

## "The Covid In Prison"

A year and a half ago; Summer of 2020 I was infected by the most notorious virus since the Spanish Flu (Which killed 750,000 citizens of the United States). I was not the only prisoner and not everyone survived. This is an event of my life I shall never forget.

It is the winter of 2020. ABC, NBC and CBS are all reporting this deadly-elusive virus called Covid-19. Most of my information is received via broadcast television / digital antenna; initially. The virus is said to be running uncontrolled on the Asia continent. The T.V. Viewing room is quiet when we began this particular stage of the pandemic. The new normal becomes a nearly continuous broadcast of this Covid-A virus. At this time I was wondering how this will affect us and specifically me, since I experienced the Great Recession while incarcerated and how closely my care is related to tax revenue and State of Florida budgets. I never thought the virus would be a health concern and tax revenue was not a factor of concern as the next few months rolled on and into the past.

Near the end of spring in 2020 it came: Fevers, coughing body aches and other symptoms. At first the medical staff presume it is just a late flu, but I have been through twelve flu seasons, at this time, many who had taken the flu shot earlier in the season were becoming sick fast and in bigger numbers than any flu I've ever seen. Medical staff treated it as such and sent many men back to their dorms. They were wrong and I believe ill equipped and uninformed.

This flu like sickness began it's fast spread, too many men complain with the same symptoms and it is declared; The infection is hear.

The new normal becomes listening to the news on my radio APP, via a multimedia device provided and purchased from JPay (Securus Technologies), because the T.V. room is too crowded (as everything else becomes or is) and it does not seem wise considering the virus. With my radio App I can now be informed, on my bunk, where there is more space, and slightly cleaner air to breath.

Here is where I hear the first report about any prisons and the Covid (N.P.R. reports National Public Radio) the report details that the Tennessee Department of Corrections has obtained enough test to test their entire inmate population for Covid-19 and that it will take 2 weeks to do so. No-one has described the manner of the testing, no inmate, including me, has a mask, cloth face covering or could Socially Distance; it's impossible to do in prison.

By the end of Covid-19, before the Delta variant, one security staff member died and one inmate just at my institution, no mask and an impossibility to keep a six-foot distance between people I soon found that I was not impervious to the Covid.

In July of 2020 I was working in the prison's kitchen (foodservice) and it is hot (no A.C. for the inmate workers), working from 3am to 7am, serving food, washing trays and now removing frozen chicken from the walk-in freezer to the attached walk-in

cooler (This is virtually my A.C.), I suddenly become ill, I just don't feel right. I'm fully hydrated and fed, I quickly discount dehydration, low glucose or weakness from my anemia. All the following symptoms I am about to experience in the next few minutes are the ones I keep for the next three days, they are: Body aches, in my joints first followed by in the muscles, I stop sweating, fever, body chills, I become unbalanced and confused.

Immediately I notify my work supervisor, a correctional staff with officer rank (Equal to a private if it was the army), that "I don't feel so hot!"; Body chills - in July - creepy. In this state I finish the rest of my shift after my work supervisor suggest that I must be deprived of water. (I'm not mad or upset folks I have adapted very well to incompetence while incarcerated). I replied by saying "Ah - nope. I'm full of water my stomach won't handle any more."

Going back to the dormitory, as customary after completing a shift, and not receiving any medical attention, I then seek those creature comforts, removing my food soiled-wet boots and clothing, and a cup of hot coffee (I was sick not dead) along with a hot shower. But this is delayed as a security of Captian rank arrives in the dormitory, on this Saturday. He notifies us that we have been placed on Security Quarantine (Cricket's Trilling). No body has a clue what that means. Instead of considering the definition further I then begin to wonder "How do I spell quarantine?" It is explained that we will not leave the dormitory,

chow (our meals) will come to us, all other privileges (phone calls, T.V., electronic mail) are still allowed. The furthest person away from me is three feet away.

Soon six other people become sick, after me, they are feverish (they stop sweating) and their eyes are bloodshot. Following a brief investigation in a small plastic mirror I find my eyes bloodshot as well.

