

My name: Gabe Henderson

My town: Melbourne, Australia

My COVID experience

This year was big. I got married. I had three grandparents die. I moved interstate. I changed jobs and then to add in the extra stress of COVID. It made life very challenging and also made me appreciate the special moments.

I am a registered nurse. I was working in Sydney to start off where we experienced some of the first wave of COVID and we got to learn about what we were facing. We had to make a lot of changes – and do it quickly. A lot of our staff had friends overseas and the stories trickled back to us about what was happening in Europe and America. And there we were waiting ... we thought we would be hit like they were. We didn't know what to expect. It changed dramatically at work everyday - where we could have our lunch, how we entered the hospital. It highlighted the importance of teamwork, and we could see the planning that was going into it. It made us feel that if it did hit, we would be safe – but there was still the unknown and that was worrying. We didn't know the numbers of patients we would see, the severity of their disease or how we would treat patients. There were questions about what safe and ethical practice was. It was a bit stressful.

When I arrived in Melbourne the second wave had hit. A lot of the nurses had experience with infected patients, and they were a lot more confident in their practice. That was reassuring. Being a nurse during COVID has been scary. I would be the primary contact for patients and this had risks for me. There were risks that I would catch it and get sick and risks that I would catch it without knowing and spread it to my family or the community. Fortunately, none of this happened to me. I remember saying to my neighbours that I had accepted the fact that I would probably get COVID at some point – I resigned to that. I had to trust that my body was healthy or young and fit enough that it would be alright. Things have now eased off. Things are going back to normal – elective surgery is back on. There are still changes but it is less stressful. There is also now a confidence that we know how to respond if it kicks off again. It was the unknown at the start that was scary.

I thought it was going to be a fun year at the start to be honest. We got engaged and were going to be married. But then the Pandemic hit and the wedding became extremely stressful. We weren't worried about the flowers or the wedding cake – we were worried about should or shouldn't we get married. Fortunately, we were able to get married with a small gathering of family and friends. That was a highlight of the year, especially when we look back at what else happened.

Then we moved to Melbourne to be closer to our family. And we went into lockdown. That coincided with three of my grandparents passing away within 8 weeks. Not being able to be with them in the last weeks of their life when we knew they were dying. Not being able to be there for my parents - was really difficult. We were in metro Melbourne – they were rural Victoria. We knew lockdown was going to be difficult – we didn't know it would be to that level of difficulty.

Having my wife Joy through the whole thing was very special. We were going through the same thing. Knowing that at some point we would be able to be with our family again. To be able to reflect together helped me get through.

When we finally got to reconnect with our family, it was emotional. It gave me strength. Power to go on. Knowing that now we can see family and be with them gives me strength.

My act of intersectional kindness

In that first wave the kindness to Joy and I was great. Everyone was looking out for each other in our apartment block. If someone was going to the supermarket, they check in to see what we wanted, so we weren't all having to go to the supermarket and expose ourselves to the disease.

One of my colleagues was getting onto a bus to go to work and was in her scrubs and as she got off the bus someone stood up and yelled out: thank you for all you are doing for us. That's very special.