

LEMON CREEK JOURNAL

INSIGHTS & IMAGES OF CORRECTIONS ON THE LAST
FRONTIER, LEMON CREEK CORRECTIONAL CENTER,
JUNEAU, ALASKA

PANDEMIC EDITION

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VOLUME XV



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To our readers:

The Lemon Creek Journal is a quarterly e-Publication of Lemon Creek Correctional Center, Juneau, Alaska. The Journal's mission is to inform, engage, and challenge Corrections professionals and the public to think critically about the challenges facing Alaska's correctional system. So that we can be more responsive to our readers, please share with us your impressions and suggestions by emailing the Editor at daryl.webster@alaska.gov.

Forward to Volume XV

The Pandemic Issue

This issue of the Lemon Creek Journal is the first to see the light of day since our Holiday Issue of January, 2020. The original Volume XV was well on the way to production in March of last year when COVID-19 came charging and just like that, *Everything Changed*. Talk about the understatement of a generation. We aren't out of the woods yet, and it will take years to write the history of COVID-19 and to understand the consequences of our responses to it. Suffice to say that life and business as we know it were dominated by the pandemic and it seemed as impossible to write about as to ignore. So, the Journal took a little vacation. But now it is time to confront the elephant in the room and discuss what the pandemic has meant to us, as a professional family, before putting it in our rearview mirror and moving on.

In *What Was It Like?* Lt. Irizarry gives us an inside look at five Lemon Creek Correctional Officers who were diagnosed with COVID-19 and overcame it. Read

what they have to say about an experience most of us know only from headlines.

COVID Homework, offers an inside view of what it was like to pack up and spend months working from home. Paul McCarthy's article gives the term, "Home Isolation" a whole new meaning.

In *COVID-19: A Mental Health Perspective*, Mental Health Clinician Rachael Cody discusses the effects of COVID-19 on inmates. We at Lemon Creek Correctional Center are justifiably proud of our campaign to protect inmates from exposure to COVID-19. But while most of our inmate population has remained uninfected, they have not been *unaffected*. Ms. Coady helps us to understand the difference.

Sailing the COVID Sea explores the question of whether a meaningful life can exist without risk.

We hope you enjoy this issue.



A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

You have made it a year to remember.

It has been well more than a year since the World Health Organization announced the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China, on January 30th of 2020 to be exact. By March 11th, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

Some of the challenges COVID presented to the world were also felt here at Lemon Creek almost immediately, and by April 15th I entered my 24th straight day of being at work, as we battled to find a way to stay ahead of the outbreak amongst our staff. I recall vividly the evening of Monday, April 13th. Superintendent Webster and I were exhausted after a long day of being in meetings with members of the Executive Team, Health and Rehabilitation Services, Public Health, and LCCC's Lieutenant and Sergeants. During the short breaks, in between meetings, we did our best to field incoming phone calls and answer emails, all of which were COVID related. By 2130 hours, we packed up and went home for some rest, returning bright and early the next morning to get back in the fight. Before we got started, I checked my email activity from the day before. Monday the 13th between the hours of 0700 to 2000 hours, I had received 64 emails, had 41 calls to my cell phone, with over 20 missed calls on the office phone, and approximately 30 calls, from me, going out. All this, on top of keeping up with the normal day to day operations of the facility, made me feel a little more than discouraged.

We were the first institution to report positive COVID cases and for a few short weeks I felt Lemon Creek was the epitome of trial by fire, as we were constantly playing defense against a relentless foe, determined choke us out with its daily set of twists and turns on the pandemic rollercoaster ride.

Though, it may seem COVID is the theme of my message, it is not. You are. Shortly after April 15th, my view of the pandemic and the outbreak here within our small facility changed. I no longer looked at our circumstance in a negative way, in fact I realized that it was not COVID that was setting the pace, it was you. If I were asked to provide a single word to describe the employees at Lemon Creek it would be resilience. Resilience, of course, is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. Resilience is also possessing the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity. Words with similar meaning are strength, toughness, and durability, and those are all fitting, but you are resilient.

