

Eulogy for arati - Lisa

I was working at the largest hospital system in New Orleans. In December 2019 we were aware of the COVID-19 infection in China with occasional cases in the North America, Europe and elsewhere. By January 2020 the extent of the infection had increased markedly. New Orleans celebrated Mardi Gras in late February 2020; after that, the local case numbers started to increase quickly.

Masks were very hard to locate. We were able to get a few through the hospital but these were for use during our work hours; we had to conserve them by packing them in paper bags overnight and reuse them the following days. Some people were making fabric masks, but my sewing skills were not up to the task. Other people were wearing bandanas over their lower faces, wrapping large woolen scarves around their faces and necks, and otherwise attempting to create a barrier in front of their noses and mouths.



In March 2020, I virtually met Carol, Virginia, Laurie, Cathy and Joyce. Through them I was able to acquire masks for myself, my family (including an RN and a physical therapist), for active and retired physicians, nurses, other health professionals and their families in other parts of the country including Jacksonville, Florida; Jackson, Mississippi; Los Angeles, California; San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; Mid-Atlantic states and New England. I think I was most grateful to these mask makers for the masks they sent to the son of a colleague; at the time he was an intern at Columbia-Presbyterian in NYC where he and his colleagues and friends had protective equipment at work but again nothing for their personal lives. His mother, who trained in radiology with me, sent me the most deeply grateful note, thanking me and these new friends for making her son safer in one of the most congested cities in the county.

By various exchanges of e-mails, Virginia and I discovered that we were both highly interested in COVID-19. We began chatting by e-mail, trying to match her pathologic assessments of the disease in ferrets with what I was seeing. We didn't solve the grand puzzle, but her kind and collegial information and e-mail conversations were both helpful and comforting to me.

I remain deeply grateful to Virginia for discussing the disease with me, and to her and all the mask makers who generous and industrious efforts kept me, my family, my friends, my colleagues and their families safe in those early days of the pandemic.

I am terribly sad that Virginia has died. I counted her as a true friend.