The F.D.C. (Florida Department of Corrections) was not ready for such a thing as a worldwide pandemic.

N.P.R. reported that P.P.E. (Personal Protective Equipment) became available first for medical workers, evidently it was true. Medical staff were wearing them first and resembled a brightly-colored dental hygienist or pastel-Darth Vader.

The nurses come around to dispense the normal medication, except for anything to relieve body aches and fever. Their feeble supply was used up quickly. They did take our temperature with a touchless thermometer, that talked with a metallic-female voice. The talking thermometer informed me I was either a undercooked piece of chicken, a radio station or I was sick with a fever of  $103.7^{\circ}$ . They recorded this on their clipboards then moved onto the rat in the next cage.

After breathing on other inmates for days effectively spreading the highly contagious virus, I am given a highly sophisticated disposable mask that I am ordered to wear. This is great now I can look diseased instead of just sick. Within 24 hours they have depleted their supply and I

am back to breathing on everyone; medical and security staff still look like the offspring of a dentist and Darth Vader

Now, excuse me for my satirical narrative, but how the pandemic was handled in 2020 by F.P.C. was a joke, people died needlessly - that is not a joke.

Today Covid is taken seriously and the process does differ than what it did then.

First is the testing speed. If I were to inform medical or security staff that 'I don't feel so hot!' (most likely with a detectable fever at or below undercooked chicken). I would be subject to a rapid test, which is available on site. The good news is I have not seen what this rapid test consist of, I do not want to, that would mean I'm sick. This is light-speed fast compared to 2020.

In 2020 it was five days after I began to exhibit symptoms and two days after my fever had disappeared and it was a nose swab. The nose swab was the most uncomfortable two seconds of my life (unless I consider when my translucent-one-ply toilet paper fails to do it's intended job). The test results came back positive for Covid-19 seven days after the nose swab. This is a total of twelve days after "not feeling so hot!". This is when the fourteen day medical quarantine begins and the security quarantine ends (The difference between the two quarantines is merely whom enforces it.)

Today the feverish inmate is removed from my immediate living area, isolated and a rapid test is administered. If that test is positive for the Covid then that person is isolated, in the medical department far away from myself and living area which is called a quad (A quad

is one quarter of a secured housing building.) This quad would then be placed on security quarantine pending the results of a laboratory test which takes an additional Seventy-two (72) hours, or One-hundred and twenty (120) hours if you became sick on Friday. If this laboratory test is negative then the quarantine is lifted and five dozen cheers and shouts of elation reverberate in the air, within the quad. If the test is positive, a fourteen day medical quarantine begins; no cheers. Add the three to five days to a fourteen days quarantine, I then have to spend Seventeen to Nineteen days without seeing or feeling the sun, hearing a bird or experience anything else that would involve walking outside, on the compound. Even stubbing my toe on the concrete walk is considered, although painful, at least it makes me feel human and alive. The isolation is the same as described previously with an exception. The exception is that all inmates in F.D.C. now possess a blue C.F.C. (Cloth Face Covering) that covers the nose and mouth and is tied behind the head. This C.F.C. coupled with swift testing and quarantine I have notice less than 50% of the inmate population get sick here. No

No-one has died from the Omicron Variant, to the extent of my knowledge. The practicing policy in place is working.

Secondly, protecting myself. I stay informed with radio broadcast, T.V. News reports and take everything in objectively. I wash my hands a minimum of three times a day and wear my C.F.C, when appropriate, and Ride the Wave. To explain, I live in a closed colony mostly cut off from the freeworld. I can get nothing for myself; it must be brought to me like a goldfish in

a fish bowl. Food, clothing and shelter, along with Covid, must be brought to me. That means the public must get sick and a lot of them for me to get sick. This is the rise of the wave. Watching the infection rates three times now they have spiked rather largely, since the pandemic began, and this is the top of the wave. It takes time for the people that work in prisons to become sick since they live in sparsely populated areas, somewhere nearby the prisons. This is my alert that infections are coming soon, like a tsunami warning after a major earthquake. I observe and listen to the rumor mill (we call it inmate.com), infections will be heard of and will start two to four weeks after the news reports show a waning hump in the infection graphs. Staff first began to stay at home for sick leave, the inmate secondly. This is when I isolate as best as I can adding this to my daily practicing method. The isolation consist of remaining in my cell, limiting ~~the~~ the common areas I touch and the amount of people I pass by. Now I will begin to witness infections while the free world reports the descending side of the infection graphs.

