

COVID-19 and Life Crises

Eviction during a Pandemic

By Janice Fitzgerald

“We came to the decision that we will be concluding our rental agreement as of the end of June” In NYS, the eviction protection during this pandemic under Executive Order pertains solely to non-payment of rent.

For our family, the lifestyle changes brought about by COVID-19 were an adjustment. Self-isolating and physically distancing create a strange feeling after having almost daily contact with friends and family. It is a manageable compromise to preserve health and safety. It was unnerving making the first trip to the grocery store, and going to the pharmacy was even more uncomfortable.

In the spring, we developed a rhythm to our days including chores, daily walks, and house projects. We’ve experienced a range of emotions during this pandemic including frustration and loneliness at the loss of social opportunities. There have been times we felt a sense of hopelessness from the fear and vulnerability created by this virus. Sometimes there is boredom, but pauses and silence can be a respite. We follow the guidelines, doing only essential errands and avoiding crowded spaces.

Are there positive reactions? There’s gratitude that we are healthy; gratitude that most of our extended family have their jobs. And, appreciation for a beautiful summer and fall with fresh air to share time outdoors with family and friends.

Since 2012, our son, John, who has intellectual and developmental disabilities, has lived independently in a small, but functional apartment not far from us. John needs assistance with managing his finances and we, John’s parents, make sure his finances are stable. John could easily be victimized or taken advantage of. We help ensure the supports that John needs are in place and functioning to help him be happy and safe. We have advocated and helped him achieve as much independence as possible, and, we are the contingency when things go awry or when something falls through the cracks.

For me, concerns often revolve around issues ensuring John is secure and doing well. When possible, we plan in advance.

Living within a couple of miles of our home, John has been able to be part of our household as well as have his independence. Dinners together, and near daily conversations afford a time for us to “check-in”. We help each other as needed. John’s two-day-a-week job ended in March when the college he worked at closed. He was one of the country’s millions who lost their employment. Fast forward to August, and John went back to work, as long as college is in session.

John has limited outside contact with others, uses his mask when in public and spends time in public spaces when absolutely necessary. John’s social circle is often his family. He coped with self-isolation in his apartment by taking daily snowshoe walks when snow was still

on the ground, and moved to hiking trails when spring arrived. Getting outdoors is healthy and John takes precautions to be a safe outdoorsperson. This includes being prepared for unusual or hazardous weather.

In May, the **notice** arrived. The *notice* was the May 15 eviction notice that John found taped to his door indicating he was to be out of his apartment by June 30. "We recently came to the decision that we will be concluding our rental agreement as of the end of June – a month and a half from now." In NYS, the eviction protection under Executive Order pertains solely to non-payment of rent.

Who would evict someone when there is a pandemic with no rentals available or affordable homes for sale? Even if a home is for sale, imagine the scramble to pull resources together to purchase. How could we mortgage our home in 40 days? John had zero resources to apply towards a move or purchase. The eviction notice ended with the offer to provide a reference, if needed, for a new rental. In a note to me it was stated "we have appreciated John as a tenant, and we hope he has enjoyed his time here, and learned valuable lessons about living independently".

A week after the eviction, I saw a post for a manufactured home for sale. It is in the area John likes to live and within a couple of miles of our home. We scrambled to put in an offer, with a down payment. We had to apply for a home equity loan on our residence to finance the purchase. Before retiring, we worked hard to get out of debt, and going into debt again was not something we planned to do. Working with a local bank, we were able to apply for and close on a loan. The closing on the home purchase was June 23. John has a new place to live with a beautiful yard and more space. He has stable housing. One fear that surfaced after receipt of the eviction notice was that John would need to move back to our home. It was a mutual fear as John enjoys his own place.

Our experience is not unheard of for parents, and their sons or daughters with disabilities. They have supported them to be independent and self-directed, and many parents have helped their son or daughter pick up the pieces after a crisis like the eviction. Our experiences during the past few months are one example of the challenges parents of individuals with disabilities face their entire lifetime.

We consider it good fortune that this move worked out for John, but we will always be concerned about his future and how similar events might impact John when we are no longer here to help him. In hindsight, we knew it would be good for John to have stability in a home he could eventually own. The apartment was adequate, but did not have outdoor space. We knew a larger place with a yard would be a future goal. However, we have never been quick to make changes when things are working.

This experience has increased awareness of taking contingency planning more seriously. One important part is making sure we outline the many things that are in place for John by developing a communication tool that someone could use to help if we are not able to.

There are qualities and life experiences that helped us get through this. Tenacity, keeping a clear head and staying calm helped. Family members have knowledge of construction, repairs and inspecting buildings, and that was crucial in being able to move quickly on the purchase offer. Project planning and management experience helped map out to do lists and prioritize the work. There were several projects that needed to be completed before moving

in. Identifying projects and setting up steps to accomplish them were part of the planning. Close proximity to where we live and where John lives helped.

Our goal, and the goal of every parent, for every child, is to see him or her in a good life, surrounded by a strong community of family and friends for support and encouragement. It is unfortunate that an unforeseen event caused us such turmoil. Despite the head spinning suddenness of the eviction, we managed, and so did John, who proudly and lovingly mows his lawn and maintains his home. That is our joint success.

Janice, Doug and John Fitzgerald live in Lake Clear, NY which is located in the Adirondack Park. Janice's advocacy for individuals with disabilities included work at the Adirondack Arc, Parent to Parent of NYS, Parent to Parent USA and as a past member of the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. In his work for NYS, Doug assisted with and advocated for accessibility in recreation. As a Boy Scout Leader, he helped ensure scouts of all abilities were included.

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John setting up his new mailbox



Backyard picnic

**Hiking Mt. Marshall
9/2020**

