

**Mary Schwartz** (submitted June 12, 2020)

My husband Hal and I spent this winter at our condo in Margate, Florida. We had scheduled our return for March 15 when we left Aberdeen in early January. The day before our departure, our condo association called an emergency meeting canceling all clubhouse activities through the month of April. We were happy to be on our way back to NJ.

On the road we noticed more traffic than usual, especially throughout Georgia and South Carolina. Many cars were packed to the gills with toilet paper taking up most of the back seats. It would have been a strange sight if friends hadn't called and told us to buy and bring toilet paper with us, as stores up north were void of the product.

Stopping at rest areas and restaurants gave me pause as I thought about the possibility of contracting the virus, but I still wanted to stop and attend mass in North Carolina. (God was definitely needed at a time like this.) The church was sparsely filled and an announcement was read about removing the congregation's sign of peace during the liturgy, when we usually shake hands with those around us.

We hadn't seen our children and grandson since New Year's Eve and were anxious to catch up. My younger daughter brought her son to see us on March 16<sup>th</sup>, but insisted on remaining outside and only visiting for half an hour. My other two children came to see me on March 22, my birthday, the day after NJ shut down.

I am usually a very busy person. I like to attend exercise classes, belong to a senior club, an Italian club. I attend local theatre and meet with friends often. How would I fare during this stay-at-home order?

I managed surprisingly well for the first month, walking daily with a neighbor, cleaning out closets, cooking new recipes. I was thankful that we had a fixed income and that my three children still had paying jobs. But when Gov. Murphy announced another month I knew that I needed to add more activities to my routine.

Monday's became FaceTime lunch day with three former colleagues. We would chat for 30 – 45 minutes as we caught up on the few things we had accomplished during the prior week. Another day was social-distancing outdoor coffee on my front patio with two of my vacation travel buddies. My favorite day was on the weekend when we would drive to Howell and visit my grandson in his backyard. He would play on his swingset, bat his ball, or kick his soccer ball as we watched from the deck. The week would end with a Sunday night trivia Zoom meeting with my husband's family from PA, MA and AZ. Having these activities to look forward to helped me maintain a positive attitude.

I am now ready to attempt more outdoor activities, but will continue to be cautious of extended indoor functions. This pandemic has helped me realize the truly important things around us. I am happy with my family, friends, home and availability of necessities. I have been blessed, and am thankful for all that I have, especially when I see how many others are suffering to merely exist.