Thirdly and lastly, my immune system. This is a theory comingled with facts and experiences. I believe, until proven otherwise, I have been infected by Covid-19 and exposed many times afterwards. I am certain that a person like me (infected once, male, 38 Y.O.A., Healthy, with good hygiene practices, and physical excersises like Yoga and low impact cardio) can aquire an adapted immune system that has learned to quickly eradicate the Covid-19; when exposed.

N.P.R., broadcast T.V. and newspapers seem to

all agree that after infection remains the antibodies that your body used to mark a virus for destruction by the white blood cells. The C.D.C., Florida Department of Health and Human Services, along with those mentioned above, all agree if the immune system is compromised by another infection, like H.I.V., that this person is at high risk of serious infection or death from the virus. The reason being is that the white blood cells are under heavy workload already and the helper cells or T-cells, that help to direct and produce white blood cells are also overworked and unable to focus solely on the rapid spreading and nerve receptor cell breeding disease. My theory, the Mister T Theory, based upon what I have just written, my year and a half of observations of the virus in a closed or crowded environment, and my body not becoming sick after repeated exposure, I believe my body has produced antibodies to combat a follow-up infection, and my environment dictates them to be called back into service. How long this last is uncertain the C.D.C. claims natural immunity can remain up to six months after infection. My antibodies never have a chance to go wherever antibodies go after they are no longer needed.

Unlike free world people who can simply avoid the virus, I can not. I will be exposed once again, to the covid, on the next wave before my natural immunity will waiver and thereby reset this six month period of immunity; in theory. Having not been sick since 2020, I have been exposed around that six month period I believe my T-cells have adapted and give me an edge over someone that has not been exposed to Covid. Furthermore I have been in three more

quarantines, in addition to the one I was sick or not feeling so hot, and two of those had inmates, on the next bunk over, within six feet, coughing and feverish and subsequently tested positive for the Covid. Kudos for my body expelling the virus promptly before I needed a fever or a full assault on all my cells. The best thing that could of happened, in this regard, was to contract the Covid when I did, survive and continue to be exposed to it.

Testing my theory the only way I can I would have removed this special Circumspect, once removed I look at my family. My dear aunt and her husband, along with their children; part of my family. They have tested positive for Covid-19 ten days before I was sick in 2020. They complained of fever, cough and a loss of taste and smell. They recovered without serious infection. My aunt and her son become sick again, just a few weeks ago and are positive for the Omicron Variant. They are not subjected to the exposure I am and they are sick a year and a half after the standard Covid-19.

My theory still stands.

My grandmother eighty-nine years young, unvaccinated, is hospitalized, with Omicron, in a Covid unit. Along with the virus she also had pneumonia. She is recovering as I write this and has been removed from the Covid unit. She is in rehab to regain full use of her limbs and balance before going home.

What can make my body suffer and weaken it is stress. My recovering grandmother can be a great distraction from survival, which is what I owe to my family. To do that in a situation like this I must convince myself first "There is not a ##### thing I can do about this!".

This might sound callous or morose, but it is true. I am incarcerated. Everyday I say to myself "I must survive. If I think I'm not of any help in here it will be magnified if I die in prison

In closing. The Omnicron variant is nothing like the Delta variant, grandma would have not survived the Deadly-Delta. I have survived this experience incarcerated, which I could have never foreseen, in this regard by doing the following: staying informed, Good hygiene practices, Riding The Wave, isolating, exercise, wearing C.F.C., staying mentally strong and the other practices mentioned.

Now having been fully advise I et, shall take my leave. It is tuesday and every supper in F.P.C. on this day is chicken and I sure do hope my peice is running a fever.

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B.L. McCoy