

**COVID-19 SPURS  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

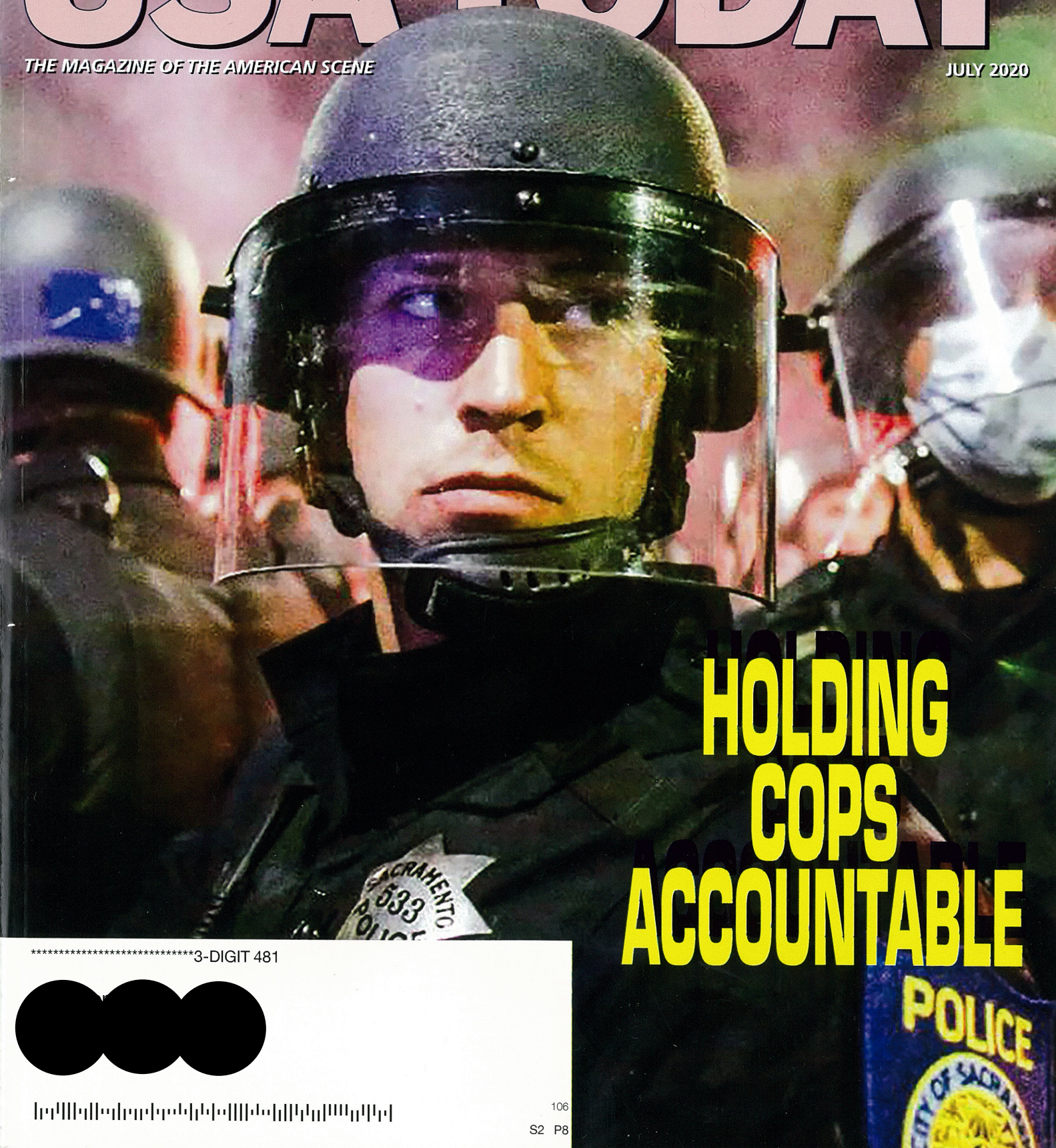
**COURT'S RULINGS  
NOT SO SUPREME**

**FEMALES FACE  
FOOD ISSUES**

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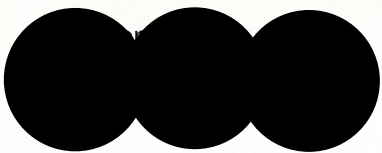


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**D**URING THE COVID-19 pandemic, most of us have been stripped of our normal routine, the comforts and securities that make each day predictable and safe. Some of us have faced death for the first time, and been forced to think about how we will respond if we, or a loved one, is struck with this new virus in a life-threatening way. Will we be strong enough to endure it in a self-respecting manner? Will we be the caretaker our loved one needs if it is he or she who is ill?

When we are sick, really sick, love manifests in many ways. We have to dig deeply, go within, keep our composure, and remember who we truly are—God’s children. We do not necessarily have the choice of what circumstances will befall us, but we do have the choice of how we will face them. It is not easy.