You reported to work, with many of you having the burden of feeling the impact of COVID-19 outside the wire as well. You did not hide in the trenches, shrink from your responsibilities, and did not get caught up in the, Oh, woe is me game! You instead moved forward. You contributed, by staying the course, helping the facility to not miss a beat with regards to our daily operations. The inmates were watched over, kept warm, educated, protected, fed, clothed, and medically and emotionally cared for. You made the difference, and you continue to make the difference. You are resilient.

Thank you, for your sacrifices, your loyalty, your integrity, your devotion to duty and to each other. I could not be any prouder.

Continue to be vigilant, be alert, and be safe,
Superintendent Cordle



2020 Employee of the Year

Rachael Cody

This year, the Employee of the Year Award vote within the selection committee wasn't even close and in this strange time of COVID-19, it was no surprise. Lemon Creek has little in the way of housing space or programming for persons suffering from mental illness and this is the challenge that Rachael Coady has risen to address. Everyone from Shift Supervisors to Superintendents regularly seek her advice and help with difficult inmates and she is always there with characteristic, calm, reasonableness. Inmates directly benefit from her clinical skills and Staff benefit from her wise counsel. Without her professional guidance, managing our inmate population would be far more difficult than it already is.

Many contingency plans have been made over the last few months to deal with one crisis or another and while we have not had to implement most of them, just knowing that help was available eased the burden. When COVID-19 threatened the institution's food services capacity, Rachael volunteered to help in the kitchen. When the nursing staff was shorthanded and help was needed, she volunteered to distribute medication. She is far and away one of the most dedicated and selfless staff members at Lemon Creek and we are honored to name her Employee of the Year.



EMPLOYEE OF THE QUARTER

JERRY FERRER

Lemon Creek Correctional Center is proud to introduce Jerry Ferrer, Maintenance Worker II, as Employee of the Quarter for the first quarter of 2021. Jerry became a part of the Lemon Creek team in December 2016 and has proven to be a great addition. He is widely known for his hard work, high motivation, and reliability. Jerry always displays a positive attitude, no matter what the circumstance and is considerate of all who work around him. His skills, maintenance knowledge, and willingness to take on any task have been of inestimable benefit to Lemon Creek. Thank you, Jerry, for your hard work. Congratulations to you for this award and congratulations to us for the good fortune of having you onboard.

What Was It Like?

A Q&A Session With Lemon Creek Officers Who Experienced COVID-19

By Lt. Ed Irizarry

We have been dealing with COVID-19 here at Lemon Creek for over a year now. During that time, fifteen of our colleagues have contracted the illness, yet if you're anything like me, you may have very little knowledge of what it is actually like to have COVID-19. For the most part, we just don't talk about it. In order to make you more aware of what we have all been facing, we asked five officers to briefly share their experience with COVID-19. They graciously agreed.

Question: What was your first thought when you learned that you had tested positive for COVID-19?

- **Officer Collman:** Everyone who already had contracted recovered easy, so I was not worried so much. By the time that I had received the positive notice, I already had dealt with the virus.
- **Officer Ponitini:** I was very scared because of all the reported deaths and all the negative media coverage. The good part was that I was with my family in California when I got the positive notification, so I was not alone during this time.
- **Officer Aaron Tupou:** I was worried about my parents, as we all got it together. They recovered faster than I did, so I did not worry so much after that. I wanted them safe and healthy.
- **Officer Jennings:** I was scared at first because I did not know what to expect. I was scared for my folks, as they are older.
- **Officer Bruce Winslow:** Honestly, I was like, "Well, ok, here we go." By the time that Sandy and I got our positive news, we were already recovering. So, it was nothing special.

*IN COVID-19, "CO" STANDS FOR "CORONA," "VI" FOR "VIRUS,"
"D" FOR "DISEASE," AND "19" FOR THE YEAR 2019.*

Question: What was it like to have COVID?

- **Officer Collman:** It was a Sunday on a sunny day. I was working in the yard and thought I just worked too hard. I had cold and hot flashes and got a little tired. I rested that night and drank a lot of water. I was better by the next day and by Monday evening, it all went away. I tested that following Wednesday and received my positive notification on Friday.
- **Officer Ponitini:** I felt like an outcast during this time. I did not come out of my room until testing negative. My symptoms were that I was really tired. I did not think it was COVID but I was so tired. I would sleep eight hours and still be very tired. When I lost my sense of smell, I did not know what to think and became worried. Those were my only symptoms.
- **Officer Aaron Tupou:** My symptoms were like having the flu. It was nothing special but I did lose five pounds, so that was a plus. I had a headache, sore throat, cough, fatigue, and loss of taste and smell.
- **Officer Jennings:** Having COVID was like having the flu. I had a small cough and was tired. It was nothing like the media explained. Just the unknown.
- **Officer Bruce Winslow:** We had a head cold like symptoms along with a chest cold. We were fatigued and had a headache.

