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2-2021

How We Made It Through

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HOW WE
MADE IT
THROUGH

No doubt, it's been a difficult year in every corner of our land. The coronavirus pandemic is not over, either. Not even close. A third wave of infections, hospitalizations and deaths is lashing our nation from coast to coast and changing the way we do even the simplest of things.

As of this writing in early December, more than 12 million Americans have contracted COVID-19, and more than 250,000 of them have died. However, you well know that the pandemic isn't the only challenge God has allowed us to endure this year.

Be that as it may, God always embeds incredible power in the stories that come out of our trials. In ancient Israel, the Israelites were crossing the Jordan and Joshua asked them set up 12 stones at Gilgal (Joshua 4:20). His reasoning was that future generations would ask about the meaning of the monument of stones and, when they did, this would be an opportunity to unlock the power that comes from acknowledging what God had done.

In this feature, we revisited 12 of the people and stories we reported on in 2020, whether in the pages of the *Herald* or during one of our livestream broadcasts. How have they grappled with a year unlike any in recent memory? How have their lives been irrevocably changed? What are they most hopeful for moving into this new year? These are their stories — a form of time capsule, so to speak.

As a band of believers moving into the new year and clinging to the promise of Christ's return, we hope their stories of loss and gain, suffering and joy, struggle and hope gives you a renewed purpose and a strong sense of the presence of God and His work in our lives. ■

Debbie Michel, associate director of Communication



Melissa Garrett

▲ Alice with husband, Harold Garrett, granddaughter, Jasmin Garrett, grandson, Preston Garrett, and their dogs, Lenny and Rusty.

ALICE GARRETT | Wisconsin's Adventist Community Services Director

One day early in the pandemic, I got a call from a friend, Marcia, asking if I had some ladies within the state who could make some masks for her daughter-in-law who was a director of nurses in a rehab facility.

They desperately needed masks for the staff and wanted to know if we could help her out. I called my local ACS leader, Georgia Rosen, then contacted ladies around the state. A Facebook page called “Mask Makers Sew” was started with tips, tricks and patterns, and soon these faithful ladies were making masks. It wasn’t long before other facilities and friends were calling, needing us to make masks. Over 600 masks were shipped to many states and facilities.

As this was taking place, many of our food shelves were seeing a large increase in needs. With grant money from the North American Division, we were able to help many needy people with food.

As we move forward into 2021, let us remember to minister to those around us, as Jesus did. *Ministry of Healing*, page 143, reads: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. . . He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence, *then He bade them ‘Follow Me.’*”

As we each spend time studying the Word of God, may we come to know Jesus personally as a Friend. He will guide us in our walk to help those in need. Jesus is coming back to take us to Heaven. He has promised. We will never have to deal with the many adversities we have now. We have a wonderful message of hope, comfort and peace to share with our fellow man. ■



Beetz Kwon

▲ Myoung with his wife, Hyemi, and their daughters, Sebin and Sejin

MYOUNG KWON | Waukesha Community and Milwaukee Northwest Pastor

It’s been three years since our family visited Korea. We had made grand plans of visiting our home country, purchased flight tickets at a very good price, and were counting down the days.

Then COVID-19 hit the whole globe. I still hoped for our trip to happen but, eventually, we had to cancel our trip. That is what the entire year of 2020 looked like. Everything got canceled, we couldn’t go anywhere, and interaction with people was limited. We were all frustrated.

The pandemic brought a disconnect to our society. But it also strengthened connections in other ways in which I lacked.

Due to the lockdown, I was able to spend a great deal of time with my wife and children as they couldn’t go to school. Not only that, my brother’s family came over and stayed with us for two full months. It was the best time of my life. I got to connect with my family.

I spent a good deal of time with my colleagues in our region by doing team online media ministry. Even though we didn’t meet in person, we got to know each other better and bonded more than ever before. I gained insight from them. I got to connect with my friends and learned how I can better connect with my churches.

At a personal level, I came closer to God as I spent my time with Him. I got to connect with God.

