

My name is Charlene Krahn, maybe better known to some of you as Armin & Edith's daughter. I live in Rosetown and am currently teaching at the Sovereign Hutterite Colony.

When Patrick asked if I would be willing to share a reflection on how Covid has affected me, my initial reaction was no! What would I have to share that mean anything to other people, but as my mind started whirling, I remembered that we all have dealt with the past year in different ways. I recently heard it described as we were all going through the same storm, but we were not in the same boat. Some people may have been in a dingy, a rowboat, a sailboat, or maybe a yacht.

My whole life changed on March 16th when I was visiting with my German Teacher (my first point of contact on the colony) and I was reassuring him "They'll never close down the school" and just like that, within 5 minutes, my phone dinged with the arrival of the email letting me know some of what was coming my way. Every teacher had issues with figuring out how to "do" school during a pandemic, but for colony teachers, our challenges were quite a bit different. There was no online learning, there was no computer time, there was nothing to do but send home paper packages and wait for the phone to ring. The one thing my students and I had going for us was that I structure my days at school to be as routine as the rest of their lives. By Thursday, March 19th, I had lists made for each grade/student outlining my expectations for schooling in the next weeks (not knowing we were done until summer). New problems require new solutions!

My German Teacher had them in the school with him for the first month & a half and I looked forward to the phone calls from the school with news of what was going on and who needed some extra help. Once the German Teacher was getting extra busy with the upcoming garden planting, the students were at home with their learning. Now I would receive more than one phone call in a morning. I lived for those calls and the chance to make contact with my students. I discovered that a few of my Grade 1's desperately wanted to have the chance to read to me over the phone, I had several Grade 7's & 8's who needed extra explanations in Math and, imagine this, I had some younger boys who wanted NOTHING to do with me once the in-person school was over.

After Easter, I realized that it was all well and good that they were doing the work, but some of it had to be corrected to make sure it was done correctly. In discussion with my German Teacher, we decided that I would set aside one day a week where I would head out to the school to do correcting. The students would leave their books on their desks and would enjoy a "school work free day" while I corrected. I was able to keep up on their learning and make my own notes to help explain concepts that were a challenge. This day of correcting was the day of the week I looked forward to the most. It was the closest thing to "teaching" that I had experienced in months. I have to admit, I never thought I would be forced to explain 2 step algebraic equations over the phone! New problems require new solutions!

I lived this simple existence thinking that everyone else must be experiencing something similar, but wow, was I in for shock when I attended a meeting at the Herschel church in the middle of June. As we went around the group sharing how the past months had been, I heard farmers who said that life was pretty normal (except for their kids being home all day). That is when I broke down. There was nothing normal in my world. There was nothing more important to me than my students!

Zoom church (Herschel style) and YouTube church (Nutana Park style) became the norm and it was certainly an adjustment. I was glad to still be able to make a connection with people and I appreciated the energy and work that people went through to make church happen. New problems require new solutions!

Once warmer weather hit, I looked forward to my daily walks around Rosetown and out onto the grid roads around town. I would use this time to pray. My prayer list became quite long as I started expanding my list of people to pray for. It started small with prayers for my family. It quickly expanded to include the colony and good friends. Slowly, I would add in events from around the world. My walks were the time when I felt closest to God. It was just the two of us heading out to enjoy the beautiful weather and nature at its finest.

Covid hit my colony in the middle of July. One of our members lost a parent and went home for the funeral and brought Covid back to the colony. I had been out there visiting before they had realized they were sick and that brought out a sense of panic in my world as I awaited my test results. I was happy when I found out that my colony was taking Covid seriously. Already at that time, some colonies were hitting the news for not following the rules. I was thankful my colony was able to see the seriousness and the need to keep working on their reputation in the Rosetown community. The colony went into lockdown with no one coming onto the colony and very few leaving the colony. The relationship that I had built with the colony members called me into action. They wondered if I would be willing to help out with the mail. I would pick up their mail and leave it on my deck. They would pick it up and leave behind anything to be mailed. I would touch base every few days and get the reports of who was feeling better and who was still sick. There were many prayers that Covid would not have serious repercussions on the colony members. I was happy to visit once the lockdown was over and had a chance to see Grandma Katie (the colony member who was the hardest hit) sitting out on her back deck and enjoying some fresh air.

Starting school this fall was such a joy for me and for the kids. I was awaiting with bated breath the **official** okay from the Saskatchewan Health Authority that I was allowed on my colony. We put in some new rules regarding handwashing and social distancing. I was thinking that I would do my guided reading with the students in their desks to maintain the appropriate distance. That plan was quickly shot down by the older students who did some measuring and decided if I sat at one end of the 8 foot table, they could be 6 feet away from me around the other end of the table. New problems require new solutions!

Due to the restrictions, parent teacher interviews were to be over the phone. My favourite interview this fall happened when I was leaving the colony at the end of the day. I met a colony truck on the grid road containing a set of parents that I had not yet connected with by phone. So, there we were, sitting in our respective vehicles, less than a mile from the colony, having our interviews and catching up on things. New problems require new solutions!

In November we were made to wear masks at all times in the school. I sent home the official documents and waited to see if there would be any backlash from the colony. There was none! We all realized that the rules had to be followed in order to have school. I miss seeing their beautiful smiles, but I have discovered that my student have very expressive eyes.

Needless to say, there is nothing normal about this world that we are all living in right now. I'm not sure exactly which kind of boat I ended up in, but its sea-worthy, stocked with supplies, keeping me safe and I'm guaranteed to not be alone for God is always with me. I'll continue to face things as they come because new problems require new solutions!