

I took a mini trip during Covid lockdown when my paternal grandpa died on July 30, 2020.

It was due to old age, no relation to the Coronavirus. At the time, my parents and four younger siblings lived in Boulder, Colorado and I lived in Sanders, Arizona. My grandpa died in Phoenix, but was going to be buried in Safford, Arizona. Flight restrictions were in full effect, but my family was never one for air travel- too expensive with how many of us there are. Luckily, we were used to the sixteen hour drive it took from Boulder to Safford, Arizona.

However me and my siblings were incredibly nervous about what regulations would be upheld at the funeral. In Boulder, a politically blue state with a high percentage of college educated people, the pandemic was taken very seriously. Masking and social distancing was enforced, and the major highways such as US-36 and I-25 were almost always empty due to the fact that everyone seemed to agree to stay home. In Sanders, the Navajo Nation President upheld rules about social distancing and masking to his areas of jurisdiction. In an area where death tolls were high and the United States government responded to requests for aid by sending body bags, President Jonathan Nez was not taking the pandemic lightly.

The same was not guaranteed for Safford. My siblings and I didn't believe that a small, very conservative, and Mormon town in southern Arizona was going to follow the same safety precautions we were comfortable with. However, our mom ensured that our Uncle Dale, who was the oldest son but not the oldest child, promised everyone would be wearing masks at the wake and the actual funeral would be outside.

So everyone agreed to go.

The drive from Sanders to Safford was barely different from how it had been before Covid. I still crossed vast empty deserts with little evidence of life and definitely no cell service. At gas stations I wore my mask and disposable gloves, and since it was only a four hour drive I only had to stop once on the way there and back.

When I got to the hotel I checked in for my family since I beat everyone else by about an hour and a half then went to rest and change before the wake. When my siblings and parents arrived I was so excited to see them again. The isolation one experiences from living on the Reservation paired with the extra isolation of Covid was starting to take a toll on me mentally. With everyone dressed and with masks in hands and hand sanitizer in all of our pockets, we headed to the wake.

The building was small, further representing how small the town was, and there were about seventy-five other people in the building. But no one else- and I mean *no one* else- was wearing a mask.

My siblings and I clustered in a corner, trying to stay away from everyone else. People came up to greet us, to try and shake our hands and offer condolences. One specific moment stands out in my memory of an uncle coming up and offering his hand to my sister, who straight up refused to touch it till my dad nudged her. We all immediately put hand sanitizer on afterwards.

My mom encouraged us to talk to our grandma, but the five of us were incredibly hesitant since there were people surrounding her, again without masks. So instead we sat six rows behind her (we assumed that was close to six feet) until it all cleared up.

During our wait a cousin came up and this conversation transpired-

Him: What are you wearing masks for?

Me: There's a pandemic.

Him: Ha! You all really believe in that.

Oh boy.

The five of us moved to sit outside and wait while my parents stayed in. I felt like my mom or my dad were panicking enough about the fact that we were what was probably going to turn into a super spreader event. But my sister Sadie was the worst off out of all of us. She was pacing back and forth, a mix of rage and panic over what the inside of the building looked like. I sat in the little shade that there was and watched her rant till my other sister Sam told her "we either got infected or didn't. Nothing we can do about it now." Sadie did not appreciate that.

I took them out for ice cream afterwards.

The next day after the funeral, (which was held outside, and my sisters and I sat in a different quadrant of the cemetery to avoid the family without masks), we went to the catered lunch. Again, my mom and siblings chose to eat outside, away from the extended family. This didn't stop some aunts and uncles from finding us and trying to chat.

Uncle: So you still teaching the Indians?

Me: Uh. The Navajo. On the Reservation. Yeah.

Uncle: And they believe in this pandemic hoax?

Me: Yeah...

Uncle: It's totally a hoax. It's made up by the democrats to make sure Trump doesn't get elected again. It's not real.

Baylee, sister: Okay dude.

Yikes.

Luckily, none of us caught Covid from that trip. But we haven't been in contact with any of the extended family since. The refusal to wear a mask, and spouting conspiracies to us during the height of the pandemic was a betrayal deep enough that my siblings and I haven't forgiven them, even though it's been almost five years.