We don’t know how this will end. Perhaps this COVID-19 will stick around for a bit longer. But 2020 has taught us what we can gain in spite of our losses and that we don’t have to be discouraged. 2020 has taught us that we can still be positive and be vibrant in our lives in 2021. ■



▼ Arthur with his wife, Margaret (front row), daughter, Sabrina, and sons, Arthur (top left) and Isaac (back center).

ARTHUR J. WEBB SR. | Shiloh Church (Chicago) Elder

Certainly, we are “all in this together,” is a phrase that reminds us of the unprecedented or uncertain times of 2020.

The ministry of “Servants of Light, Hope and Healing” is an actively unified outreach ministry for all members of our community, bringing joy to the isolated who are feeling forgotten or lonely, hurt, ill from coronavirus, or shut in from other causes. It is evangelism-on-the-move throughout the Metropolitan Chicago area, aided by colorful signs, conveying messages which capture seemingly inattentive eyes and ears of neighbors who often wave or nod in approval of our ministry.

God reveals His approval for this ministry in many ways. One of which, while doubters may say it was coincidental, but we believe it was providential, was changes in weather conditions. Our visits bring spiritual enlightenment to the hearts, families and homes we visit. On a number of occasions, weather conditions threatened cancellation of visits. For instance, one Sabbath it rained all morning and dark clouds loomed up to an hour before our scheduled first visit. Those clouds were instantaneously replaced by the clearest sunny blue sky imaginable, as if God had flipped a switch. Another Sabbath, forecasted to be the “hottest day of the year,” was hot and humid; however, an overcast sky and a soft breeze off the lake brought relief!

With this new normal of handwashing, masks, social distancing and virtual services still on the horizon for 2021, we extend and encourage other congregations, in the words of the old chorus, “Work with each other, Work hand in hand, And together we’ll spread the news that God is in our land; And they’ll know we are Christians by our love! Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” ■

HOW WE MADE IT THROUGH



Zack Payne

▼ George, his wife, Theresa, and their dog, Sheba

GEORGE ANDREWS III

Business Owner and Lay Pastor of the Kenosha (Wisconsin) Church

From COVID-19, politics, protests, shootings and a city literally on fire, this year has been an event-packed year.

I was taxed to the limit, so much so that it had an effect on my spiritual state of being. I found myself calling on God to show Himself. This led me to the story of the disciples on the ship when the storm was raging, and Jesus was asleep (Mark 4:38).

But, similar to the disciples, I realized Jesus had given me all I needed and there was no need to question my faith. I was reminded of all that God had brought me through and how He had prepared me as a spiritual leader to keep my family from harm's way.

The protests over the Jacob Blake police shooting was a way for our churches to draw together with each other and also to the community. We were able to clean up and feed the community, leading to several contacts that are now friendships. Through all of this, what really touched me the most was I could truly feel God's presence in everything. I was at the point where the crises become opportunities for me to show how God was still in control.

I have learned that it is one thing to serve God and count His blessings. But the real joy comes when you realize how blessed you are to be serving God. I often tell people: I do not know if there are any golden streets or no more pain and suffering, but I do believe. I do know one thing for sure and that is, I am doing Heaven here, now, on earth, because in my prior lifestyle I already did hell. ■



Christa McConnell

▲ Robb with wife, Chris, and their daughters, Sara and Abby

ROBB LONG

Indiana Conference Evangelist

2020 seemed like another "great disappointment" in the history of Adventists here in Indiana.

Any hope of rejoicing in a great harvest of souls through the Ignite Indiana initiative was dashed when COVID-19 shut down our large outreach events, just as they were about to begin. It was a huge disappointment.

Personally processing this devastating reversal reminded me that great disappointments can lead to new appointments for those who trust in God's grace. From the COVID-19 crisis, I have personally gleaned three helpful lessons:

1. How opportunities to share our faith can quickly be curtailed by circumstances completely beyond our control. That was a harsh reminder, but I better understand now what Jesus meant when He said, *the night comes when no man can work*.
2. How closed doors can lead to new creative ways of doing things. Adjusting to the "new normal" of virtual evangelism and online platforms by developing new technology skills has taken time and effort, but I now feel better equipped to take advantage of the coming opportunities to literally reach millions with our message.
3. How important a Christ-like character is in difficult times. When my wife and I took her 96-year-old mother, who has severe dementia, into our home because of assisted living visitation limitations, our lives changed dramatically. The new demands placed upon us required more personal sacrifice than we've ever been called to exercise before.

