

For the past few years, learning how to deal with a pandemic referred to as Covid-19, was an everyday struggle for humankind. The fear of leaving your house to get groceries, or even going to work had people struggling to live the life of what was worry-free. At the very beginning of the pandemic, I was working at my very first job, which was at an assisted living facility. I was a server at the dining hall in the facility and made great connections with some really nice people. In the midst of the first wave of Covid, the facility had to restrict visitors from coming and began taking everyone's temperatures who came into the building. With weeks passing by, and doctors learning more and more about this disease, it was deemed to be the worst for the elderly, which caused the residents to be forced to stay in their rooms all day. No resident was able to come down to the dining room anymore, as I and other employees were required to deliver food menus to each resident's room. With those food menus, we would have to report to the kitchen what each resident wanted and then deliver the food to them as it was prepared. We would walk around with face masks and gloves, along with a cart of beverages, and a cart with every resident's food on them. Knocking on each door, we would have to look out for positive covid signs on them. If a resident reported positive, we would have to put a plastic face shield on, along with two layers of masks, two pairs of gloves, and a protective gown that would prevent germs from getting on our clothes. An immediate response to change our clothes and masks was required, as it was repeated day after day for residents who tested positive.

With the cases of Covid rising day after day in the facility, restrictions continued to pile up. Daily testing was required for all residents and staff and needed to be done twice a week. With the testing being required, if an employee missed a day of testing, they would be taken off the schedule and even terminated if refused. Multiple training sessions were put into place, such as proper hand washing, social distancing, and how to communicate with an infected resident. Staff meetings were held every day to discuss the number of infected residents, and who would be heading to the hospital for more severe treatment. There was a schedule made for residents to come down and use a phone to call family members for those who didn't have cell phones. There would be a fifteen-minute time frame and had to be just once a week due to the number of residents wanting to make phone calls. This would remain this way for months, even almost a year until the spread of covid eventually started to slow.

In response to the spread starting to slow, family members were able to visit their loved ones in the building for the first time in months, even in a year for some. Temperatures were still being taken when first walking into the building, along with social distancing and face masks being worn. The family members had two choices. First, it would have to be an outdoor visit remaining six feet apart. The other option was to stay in and talk through a glass window to your loved ones. Next to the spot where they could talk, was an open door with a piece of plastic hanging down from the top. This was used for hugs, as there were spots to insert your arms through the plastic and wrap them around the other. All these meetings had to be monitored by a staff member and put on a time limit if there was a line of families coming.

Working at this building for so long, it was heartbreaking to see the effects this disease had on so many residents. Mental health emerged as an extremely sensitive topic, notably changing the way residents acted towards me, and acting in a completely different way than they used to. The old friends with that I had great conversations with, but I was not able to do that anymore. My one friend Peggy, who is pictured in this photo, was 96 years old and did a great job not catching Covid in the major wave of it. We had great conversations about how I was doing in school, how she always hated the food here, and how strawberry ice cream was her favorite. But as Covid slowed down, she ended up catching the disease from a family member who visited. She was doing great at first, but then had trouble breathing one day. She was rushed to the hospital and later died that night. There was nothing that hit me that hard in so long, knowing that my best friend who joked about everything with me and made my day at work that much more enjoyable was gone. I struggled to come to work a



few weeks after that and not being able to walk into her room saying, "Here's your strawberry ice cream," was the worst. As stressful and hard as the years of Covid have been for me and my friends in the facility, it taught me so much and to never take anything for advantage. You never know when it'll be your last interaction with them.