CORONAVIRUS IS SO NAMED BECAUSE OF THE SPIKES THAT APPEAR ON THE VIRAL SURFACE. THERE ARE MANY TYPES OF HUMAN CORONAVIRUSES. COVID-19 IS A NEW VERSION, CAUSED BY A CORONAVIRUS NOT PREVIOUSLY SEEN IN HUMAN HOSTS.

Question: How long did your symptoms persist?

- **Officer Collman:** My symptoms lasted only two days. Hot and cold flashes and I was a little tired only.
- **Officer Aaron Toupu:** My headache, sore throat, cough and fatigue lasted about seven days. My loss of taste and smell lasted almost a month.
- **Officer Jennings:** My symptoms lasted for about a week.
- **Officer Bruce Winslow:** Our symptoms lasted for eight or nine days.

*THE STATEWIDE ALERT LEVEL FOR ALASKA, AS OF
MARCH 30, 2021, BASED ON THE AVERAGE DAILY CASE
RATE OVER 14 DAYS IS HIGH AT 19.93 CASES PER
100,000.*

*THE ALERT LEVEL IN JUNEAU CITY AND BOROUGH IS
LOW AT 3.15 CASES PER 100,000*

*[HTTPS://CONTENT.GOVDELIVERY.COM/ACCOUNTS/AK
DHSS/BULLETINS/2CA40B](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/AKDHSS/bulletins/2CA40B)*

Question: Aside from the symptoms, how did it impact your life to be COVID Positive?

- **Officer Collman:** It really did not impact my life at all. However, my family did receive some backlash for me having the virus. Some social media negativity.
- **Officer Ponitini:** I was on my trip to California with my family and I could not enjoy them as I was quarantined in my room. So, that was unpleasant and very boring.
- **Officer Aaron Toupou:** Honestly, it affected me at first because I thought I was going to lose pay and use my own leave. But the state allowed for the COVID leave, so then I was not worried at all. It went from a nightmare to a staycation in my room.
- **Officer Jennings:** The impact on me was that I could not work. I felt as though I was letting down the team. I was also very concerned for my parents. But it was cool for the history of it.
- **Officer Bruce Winslow:** The impact on us was that we had to quarantine during the best weather of the summer. Our life was not affected other than we could not leave and go shopping. Because of this we used the delivery service that was offered by some grocers for food delivery. The worst of this was that we could not go Fish!!!!!!

PEOPLE WITH COVID-19 HAVE HAD A WIDE RANGE OF SYMPTOMS REPORTED – RANGING FROM MILD SYMPTOMS TO SEVERE ILLNESS. SYMPTOMS MAY APPEAR 2-14 DAYS AFTER EXPOSURE TO THE VIRUS.

*[HTTPS://WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-
NCOV/SYMPTOMS-TESTING/SYMPTOMS.HTML](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html)*

Question: Has the experience changed your perspective on the disease or life in general?

- **Officer Collman:** It makes you realize that you are frail. I am glad that I work out and eat right, to stay healthy. I am in my 50's with asthma.
- **Officer Ponitini:** Yes, at first I was very scared and then afterwards it was nothing. It changed my view on the disease and I am not scared of it anymore. I survived easily.
- **Officer Aaron Tupou:** From my perspective, this virus is not as bad as everyone says it is. For me it was just like having the flu.
- **Officer Jennings:** My thoughts are that this virus is not as bad as everyone says it is. It affects everyone differently.
- **Officer Bruce Winslow:** Yes our views on the virus have changed. It is more fear factor and more hype than it really is. We are both older and it was nothing like the hype. Nothing like I thought it would be.

