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The Covid-19 pandemic from the viewpoint of a Finnish hairdresser

I don't think I'll ever forget the big press conference held by our then Prime Minister, Mrs Sanna Marin, and other ministers on Monday afternoon, the 16th of March, 2020. I listened to it on the radio. The Prime Minister announced that a total corona lockdown would start on March 18. Schools, libraries, swimming pools, cinemas, theatres, restaurants and the like would be closed down, and people were to stay indoors and avoid contact with anyone other than their immediate family members.

I slowly began to realize how the pandemic and these new regulations would affect my small hairdresser's salon. I am the owner and the sole employee of the salon. Most of my customers are regulars, men and women, but every day I get a couple of customers from the street, too. My salon is located in the very centre of Joensuu, a small city in eastern, central Finland.

My fears that the first few weeks would be quiet turned out to be true. Nobody wanted to take the risk of being infected by the disease. Everybody was shocked by the strong orders to stay home, order food deliveries from supermarkets and not to visit close relatives in old people's homes. And to keep a distance of two metres. Moreover, distance working was the new norm, but not possible in my trade.

I became painfully aware of the seriousness of the situation when I opened my mobile bank app and paid the rent of the salon, my monthly advance tax and the electricity bill. Luckily, I had some savings but they would be soon gone as customers were simply afraid of phoning me for an appointment and entering my salon.

The first customer, one who had been coming regularly for more than 20 years, called me and made an appointment. We decided not to wear masks because it is hard to cut the hair on the temples and sides with those strings of the mask going round the customer's ears. Besides, the mask caused me an acute feeling of suffocation, which got very serious over the next several months, probably aided by the strong-smelling cleaning agents which I used to disinfect the salon after every single customer.

Without masks we could talk freely and comfortably while I was cutting and shaping his hair. He was aware that I had had scarcely any customers in the past

couple of weeks, so when paying for my work, he simply handed me 200 euros saying that he wanted to pay for that day's haircut and also for the next five haircuts. That friendly gesture brought tears into my eyes. There still was some goodness in the world!

I would have been in financial difficulties with so few customers, mostly men, who came in approximately once a month to have a haircut. Luckily my gentleman friend was able and willing to pay many of my bills until, towards the end of the year, I began to receive regular financial support from the state. It was not much but I am thankful for it anyway.

A very important person for me has always been my sister, who lives in Helsinki. We had long conversations over the phone about our respective situations. My elder brother, who lives near Joensuu, used to come to me for a chat and a haircut before the pandemic. Our relationship suffered in the corona months as he and his wife were strongly of the opinion that corona was just a flu and the vaccinations given by the health care were useless, and probably even contained vicious microchips paid for by Bill Gates. For him, wearing a mask was simply an indication that you were a weakling and a slave of the state. We did not talk to each other practically at all until the pandemic was over. Getting back to normal, free chatting was difficult because you feared that your brother would start ranting about the many conspiracy theories which he had kept advocating only a few months earlier.

The corona months, years actually, were for me a difficult time mentally, physically and financially. I am so happy that the pandemic is over now.

The text is based on an interview of my hairdresser in April 2024

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