



“A hug is an act of holding someone tightly in one’s arms, typically to express affection.”

During the Christmas holidays, I went to Spain to visit my family. I saw my father from a distance and I could not give him a hug because of Covid. He is 90 years old and, at that time, neither he nor I had received the vaccine. In my culture, we constantly show love to our friends and family through physical contact: a hug, two kisses, shaking or holding hands, or a pat in the back.

It is true, unfortunately, that we learn much more from difficult situations than from pleasant ones. Before the pandemic, I never thought that I was going to miss hugging my family and friends. One of the main lessons of this pandemic is to realize that we should never take anything for granted.

While watching the news recently, I saw the story of two old brothers in Spain. They were around 80 years old and living in separate care homes. They were hugging each other 10 days after they both received the vaccine. The last time they were able to hug each other was a year previously, when

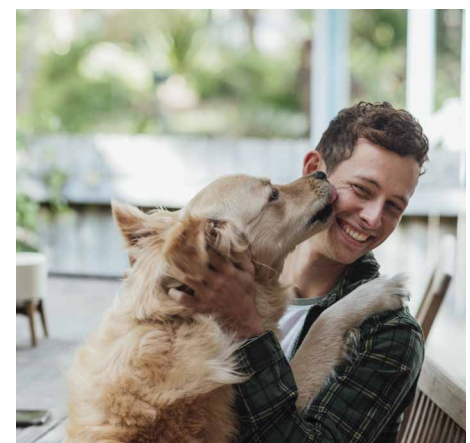
the pandemic started. It was a very emotional story with a strong message.

We should see the pandemic as a chance to reset our world and our lives. Since this exceptional period of our history began, I have heard so many times that we cannot go back to the way we used to live, that it is not sustainable and that, after the pandemic, everything will be different. Most of the big cities around the world have been enjoying the cleanest air in decades and mother nature is blooming because human beings have been in lockdown.

I think that probably pets, including my dog Daisy, are the only ones enjoying the pandemic. I have never spent so much time with her. She must think I am retired now. I think I will need to hire a therapist for her (and me) when we cannot spend so much time together.

I recently got my second vaccine shot. I am very thankful that I live in the United Kingdom, one of the countries where the vaccine rollout has been a complete success. At the same time, I feel guilty think-

ing that billions of people around the world have not received it yet. We don’t know how long the vaccine will protect us and if it will be effective against any dangerous variants, but it is difficult not to feel a little bit like “superman” after receiving the second shot. The first thought that crossed my mind was, “Now I can do whatever I was doing before. Nothing can happen to me.”



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When I was listening to the radio recently, one of the announcers used an interesting phrase in reference to life before the pandemic. He said “la otra vida,” which means “the other life” in Spanish. By using the term “the other life,” he obviously means that life under the pandemic is different. But what about life after the pandemic? Are we going back to the other life, the life we had before March of 2020? I know that probably many of us will use masks more often and be more cautious when we meet with people, but my question is related to the bigger picture. Are we going to resume life as if the pandemic did not exist? Are we going to continue ignoring the poor countries and looking away? Are we going to keep destroying the planet? In short, are we going to learn from the pandemic? Are we going to appreciate those little things that were normal in “the other life” and were gone during the pandemic?

I have to admit that I am a little pessimistic but I hope I am wrong. I have the feeling that the ‘new normal’ will be like the old one with a mask. I see it like the gun control situation in the United States. After a mass shooting, everybody gets really upset and asks for gun control laws.

Later on, when nothing happens, eventually society forgets about it and life goes on. My worry is that attitudes in the post-pandemic time will follow the same process. We will forget how much we suffered, how many loved ones we lost, and our good intentions will go away the more we start enjoying everything we used to be able to do before the pandemic became part of our lives.

Let’s imagine we are in the year 2051, asking a person who is 50 years old how he or she remembers the Covid crisis they lived through when they were 20. What do you think they will say they remember? That everything was closed and they could not go out and party? Or that they could not travel? For some, the impact will have been more serious, especially if they’ve lost someone they love, but for the majority, it’s all about how Covid curtailed their social life. If we pose the same question to someone who was 50 years old in 2020, that person will tell us a different story: that he or she lost their mom, dad, or another family member, or perhaps they lost their job.

My hope is that, regardless of age, we all learn something from this pandemic and, as a result, we can build a better world. We are definitely living during a historic moment that we will never forget. If we want to be optimistic, we can always turn a bad situation into an opportunity and we can reset the world and our lives. And by the way, if it safe, don’t forget to enjoy giving a big hug to your loved ones. We have discovered that something as simple as a hug not always is possible.



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