ANYONE CAN HAVE MILD TO SEVERE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19. OLDER ADULTS AND PEOPLE WHO HAVE SEVERE UNDERLYING MEDICAL CONDITIONS LIKE HEART OR LUNG DISEASE OR DIABETES SEEM TO BE AT HIGHER RISK FOR DEVELOPING MORE SERIOUS COMPLICATIONS FROM COVID-19 ILLNESS.

[HTTPS://WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2019-NCOV/SYMPTOMS-TESTING/SYMPTOMS.HTML](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html)

Question: What advice would you offer to other people at Lemon Creek, who have not gone through this experience?

- **Officer Collman:** Have a good attitude and do not be afraid. It should be a wake-up call for some to work out and stay healthy. Once again, do not be afraid of it.
- **Officer Ponitini:** Everyone is different and I would recommend that people take vitamins, stay healthy, strong and be prepared. But do not fear it.
- **Officer Aaron Toupou:** It's not that bad, so my suggestion is do not freak out because it is not that bad. Recover and move on!
- **Officer Jennings:** My advice is for people not to freak out. Just hydrate, eat and stay healthy and recover.
- **Officer Bruce Winslow:** My advice is do not fear it. We self-medicated and recovered easily. Do not be afraid of it. We have been sicker other times before.

COVID-19 VACCINES ARE SAFE AND EFFECTIVE. THE CDC RECOMMENDS YOU GET A COVID-19 VACCINE AS SOON AS YOU ARE ELIGIBLE.

[HTTPS://WWW.CDC.GOV/CORONAVIRUS/2-19-NCOV/VACCINES/YOUR-VACCINATION.HTML](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/your-vaccination.html)



COVID HOMEWORK

By

Paul McCarthy

Educational Coordinator, Lemon Creek Correctional Center

I refer to life prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as the *before-times*, meaning before all our lives changed in so many ways as this novel virus was unleashed on humanity. For me, one of the biggest changes to my usual operations was in working from home, or, to use the retro-futuristic official term for it, “tele-commuting.” (I have never actually used that term except for right now.) I had to fill out a form with a list of suggested things I could do from home, and a couple days later it was granted as anticipated. By then I had already relocated my computer and all the trimmings to the home I share with my wife. Our guest bedroom/study became my home office. I had to connect the computer to the internet modem by cable, and snake it under the living room rug, behind the couch, along the base of a couple walls, through the dining room, and finally, into my new home office. Six months later the cable was completely shredded where it had been under the rug, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

To start at the beginning, I began working from home in early April 2020. Even before then, the usual education routines that defined my work at the prison began to be disrupted as COVID risk mitigation strategies were put into place by DOC. Movement by inmates within the prison and to the learning center were curtailed. But there was still exposure, and I was so determined not to contract it at work and then expose my wife to it that I was willing to use my personal leave to keep out of the classic “congregate setting” (a term I’d actually never heard of back then) of my workplace. Thankfully, that was not necessary.

The option of working from home seemed to be especially well-suited when, right around the time I first started this new chapter, a CO at Lemon Creek tested positive for COVID. Then a number of others followed in fairly quick succession. I obviously did not want to carry the virus to my wife, so I was glad to be working from home. At that time, in early April, people were still finding out a lot about the virus, and I started finding articles on all things COVID to email to my fellow educator Kris Weixelman for her to distribute to the inmates. The fact that she remained at work inside the building was a huge boon to me. Because I was in frequent contact with her, it kept me much better connected to what was happening in “the Creek.”

Working from home started off as a novelty. I nearly experienced cognitive dissonance to be at home using the same computer I use at work, with the same access to the Lemon Creek G-drive. Eventually the novelty wore off, but overall, when I think back in time to when no one could have imagined such things happening, because no one saw a pandemic coming, it still seems odd. By which I mean, unexpected. I was full of gratitude though that DOC was willing to make accommodations to prioritize the health of my wife and me. My wife is high risk, and that is why I requested the opportunity to work from home in the first place.

As I reflected on the “new normal” of working from home and other aspects of life during the pandemic, I encountered a random detail about this guy who decided he was going to grow a beard and cut off his hair, and I spontaneously decided to follow suit. His rationale was

to give him someone new to look at in the mirror, since he wasn't seeing different people at work, and while not exactly the same, my rationale was to lean into the change, and unexpectedly do something I hadn't done since my mid-twenties, grow a beard. Cutting off my hair seemed like a good way to deal with the fact that my barbershop was closed for months and my wife doesn't cut hair very well. The beard was the biggest change though, and I called it my "working from home" beard.

