

Family Connections and the Global Pandemic

By Camryn Matthews

The coronavirus outbreak has dramatically changed my life, including the relationships with other people in my family and community. Millions of us have lost some or all of our normal ways of seeing others as we try to keep each other safe. This has had the greatest impact, since family is the most important thing I love.

Before this pandemic started, I wouldn't say my family connection was unassailable. For nearly a year and a half, I was unable to see the maternal side of my family. It wasn't just my mother's incarceration that caused relationships to be lost; a lot of unresolved issues among other family members caused relationships to be lost with my mother and me and her side of the family. It was unbearable that I was able to see my father's side of the family without any problem or hesitation compared to when I asked to see my mother's side. I had to ask how my father felt about me seeing them, since my mother isn't in the picture anymore. So it was tough maintaining a relationship with them only through technology and video chat, since I'm unable to see them in person and hang with them.

Nonetheless, since this pandemic has happened, and I know that I'll be going off to college soon and will be on my own, I decided to try to make a connection again with my mother's family through Facebook. I know it sounds kind of unusual, but it worked, and I reached out to all of my mother's side of the family.

I was able to retrieve phone numbers and communicate with some of them again, building up some type of stable connection to hold onto until the world opens back up again and I'm able to see them and enjoy having some family time with them once again. Yet it's somewhat weird, because my mother isn't here anymore to guide me in the right direction. By that, I mean she is not here to help me know whom to trust again and whom to talk to again. But I know I have to make these decisions on my own. I also know that awkward conversation may be brought up with my mother's family about her incarceration and what led up to it, which I really want to avoid, since I constantly hear and talk about it with my father. I know everyone wants to have their own opinion about her, which can provoke me the wrong way. I don't want a new beginning with them to start off with an upsetting conversation about my mother. However, I'm willing to try it again.

Unfortunately, since most of my mother's side of the family are elders, it will take some time to see them again, just like visiting my mother, since she is located in West Virginia. I was unable to leave to visit her. I haven't seen her since the day she was incarcerated, so it's been a while. Before this pandemic struck, I was supposed to visit her together with all of my sisters, but since the circumstances have changed, visitation has been postponed until the pandemic subsides, causing great desolation.

Staying in these close quarters has given me a lot of time to think about everything and the decisions I'll be making soon. The most I've thought about is being alone without my family.

Being alone isn't the best feeling. So this pandemic inspires me to go get my family back and have them by my side once again without other people's words having an influence on me. This connection with my family has gotten stronger and is stable enough to hold onto until I'm able to finally see them again. Even though I still wish to see my mother before I go off to college, I really have to think about the safety concerns that are at hand and how places are now, because nothing is going to be normal again. Taking measures to stay safe is a new normal. But I'm hoping that rebuilding the bond with my family will help me deal with my mother's incarceration.

In conclusion, during this pandemic I've had time to grow and think about my future and the connections I want to have. I've also created a stronger bond with my family. They taught me our bond has never been broken; it just needed some repairs. This pandemic has given me the opportunity to get to know my family better.