As things return to normal, these lessons give me great hope. I think we will have a greater urgency now to share the gospel and the Present Truth whenever we have the freedom to do it. I believe the seeds sown via online platforms will result in countless decisions for Christ and His truth in the future. And I am convinced that the trials of difficult times can create patience in the saints and prepare us for our selfless Savior's soon return to take us to Glory. ■

MARIA FUENTES

Children's Sabbath
School Teacher

"Children's Ministry in Times of a Pandemic" was the title of the Lake Region Conference Hispanic Children's Ministries Department held August 24–28 for teachers and volunteers.

One of the workshops addressed how to teach biblical principles to children in a meaningful, interesting, fun and practical way. At the conclusion of this workshop, Dr. Cristina Calderon, director of the Lake Region Hispanic Children's Ministry, invited all of the teachers and parents to keep preparing our children for the Kingdom so when they decide for Jesus, they'll have a strong foundation to help guide their decision.

While listening, I had the strong conviction to ask my son, Cesar, if he would like to get baptized. You see, Cesar had decided to get baptized when he was 10 but, in the move from California to Illinois, this delayed the fulfillment of his dream. So here, after three years, he was as excited and happy as ever.

The surprise was not over yet. His eight-year-brother, Jayden, heard about the baptism plans and immediately told me that he wanted to get baptized, too, because Jesus Christ is coming soon, and he wanted to be ready! I couldn't believe my ears. Our family was overjoyed when Cesar and Jayden were baptized on the last day of the virtual Children's Ministry Workshop.

As I look back on their decision, I can see that God is working, even during a pandemic. Little did I know when I was registering for this virtual workshop to further my knowledge and serve better as a Children's Sabbath School teacher that this would have an immediate blessing on my family.

We don't know what the future holds but after reading Matthew 24, our family is more and more convinced that God's promises are true. He is coming soon, and we need to be ready. ■



125photography.com

▲ Maria with her newly baptized children, Cesar (next to her) and Jayden (standing front right), along with her other children Omar (back row) and Isaac (sitting)

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“I'm optimistic that 2021 will be a very fruitful year in Youth ministry, especially since young people are doing ministry on social media and in the area of content creation.”

—Eric Herve Jean-Baptiste

RINHLUPUII CHAWNGTHU

Andrews University
Freshman

In January 2020, I was in my last semester of high school. As high school seniors, I, along with my classmates at Indiana Academy, was preparing for graduation and beyond.

There were so many plans for our senior class trip, graduation and a mission trip to El Salvador. However, all those plans fell apart, one by one. The first was the cancellation of the mission trip on the very night we were to leave. Of course, I was really disappointed. I had been looking forward to doing VBS with the kids and helping with medical missionary work there.

Then there was the class trip. We had spent the last four years doing many fundraisers in the hopes of having a good senior class trip. There was hope that, by the time May rolled around, we would be able to at least graduate in person. Unfortunately, that didn't work out either, but I'm grateful we still were able to have a social-distanced graduation service in August.

A few weeks later, I started my first semester at Andrews University. I was just thankful that my first college experience wasn't entirely virtual, although it was far from normal. The semester was cut short due to the rise in [coronavirus] cases, but still it was nice to be on campus.

This year, I want to cherish each moment of life. 2020 has taught me that the whole world can change in an instant. I look to the future knowing that God is in control of it all. A Scripture verse that inspires me to do that is Jeremiah 17:7: *Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord.* ■

Christa McConnell

STEVEN AND TAMARA CONWAY

Detroit Northwest
Church Leaders

Standing in the driveway alone, sun beating down on my face, eyes closed, listening to birds chirping. My senses said I was standing on a secluded mountain.