As the reality of working from home settled in, my concerns turned to finding things to do to occupy my time and keep myself productive. It was a dual reality that while feeling removed and even isolated to some extent from the people I previously worked in physical proximity with at Lemon Creek, I started to reach out to the much more dispersed community of DOC educators and our new supervisors in the Reentry Unit. I regard it as a silver lining of the pandemic that I have had so much opportunity to connect with all those folks, strengthening old relationships and forging new ones. New forms of information technology for keeping people connected over great distances, such as Zoom, and Teams, a Microsoft platform implemented by DOC shortly before the pandemic started, have become indispensable to my work. In that vein, I have experienced a phenomenon many times that was unheard of for most of us prior to 2020, which is now so ubiquitous that it is a sign of the times, namely, "Speaking while muted."

For much of my time of working from home, I didn't have a webcam, so while I could see others on Teams or in Zoom meetings, they couldn't see me. It has become something of a joke that persons who work from home only need to be

presentable from the waist up, but even though none of me was visible to others, I was always fully dressed, and not in pajamas. Eventually the shops that were for so long out of webcams due to the pandemic had them back in stock, and I got one. I learned how to choose a digital background on the Teams platform as a substitute for what would otherwise be the inside of the room the computer is in.

One of the bigger "jobs" I found for myself while working from home was helping the Reentry Unit Grant Manager deal with the Second Chance Act data for her grant reporting. This involved ACOMS, and while I have used it before as an educator, I had to take a much deeper dive into it for this purpose. My knowledge of ACOMS is now so much more extensive than it ever was before, and I've been asked to train a couple new Reentry Unit hires on the database. That is another unexpected benefit to come out of my time working at home. I have also been involved in an initiative to make apprenticeships more uniformly accessible to different institutions and, I hope, finally bring them to Lemon Creek. The pandemic-caused disruptions to usual routines has allowed me to engage with others on projects like that. In fact, this time has been a kind of recalibration of intent as it has allowed me to experience the continuities of my education work with its grounding in reentry. The better inmates are prepared to successfully reenter, the less likely they will be to return. While we cannot now actively do that work with inmates, this time of working from home has given me opportunities to make connections with a team of persons who are all engaged in preparing ourselves to better help inmates when we can get back to reentry.

All was not silver linings and positive outcomes though, and I'd be remiss to not mention my occasional struggles with feeling cut off from the action and the people inside Lemon Creek, feelings of concern with being regarded as a second-class employee because I was not in there every day doing what needed to be done despite the risks and feeling bad that I wasn't doing more to help meet the needs of the inmates incarcerated there. God knows as hard as this time has been for people like me in some ways, it has been an order of magnitude harder for the inmates.

Like others, I had been aware that the publication of the Lemon Creek Quarterly was suspended as are, or were, so many other things. Then earlier this month I was asked to write something on

working from home to contribute to an issue with the pandemic as its main theme. Little did I know that the due date for my submission would also be the very day I would return to work "at work," as I typically put it. Both my wife and I have had both vaccination shots, mine courtesy of DOC, and the vaccine is increasingly available to both DOC employees and inmates. Other educators I know who live and work up north are starting to return to work in their prisons, and I am grateful that I can now do so myself. I have no illusions that we will return to "normal" anytime soon, but one day I hope to look back on this "COVID chapter" as a time of crisis but also of opportunity; of disruption, but also continuity; and of isolation, but also connection.



COVID-19: A MENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVE

By Rachael Coady,
Mental Health Clinician

Exactly one year ago the world shut down. 2020 hindsight shows us that we have experienced a global phenomenon that discriminated against no community, country or continent but rather effected the entire planet. In February of 2020 we watched with fascination as Wuhan, China began to shut down. Most of us were not able to imagine what was to come. Gradually with our families and within our communities we watched our privileges slowly be removed. Privileges such as going to a movie, dinning out at our favorite restaurant, enjoying social gatherings with extended family and friends, going to the gym, and traveling became paralyzed. We were faced with what is now commonly known as *shelter in place*. It was an experience we shared as collective communities across the globe. Lemon Creek Correctional Center was a microcosm in the global pandemic

