Voices of Sisters
Coronavirus



What Sr. Jane Marie Bradish hoped for, and what she got (Photos by Jane Marie Bradish)



by Sr. Jane Marie Bradish

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I know better than to get too excited when predictions come for a big storm. Even though I'm at the age now when my body predicts coming storms, I love them and I know which ones are safe to participate in. You can find me outside in the midst of a good rain splashing in puddles. A snowstorm will find me tramping into the yard, maybe even making a few snowballs. Yes, I know there is such a thing as too much or ill-timed rain, and snow cleanup gets old by April, but I've never been one to complain about a good (safe) storm.

The hype was there — big time. National and local meteorologists had been talking about the upcoming storm for a week. Reporters made their annual visit to the city salt yards to show the trucks being loaded. Each passing day brought new weather alerts for snow, wind and then cold: advisories, watches, warnings.

Everyone was ready: Extra shelters were opened, people stocked up on food so much that the grocery store shelves were empty, lines at gas stations wrapped around the block, neighbors even invited each other to park cars on their driveways to keep the streets clear. My landlord made sure there was enough salt and that the shovels and snowblower were ready to go. And then we waited. And we waited, and we waited.

As I went to bed, part of my prayer was for everyone's safety: those who were without shelter, police and other rescue-type workers who would be out assisting, the municipal workers who would be spending their night driving salt and plow trucks instead of being home safe and sound and warm.

First thing in the morning, I rolled out of bed and pulled on my snow clothes in preparation for going out and beginning the process of digging out. I never even looked out a window to see what was waiting for me. Bundled from head to toe, I opened the door and stepped outside — to two inches of snow and fairly mild winter temperatures.

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I stopped in my tracks, wondering if this was real or a dream. The wind let me know I wasn't dreaming. I shoveled quickly and came back inside. As I pulled off the extra clothes and proceeded to clean myself up to get on with the day, I burst into tears, and they didn't stop! It took what seemed like forever for the tears to stop — I mean

a couple hours not of sobbing but of tears running down my face. All the while I wondered, What the heck was I crying for?

Insights were slow in coming. And they were widely varied.

My tears had nothing to do with the broken promise of a snowstorm.

Instead, for the first time, I cried for COVID-19:

- For the millions who have died. A number approaching 6 million but in reality, probably much higher. This virus does not discriminate. People from every race, socioeconomic status, gender, age, health and vaccine status have died. Most have died alone and many have suffered greatly.
- For the young people who have missed out on so many things. The normal activities of growing up: from birthday parties to school dances to graduations to vacations with families. It's heartbreaking to watch little ones see grandparents only through window panes.
- For the medical professionals working literally to death. We are now learning the stories of hospital workers so overwhelmed they are dying (infected themselves, or worked to death, or suicide).
- For teachers who pivoted overnight and continue to teach in-person and virtually and in other combinations. Teachers who, with no real training other than instinct, have set aside curriculum in order to be attentive to wellness and the mental health of their students and student families.
- For the workers and businesses, many of whom will never recover. Not everything can be done through technology and too many small businesses have been forced to close forever. Owners and employees are suddenly without jobs and in some cases generational histories are simply boarded up.
- For those who are alone or left behind. The technology that allows so many to stay in touch and stay employed is a luxury for most. Yes, I missed human companionship but I'm able to call or video chat — it's not the same, but it's more than most have.

My litany could go on. There are so many effects of COVID-19 that I do not know or have any experience of. I cried two years' worth of tears. I cried for changes we have all been forced to make, even the changes that are good.

The Earth and all her inhabitants seem to get very quiet in the snow, even with all the noise that happens during cleanup. At least for a couple of hours everything is

clean and quiet. My disappointment over the quiet and clean of the "snowstorm that wasn't" tapped into my lived grief of COVID-19. Maybe the tears were the cleaning that needed to happen for me.