But “Nope.” I was in what was a previously bustling Detroit suburb, outside watching wild rabbits, normally few in number, roam in abundance from house to house. The absence of people, buzzing vehicles and barking dogs I am sure helped this population to burst forth, as well as brought home the realization to me that we are living in a pandemic.

Staying home wasn't so bad, at first. Morning and evening family walks became our norm. We began receiving daily emails, texts and calls from folks struggling with being together 24/7 or with having limited social interactions with family and friends. It was clear that physically attending work, school, shopping, weekly church groups and services, filled voids and created coping mechanisms many simply didn't know they had until now.

Then . . . there was the loss. The overwhelming, unexpected, continued loss of people we loved. Constant grieving day after day became common. With all of this, we needed to explore ways to try to lift the heavy burdens of members and communities without being able to physically touch one single person. Thus, Virtual Family Worship was born. Our livestreamed evening worship began six days a week and, to this day, we have continued singing, praying, reading and sharing encouraging words from our couch.

Jared Thomas

▲ Rinhlupuii Chawngthu (sitting center), with her parents, Lalmuansanga and Lathangveli Chawngthu, and siblings, Remruatpuia and Laldusaki Chawngthu

▲ Steven and Tammy with their children Israel, (seated), Abigail (standing left), Angel (middle) and Gabriel (right)

We are blessed to reach hundreds of Christian and non-Christians unexpectedly. Our church doors closed, but other avenues opened that we never would have even imagined, if it had not been for the pandemic of 2020.

Looking to 2021, my hope is that 2020 has awakened me from my pandemic of “normalcy,” and comfort, reminding me that Jesus was never afraid to challenge the norms of society, pointing us to remember, *For this world is not our home; we are looking forward to our everlasting home in heaven* (Hebrews 13:14). ■

TOSON ANTWAN KNIGHT | Caught Up Mentorship Program Founder

I remember thinking 2020 would be different the day I found out Kobe Bryant died. I had admired Kobe all of my life — his work ethic, drive and passion. Even though I didn’t play basketball, Kobe was my role model.

A few weeks later, I found myself in the hospital needing emergency appendectomy, and a week later, I was back in the hospital with an infection. For the most part, I felt hopeless. I could not wait until I healed. It was only God who gave me the strength to get back out there.

Little did I know that less than two months later, I would face unprecedented challenges. Most of my family work in some form of healthcare in the Detroit area, so the coronavirus hit us hard. I remember getting the call that my aunt, Linda Thomas, had COVID and was headed to the hospital. I called and spoke with her for what I did not know would be the last time. She died, and we buried her on a Friday. Sunday, my uncle, Marion Pettaway Jr., died from natural causes, and the next day my mom, Angela Knight, died from the coronavirus. I will never forget being in the room and watching my mom die. I never cried like that in my life. All I could do was wail, “Ma, Ma, Ma.” I watched as she went to sleep. I will never be the same.

I’ve learned how to stay strong amidst adversity. I run a mentor program and deal with kids who need me. There is no way I could give up even when I had COVID-19 this past November. I was determined to get back healthy and impact the lives of the kids in Detroit.

Growing up in church, I always heard that God would *never leave you nor forsake you*. During these times, I struggled with trusting God. While thinking about my aunt, I remembered something she told me at church one day after I prayed. *Look to the hills from which cometh your help; your help comes from the Lord*. That’s my plan until Jesus comes, hopefully soon. ■



Steven Norman

▲ Toson Antwan Knight (back center), with mentees. Front row: Anwau Charles, Robert Merriweather; back row: Eduardo Yarbrough, Earle Kearney, Barry Stewart, Edmen Stewart

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“ Looking to 2021, my hope is that 2020 has awakened me from my pandemic of “normalcy,” and comfort, reminding me that Jesus was never afraid to challenge the norms of society. . . ”

—Steven and Tamara Conway



▲ Nilda Cabanilla

NILDA CABANILLA

AMITA Health Adventist Medical Center
Hinsdale Registered Nurse

I work in a medical unit where most of the COVID-19 patients go, but the unit also has several beds for patients who are not COVID-positive. I work mainly with those patients right now.