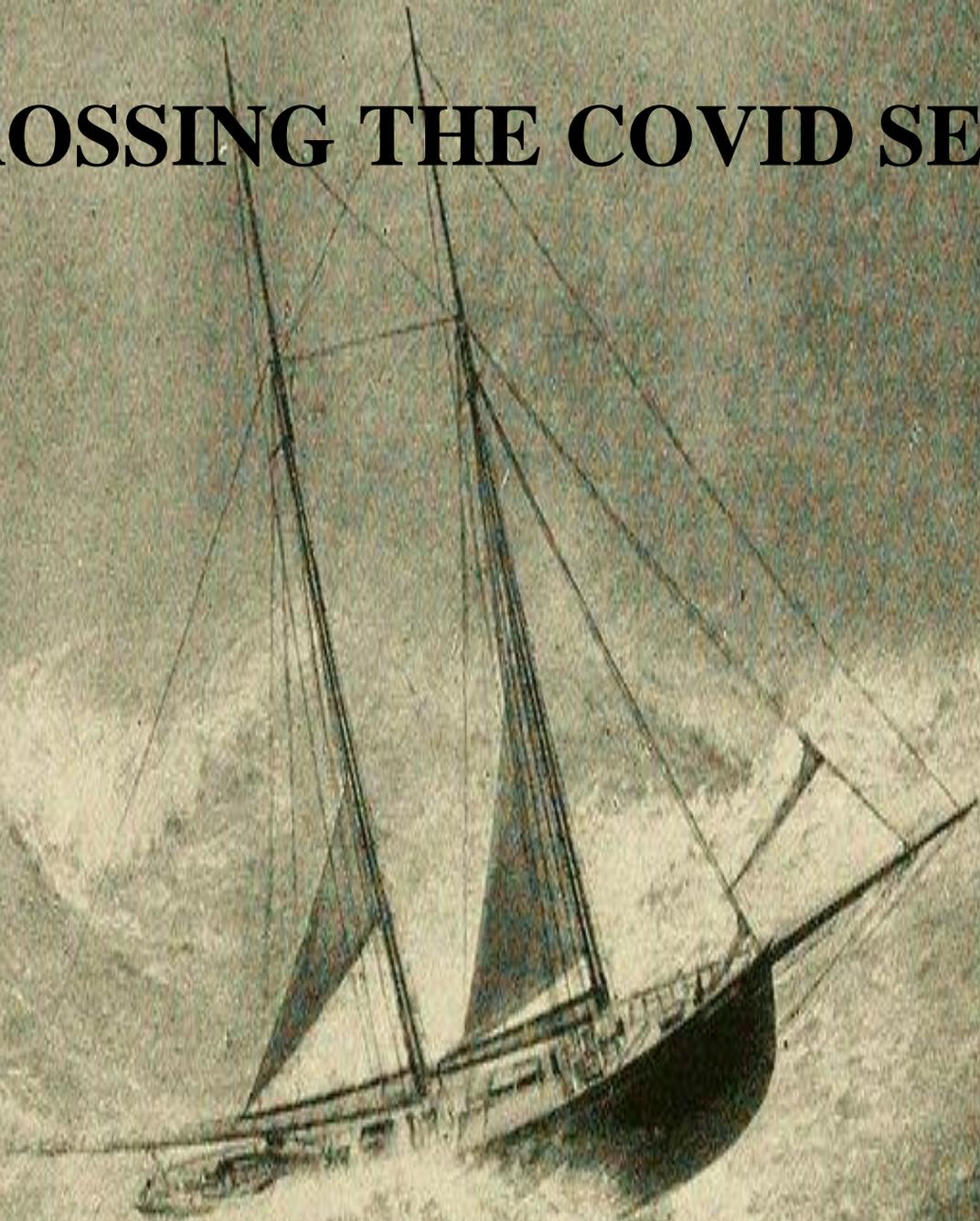
and was not exempt from the massive shifts occurring around the world. The facility quickly shut down to anyone outside of employees and daily life and routines changed seemingly overnight. Inmates quickly experienced social isolation from the outside world when visitations were suspended, chapel services shut down, recovery meetings and outside programs halted, and court proceedings indefinitely postponed. Living units were isolated from one another, housing units locked down, and all daily movements and activities altered. While the details of daily routines and the square footage inmates live in differs from those of Lemon Creek staff, the stress of our new realities was perhaps quite similar. In a short time, we all became physically and socially isolated. Across communities we've seen rates of depression and anxiety skyrocket stemming from isolation, unpredictability of the