We all are products of our environment or, as some prefer to express it, victims of victims. We are programmed at an early age. I was taught to recite certain prayers. Maybe you were, too. Much like a parrot, I could and would recite words without thought.

It was in 1981 when I first went to a holy place called Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, on a dare from a then-atheist fellow news reporter. The experience changed my life. Six children (at the time) were receiving visions from the Mother Mary, Queen of Peace. I was astounded to find these children of average appearance and was told by church hierarchy that they were not particularly spiritual before the “phenomena” began. More astounding was the fact that each connected with God in a different manner.

Was there a message in this? Could it be that God meets us where we are? We worry about style and form. Maybe Jesus is just looking for sincere hearts. The fact that each child was different from the other and quite ordinary in their likes and dislikes spoke volumes to my heart. Could it be that God is not looking for the extraordinary, but that these children represent all of us—a small microcosm of the world? Could God be calling ordinary people to extraordinary acts? Is He willing to meet each right where He is? I believe this to be true. Is He saying we are enough right where we are with His grace to cope with the seemingly impossible? Is Medjugorje an invitation to seek Him? “Knock and the door shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7)

Little did I know that the Medjugorje experience would, much like a tapestry, unfold and become a major influence in a future life crisis.

It was fall of 2012 when my world would change; my peace would be disturbed and my life altered. My mother was diagnosed with cancer. She had not been to a doctor in forever. She always was healthy, as was my father who volunteered at the local hospital each week and played tennis each Wednesday at the age of 87. Life had, to this point, been so beautiful, uncomplicated, and blessed. In an instant and in my own family, everything changed.

Mom did not tell me she had cancer. She

# STAYING STRONG IN TRYING TIMES

BY ANN MARIE HANCOCK

*“When God is with you, no one can stand against you.”*

had not called me or anyone to drive her to the doctor’s office that day. Mom always was strong-willed and private, not given to intimate or personal conversation, not even with family. It was my dad who called me and said he wanted to talk to me.

It is funny what you remember at a time like this. I remember getting engaged to my husband of 48 years and asking Mom for marital advice. She said, “You know what you need to know.” That was the end of the conversation. I remembered a massive bug infestation in Army housing at Ft. Monroe in 1973. My husband was on active duty at the time. I was totally traumatized by what I saw and came home for a couple days. When I described my emotional state to Mom, she said, “Get over it. There are worse things.” She was watching Archie Bunker in “All in the Family.”

Mom was very private. I think I saw her in her slip twice in my life. She emerged every

morning dressed and in full makeup—private. This information is significant in term of Mom’s cancer journey. I asked her why she did not call me. The response, “No big deal.”

We know, intellectually, that denying something does not lessen its seriousness or improve the chances of its disappearance. There is a time for conversation, but I knew she needed to process and digest the news her way. Part of love is respect. I thought, at some point, we would talk and she would cry. Me, too. We never had the conversation every daughter or son needs to have. She would not have it. Mom was a closed shop.

We do sickness and/or death on the sick person’s terms. We encourage whatever gives them peace. For Mom, it was Nora Roberts books and good food, comfort food, when she could eat. It was Notre Dame football and VCU basketball.

Mom’s cancer diagnosis was no different. “We’re not talking about it. We are moving on.” So often in life if we do not acknowledge our lessons, our God allows the next step to get our attention.

Mom’s little pink speck above her eyebrow was barely visible in May. She put a Band-Aid on it, and by Sept. 8, my niece’s wedding day, she had a large white gauze on her forehead in the wedding pictures. All the persistent questions precipitated a September visit to the doctor. On Sept. 20, an all-day surgery was performed, removing the better part of the top of her head. She gave the appearance of a little Egyptian mummy with her large turban and just her eyes, nose, and mouth exposed. There was a tube in the back of her head for drainage (which she later removed herself).

At 89 years old and in the condition described, after one day, the doctor asked if she was ready to go home. I had spent the night with Mom and found myself responding for her with an emphatic “No, she’s not going home today.” I wondered how Jesus felt when he threw the money changers out of the temple.

The elderly and sick of all ages need—must have—an advocate and one that is not easily impressed or intimidated. I know this from at least four experiences with hospitals and well-intentioned doctors. My advice: be not afraid; speak your mind; trust yourself; and be firm when you speak. Nobody knows your loved one better than you do. You intuitively know when you need to assert yourself for her safety. Trust me, you will know.

In late October and without family knowledge, my mother drove herself to the oncologist for a checkup. A biopsy was ordered, and on Nov. 5, Mom reported to Dad that the cancer had moved to the lymph system and more surgery was needed. The fabulous Dr. Alan Burke would perform the delicate facial surgery on the parotid gland. My father would not live to see the second surgery.

Dad had, in the last two months, developed high blood pressure and even experienced chest pains at Mass one Sunday, but dismissed



them. Mom's rediagnosis of cancer and the November election took a terrible toll on him. His candidate lost the presidential election.