Caring for patients during the pandemic has been physically exhausting. Some of our nurses have been exposed to the virus, so the rest of us have had to pick up extra shifts. We all wear masks, face shields and goggles to protect ourselves and our families. And caring for patients is different now — they need assurance, they need help, they are depressed. I often sit with them just to talk, to reassure them. I always tell them that God is there for them, that they should put their faith in the Lord, and I pray with them. We often are communicating with both patients and their families, who cannot come into the room with their loved ones. It is really sad when patients pass away without being able to see their families.

This time also is emotionally and spiritually exhausting. For me, it is my faith that gets me through. I was born an Adventist. I have a morning devotion every morning with my husband before I go to work. When I come home, I thank God for being able to serve my patients that day. In my 30 years as a nurse, 2020 has been the most challenging during my time at the hospital. But I believe that when God calls you to a vocation, you have to answer and serve the Lord through serving others. I aspire to bring the joy of Christ into each patient's room, and hope to be reunited with them all in the Kingdom of Heaven. ■

Dave Pfeleiderer



▲ Aaron Berger with wife, Cindy, and children, Danielle, Brian (back) and Ben (front)

AARON BERGER

Wilson Church (Michigan)
Head Elder

The year started off like any other year. One son at the academy, a daughter at Southern Adventist University, and the rest of us were doing our daily and weekly routines. Work during the week and church duties on the weekend.

Then it happened. Our lives changed in a moment. The children were sent home from school and Cindy, my wife, a teacher, had to resort to teaching grades one through four by Zoom and online. Normal was not normal anymore.

But it was nice having all three of our young adult children home together after four years of going in different directions. We really enjoyed this time as a family while the whole world was locked down. It gave time to reflect on our family and on why we believe and trust in God.

Our Wilson Church construction came to a halt and so did church services. We went to Zoom Sabbath school and downloaded video sermons in our home. It was nice to be able to join the church members and family once we could go back to church together. Still, we couldn't worship in our new church building until August, and what a blessing that was!

Through these times we have learned how important family is and we are trying to spend more quality time together camping, hiking, sightseeing, biking and other outdoor activities. Also, we have a renewed understanding of how important and precious the people in our church family are and that we need to be spending time worshipping our Savior, Jesus. As I look to the future, I am drawn to look for God's leading in my life and my family's lives, trusting in His faithfulness. ■

Ashleigh Hayes



Jonathan Logan

▲ Eric, along with his wife, Eda, and sons, Ezra (standing) and Elias

ERIC HERVE JEAN-BAPTISTE | Lake Region Pathfinder Coordinator

While we can never fully prepare for the future since much is unknown, we trust that God places us where we need to be.

Just before the pandemic, I was appointed as Lake Region's Pathfinder executive coordinator and imagined my routine would involve traveling and meeting youth leaders and young people from around the United States. It's amazing to think that, during the months when events were cancelled or forced to go online, I have found more opportunities to serve than ever before. The most notable was assisting in one of the largest virtual Pathfinder teaching platforms in the world through the Lake Union Club Ministries. By the time you read this, we will have taught 100 different honors to more than 24,000 people from around the globe. What a privilege it was to meet leaders and young people from around the world via the Zoom platform on my laptop! But this opportunity to serve and gain professional opportunities didn't happen overnight. I believe the reason I was able to grow so much in 2020 was because I was willing to serve where I could in 2019. What was I doing in 2019? I was often using Zoom for a podcast called "Youth Ministry and Mentorship 101," not knowing that the knowledge there would lead me to where I am today.

I'm optimistic that 2021 will be a very fruitful year in Youth ministry, especially since young people are doing ministry on social media and in the area of content creation. Without question, the pandemic has brought ministry to those places and, even if a vaccine comes out tomorrow, the Gospel will continue to be spread in those virtual spaces. Mentors, such as the late Robert Jackson who was influential in my life, will continue to be crucial as they are the ones who foster intentional relationships. We likely will face huge hurdles in 2021. However, I am sure those found ready are the ones serving where God has called them. Undoubtedly, God knows our future, and this is why His plans are bigger than what we can even imagine. ■

HOW WE MADE IT THROUGH