circumstances, and a variety of stressors including threats to our basic needs. Fear, anger, and distress have overwhelmed many of us in new ways and left us without healthy coping solutions. Alcohol and drug misuse have increased with more deaths than ever linked to overdoses. Increases in emotional and mental stress as well as substance use disorders have historically impacted rates of suicide, suicidal thinking and self-injurious behavior. While statistics as they relate to the Lemon Creek inmate population have not yet been gathered, I suspect someday numbers will show that the Lemon Creek inmate community was no exception. Lemon Creek has seen a steady flow of inmates seeking help for symptoms relating to anxiety, depression, insomnia, panic and an inability to cope with feelings of distress, unmanageability and factors outside of his or her control. The population of incarcerated severely mentally ill inmates has increased, perhaps drawing attention to the lack of support that resources on the outside have been able to provide at this time.

This past year has presented incredible challenges for all of us. Currently, we look ahead to a period of recovering the economy and beginning to recreate a new normal within our communities. As we do this, it is essential we remain aware of ways we can prevent further deterioration of mental health conditions and promote healing. The collective nature of the traumatic experience we've gone through together could change how we relate to each other, for the better. It also suggests that emotional recovery is dependent on individuals coming

together to support one another. As a counselor and more specifically as a member of the Lemon Creek community, I ponder how we rebuild and heal within the institution both as inmates and staff. A question I ask myself as I head into work each morning is what I can do to contribute to the recovery of those I encounter throughout my day. Simple and small gestures can have a profound impact on a person and a community. Things such as taking two extra minutes to check in with a co-worker who seems to be having an off day, asking someone how they are despite having a lot of tasks on our plate for the day ahead, taking a moment out of a hectic afternoon on the floor to hear an inmate share hopeful news, expressing gratitude to a coworker, looking for ways to be helpful, offering someone the benefit of the doubt, smiling and offering a kind greeting, and practicing compassion while reminding ourselves that we have no idea what hardships someone else might be faced with. These seemingly unimportant acts might have profound impact in lifting spirits, feeling connected and improving the mood for you and others. Reaching out will be critical in moving forward and can create a sense of well-being among the communities we find ourselves a part of. I encourage you all to take a moment to reflect on both the challenges and the good fortune of where you find yourself today and take just a kernel of that positivity and pass it on to those you encounter in your respective communities. Furthermore, the question I pose to all of you is what small act can you incorporate into your daily routines that can aid another person—inmate, colleague, friend or stranger—in their healing journey?

CROSSING THE COVID SEA



By

DARYL WEBSTER

Crossing The COVID Sea

By Daryl Webster

About three years ago, my wife and I bought a boat. We had talked about it ever since coming to Alaska, but because neither of us had much boating experience, doing something about it was always just over the horizon. Then, one day, a good friend invited us to check out a real “Skookum Deal” on a comfortable old Tolly Craft and as soon as we stepped on deck, we fell in love with it. So, we became owners of the *Skookum* and that day marked the official end of our carefree boating experience.

We have evolved from risk-avoidance to risk-awareness, simply because risk empowers us to experience life as we choose to live it.

When you are a guest on someone else’s boat, you tend to trust their knowledge and the deck beneath your feet, either out of courtesy to the skipper or because you just don’t know any better. You nod at the risk and embrace the pleasure. But out on the salt in your own boat, no matter how much you enjoy the ride, a part of your mind is always gauging the sound and feel of the engine, and the wind and waves that can change with so little warning, because when the unlikely occurs (as it invariably does at some point), even the sturdiest boat is just a tiny, buoyant speck on an enormous, frigid sea. At its most passive, the beguiling North Pacific beneath your keel can kill you in moments, by icy immersion alone. That is a collective “you” by the way, because it also invokes the fate of the wife beside you and the small children playing in the V berth.