On Nov. 8, sometime during the night, my dad got up to go to the bathroom, had a heart attack, and died. I remember it like yesterday.

I would suggest to you to exercise great caution when choosing someone for funeral arrangements. While it sounds easy, it is better for everyone to have a self-chosen option in which you and the family will later be comfortable. Do your homework. For this is a time of frayed nerves, fragility, and great fatigue. Emotions are unpredictable.

Maybe this has something to do with forgetting that life is a short journey leading to eternal love and light, our real destination, our purpose for being here. Earth is not our home but a stopping place to be used wisely and lovingly on our journey back to God. Someone once quipped that 99.9% of us will die at some point in our lives.

After Dad died, I cried quiet tears privately for what was left unsaid, for what could have been and never was. I had to refocus on Mom and the next surgery, the longest one. This one was grueling and took place in December before Christmas. I tried daily to open doors for Mom to say anything she wanted to other than "Whaddya bring me for lunch or dinner?" The silence sometimes was deafening. There was little conversation and sometimes outright anger.

Later that week, Mom started radiation. I asked her if she wanted to postpone it. Her comment, "Let's get on with it." I spent weeks with Mama in her daily radiation in the mornings. We would eat lunch if she felt like it. If not, around 4:30 p.m., I would get her settled in her bed at home and make sure she had her pills, books, food, drink, and straws.

I knew Mom was scared to death. She felt comfortable striking out at me because she knew I would take it and come back for more—and I did day after day. When God is with you, no one can stand against you.

It was Feb. 5 when Mom cried "Uncle . . . Ann," she said, without looking at me, "I'm done. Don't be mad at me." I replied, "Mama, it's your choice, your journey. I can share in it, but you are in charge. You do what you need to do for you." There is something to be said for the quality of life. She was done for then, but would face radiation again a year later.

Mom was approaching 91 and concerned only about her driving privileges and the reissuance of her license. License plates that read PRRFEC were on her Toyota Camry. We told Mom we would take her anywhere she wanted to go any time. The family matriarch replied, "I am an independent woman and need my wheels. I have things to do." PRRFEC!

I was remembering a trip for lunch with our son, an adventure that would take us to Richmond's west end. Mom directed and said she would pick me up. Arguing was fruitless. She proceeded to run two red lights. After the second episode, I said, "Mom, I think you went



through that light." She said, "Don't worry about it. Your dad did it all the time." Mom was strong, tough, and insistent on her independence. I learned to pick my battles. I tried to discourage her from driving. Should I have taken the car?—maybe. She said, "Ann, you drive like Moses." I said, "When did you see Moses drive?" She said, "You're not funny."

I could tell that, initially, she seemed embarrassed that I brought meals each day. Her embarrassment was channeled as anger. "I don't want it. Stop bringing food. There's too much of cetera et cetera day after day, the same."

Then one day, she said, "Whatcha got? Come in and sit with me." Before I left, she thanked me and expressed concern that I was wearing myself out. Independent folks are used to doing, not being served. It translates "dependence," and they hate that. Sickness involves humility and accepting help from those who love you. Mom really struggled with this.

So many things come to mind for caregivers. At or near the top of the list is the question of filters. Often, the sick and elderly lose their filters. I recall, each week, when Mom felt like it, we would go to lunch with one of my friends. I am blessed to have fabulous and compassionate friends. One showed Mom a picture of her daughter's new beau. Mom commented, "Wow, he's fat." I wanted to go under the table until I remembered that Mom is not me. I am not Mom. Why was I owning the embarrassment while Mom took a big bite out of her chicken salad?

Another incident that comes to mind is the frequent visits to the cardiologist. His office was on a top floor at the end of a hall at St. Francis Hospital. Mom insisted I drop her off at the front door of the hospital. I did not argue. Mom was tired and frightened. She was in pain, nauseous, and losing weight quickly.

I parked the car and took the back elevator up. Mom had not arrived upstairs. I got a queasy feeling in my stomach as she stepped off the elevator and flew by me to ask the nurse, "Why the hell is the heart doctor on a top floor and way down at the end of the hall?" After telling anyone who would listen they needed their heads examined, we went to our little exam room where Mom's blood pressure was off the charts. She argued that it was fine when she took it at home. We could not leave until the pressure reached a normal range.

Upon leaving, it was 1 p.m., and I asked Mom if she wanted to go to her favorite sandwich shop. Angrily she said, "No, take me home." She popped out of the car with her cane and turban, told me she would see me tomorrow, and went inside the house.

I knew that she was tired, scared, and lonely with Dad gone. She was very angry—angry that she did not see the dermatologist sooner, angry at aggressive squamous cell cancer, angry with herself. She needed some privacy to process or even to cry. I wanted to hold her, but I knew this was not the time. I peacefully pulled away only to return the next day, a new day.

I remember Forest Gump saying, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get." Just be ready. ★

*Ann Marie Hancock is a journalist, radio and television personality, and the author of You Can't Drive Your Car to Your Own Funeral, from which this article is adapted.*