team. They told us about COVID-19. They let us know that no visitors could come in for 2 weeks, and we would not be able to have group activities. No BINGO or stuff like that. Our activities ladies were very good to do one on one things with us. We also had to sit 6 feet away from people. The residents with dementia didn't understand why we were on lockdown. It was very sad to watch. Many would walk around saying "what's going on?"

When the 2 weeks were up it didn't get any better. We had another meeting to see what was going on, and they said it would be a month with no visitors. Our staff were very awesome to help us and did everything they could for us. Time after time I saw our residents were down and

I was to, but I at least understood why this was going on. They told us we would now have to eat in our rooms instead of with each other. Those residents who could not feed themselves, got eat in the dining room but had to be 6 foot away from each other. I started doing a lot of Diamond Art to keep me busy and pass the time.

One day they came to me and asked if I wanted see my mom? I, of course, said yes I do. They told me it would have to be through a window and there could be no hugging and no touching. I said "I can't believe it, but I will try it." They took me down and I sat by the window to wait. I saw my mom walk up and as we were talking I just wanted to reach out and give her a hug. There was someone sitting in the room watching to make sure my mom wore a mask. Our visit lasted 8 minutes before I had to go. I cried very hard because I wanted to give my mom a hug and I couldn't. I felt like we were in jail, but I knew we weren't. I know that they did this for us to keep us safe, but it felt like we were being punished.

We had meetings over and over and we were still not allowed to have visitors inside the building. The good news was that there were no COVID-19 cases in our Long Term Care at this time.

Once the weather got nicer, we were able to visit with family outside, but we had a fence in between us. I had made my dad a picture for father's day, but I had to give him the picture over the fence. That was very hard to do. I wanted to touch him, but again there was someone who was watching us. My heart was hurting for me and the others who live here. We still had people saying "why I can't see my family?" The staff would tell us that there was a very contagious illness going around to try and help us understand.

At this time, we still couldn't do group activities. Starting in October, they did allow us to play BINGO but we had to be socially distanced. Only 2 at a table and 6 feet away from others. All of the staff continued to wear a mask while at work and they would get tested every week. We also were being tested each week.

Eventually we were allowed to leave the building with our families, but they were still not allowed to come in. If we wanted to go home or do something with our family, we had to come back and go into quarantine for 14 days. I chose to see my family on Thanksgiving and spend the day with them, which was wonderful day. But when I came back and I had to sit in a room for 14 days being quarantined from all the others. It was very hard, but I did a lot of my Diamond Art to pass the time. To me this was worth the time in quarantine because it had been 8 months without seeing my family. After the 14 days I went back to my room and I was very happy to be back. I felt so bad for the people who couldn't go out for the Thanksgiving holiday. There were so many people who were sad because they could not see their loved ones. I did go back out for Christmas to spend time with my family. I went back in to quarantine for 14 days it was very hard. But it was so nice to see my family. I prayed so much that year for this COVID to go away.

In the year 2021, they started having groups after a few months. Still, no family could come in. In April, we started to see some things is changing. Family could come in but we they had to get tested for COVID, wear a mask, visit only in our room. We were still not allowed to be touching or hugging our loved ones.

We started to see special activities again, such as take out lunches, and our favorite lunch with activity. That means residents and staff cook a special meal together for lunch. I started to go back to church after over a year of having to watch it on the Facebook. Starting in August of 2021, we saw some of residents get COVID-19. They would have to go into quarantine for 10 or more days, depending on their symptoms. In October, I and my family came down with it also. I spent 18 days in quarantine because I was exposed by someone who had it. They wanted to be safe and not expose others, but then I came down with it while I was in quarantine. That is why I was there for 18 days. I was not that sick. I did lose my dad from COVID-19 during this time. This past Thanksgiving and Christmas I was able to be home with my family.

Now, here we are in the year 2022. We continue to have residents and staff test positive for COVID-19. We are monitoring what we can do as far as activities, but they are again smaller groups. Families can continue to visit and if they want to take their loved one out they can. We can't do outings in our Long Term Care van at this time because of the amount of COVID out in the community. I am hoping soon we can do that. We are having church with our residents again and I feel like the Lord has helped us through the last 2 years. If you have a loved one here, just know this, they are trying to keep everyone safe.

God bless you all.