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COVID CHRONICLES SUBMISSION:

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From Eternity to Here

"And the strange thing was he had never loved her more than in that moment, because at that moment she had become himself."

--- James Jones, From Here to Eternity

Nine weeks have passed since we arrived on Kauai. Given that most of those 63 days have been spent sheltering in-place alone in a small condo in the middle of the Pacific Ocean nearly 2,500 miles from home, that time can feel like an eternity.

Our primary reason for coming to the island is to see our daughter and two grandchildren, ages 1 and 9, to help while our daughter works and to enjoy the little ones as grandparents do. These years are precious and not to be missed. Every contact -- grandchild to grandparent and back again -- ties us closer, produces a memory for life. Hawaiian culture calls it legacy.

Eternity, for us, has been not touching our grandchildren, not seeing them in-person, yet residing so close -- 10 miles down the road. We share the same Trade Winds and tropical island flow. But it hurts when we think about those little smiles and innocent eyes of wonder that we're missing up close. Social Distance has anti-social limits.

That eternity of isolation and distance has been counterbalanced by the island itself. The gentle sway and sudden cloud bursts are never dull. The sudden surprises of flowers bursting daily with color and fragrances that perfume the tropical air stop us in our tracks. Those tracks are often footprints. We walk in soft sand at Hanalei Bay. We never wear socks. We wear flips-flops that locals call slippahs.

We step wide of fellow walkers and exchange hand waves. We wear masks when we buy tools at Ace Hardware or groceries at Foodland Market in Princeville. We wash our hands afterwards in temporary sinks outside of the buildings. I turn off the water with my elbow to avoid touching the knob with a clean hand.

I feel ridiculous doing that but no one bats an eye.

We miss our dog Frida back home. House-sitters occupy our house in Santa Cruz. They are caring for our loyal German Shepherd who must wonder where we are. We were supposed to be gone six weeks but our flight home in mid-April was canceled. Our house-sitters, Vera and Joe, whom we met online, come from Barbados, which has been under quarantine with no incoming flights.

They are stuck in our house. We hardly know them. Sheltering has shut down the world, turned things around. Yet business continues online for Vera who now works virtually from our place in Santa Cruz. Barbara meets with her Santa Cruz associates in Zoom meetings from Kauai.

Virtual life is good. Real life is lonely. The island setting is magnificent.

Barbara and I have discovered each other again. Stuck together in a condo for weeks on end we either accept our limitations and idiosyncrasies, or kill each other. An exaggeration, of course, but a peek at the daily news reveals worse.

We have probably seen our three daughters and their families more in the past four weeks than we've seen them in the past year -- altogether as a family -- on screen. We share and we listen. It's especially fun to hear our California grandchildren tell us what they're up to. They miss their friends, but find stuff to do, like ride their bikes, build backyard forts and learn cool dance moves.

Recently, I was thinking about our good fortune to be here. We have made friends, but have not been able to visit as freely as we like. My memoir writing group came to mind, since we meet weekly by Zoom. Then I realized that they are in their homes in Santa Cruz, not on Kauai. I had temporarily fooled myself, believing they were here.

These are weird times. We count our many blessings. We have friends and family. Our kids are healthy and employed. This seems like a miracle when you watch the news.

There's good news on Kauai. Today marks 28 days, two incubation periods, without a new Covid case on the island, which has been shut down for weeks.

Yesterday, feeling a little braver, perhaps more foolish, and aching to see our Kauai family in person, we drove to Anahola to deliver a package to our daughter Isabel Bryna and see our grandchildren, Viva and Mystiko. Upon arrival we tip-toed around each other, performing an odd separation ritual.

To prevent physical touching, Viva and Barbara exchanged gifts by placing little packages for each other on a rock. We're getting closer, inch-by-inch, to making skin-to-skin contact and closing the eternal gap of separation.

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