Nevertheless, becoming boat owners was the best lifestyle decision we ever made, outside of moving to Alaska. With every trip and in spite of the occasional misadventure, we have learned to love the freedom of leaving behind the safety of dry land. We have evolved from risk-avoidance to risk-awareness, simply because risk empowers us to experience life as we choose to live it.

Rather than something to be avoided or minimized, risk must be embraced as part of the price of living large and free.

Statistically, it is an unlikely fate, but no one wants to drown or bob around in a life jacket, dying in increments from hypothermia. If we sold our boat and never again left shore, we and our children could almost certainly avoid that fate entirely, but we would never experience the gentle motion of the deck rocking in the breeze, feel the sneaky tug of a big halibut on the line, or watch a full pot of Dungeness crab emerge from the depths. We would never motor back into Auke Bay at the end of the day, with alpenglow painting the peaks or smile with the subtle relief of stepping from deck to dock, having cheated the sea once more. That’s the thing about risk. Rather than something to be avoided or minimized, it must occasionally be embraced as part of the price of living large and free.

Everything dear to us, everything worth living or risking death for is largely defined by its opposite. A meal and a cold drink mean little in the absence of hunger and thirst. We love deeply from having been

alone and cling to loved ones because we know that one day, we will be parted. We treasure life more with the certainty that we must eventually surrender it. The present pandemic has a place in this great weighing out, we just haven't yet thought of it in those terms.

COVID-19 was the third leading cause of death in the US in 2020, behind cancer and heart disease and ahead of stroke, chronic lower respiratory disease, Alzheimer's, diabetes, influenza/pneumonia, and a host of other killers, right down to slipping in the shower or choking on lunch. There is a very real risk of catching COVID-19 and it is possible to die from it, but consider this, using data reported by the CDC:

- Of 30,213,759 Americans who have contracted COVID-19, 29,665,597 survived; (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographics>)
- 98 percent of those contracting COVID-19 survive;
- The average American currently has a 99.9 percent chance of NOT dying of COVID-19;
- While persons of any age can contract COVID-19, persons 65 years of age and older account for 81 percent of COVID deaths. Persons under the age of 50 account for only 4.6 percent of COVID deaths and risk of COVID mortality among children is minute.

Missing and much needed is a serious and inclusive discussion of what the COVID endgame looks like. How will we recognize victory over the virus?

Up to now, our society has lasered in on trying to understand the nature of COVID-

19, Aquantifying its lethality, and mitigating its spread through measures with side effects ranging from mild inconvenience to economic and social devastation. Missing and much needed is a serious and inclusive discussion of what the COVID endgame looks like. How will we recognize victory over the virus? 70 percent immunity? 90 percent immunity? 100 percent eradication of the disease? Given the emergence of viral variants, are any of those outcomes even possible and if not, how long should we expect to isolate ourselves from each other and the world around us before the safeguards become more odious than the ailment?

It is given to us to decide how to spend the precious time at our disposal, in risk-obsessed fear and isolation or with risk-inspired faith and joy.

Could it be time to examine COVID-19 in its proper perspective, and learn how to live *with* it, whatever that ultimately looks like? COVID-19 appeared with little warning and in a short time has taken its place among the many risks of life on Planet Earth. Therein lies an inconvenient truth. No matter where COVID-19 ranks among the multitude of things that kill people, the collective death toll of all those killers is 100 percent. That's right. In this wondrous world, we all perform in an arena with only one exit. At some point in our lives, one of those vehicles of mortality is going to catch up with each and every one of us. In the meantime, it is given to us to decide how to spend the precious time at our disposal, in risk-obsessed fear and isolation or with risk-inspired faith and joy. Somewhere in the ill-defined space between heedlessness and paranoia, risk and safety, exists a point of equilibrium. We must find that place.

Lemon Creek Correctional Center wants YOU!!



Lemon Creek Correctional Center in Juneau, Alaska is currently recruiting Correctional Officers. To apply go to Governmentjobs.com/careers/Alaska/ and look for the statewide Correctional Officer I position.

Why be a Correctional Officer at LCCC:

- Great Pay/Benefits
- Career advancement opportunities
- Premium schedule (7 days on/ 7 days off)
- Generous vacation leave
- Excellent training
- Great community to raise a family



If you have any questions contact Sgt. Chuck McCracken at (907)465-6548. We look forward to talking to