

Dodging the Virus

Category: Omicron

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | January 9, 2022

Although I wasn't the last kid picked for teams in gym class, captains never clamored for me, either. That was sensible, given my nominal athletic skills. In softball or kickball, my defensive strategy consisted of trying to psychically deflect incoming balls from my sector of the outfield, desperate to avoid letting down my team with an embarrassing miss or fumble.

Dodgeball was a different story, however. When weather forced us inside, I got my chance to shine. Well, not shine exactly. The glow was more like the subtle gleam of pewter than the sparkle of sterling, but I did surprisingly well at dodgeball. For a big, slow kid who should have been easy to hit, I managed to keep a low profile by focusing on the balls and scurrying to wherever the opposition seemed least likely to slam them. This modest superpower kept me in play longer than many of my more athletically gifted classmates.

As the number of players dwindled and the stakes got higher, I was typically one of the last three or four kids on the court before a ball would finally send me to the bench with the rest of my team. I can't recall ever being the very last kid standing, but even late elimination from a game was heady stuff in those days.

The wild contagion of COVID's omicron variant makes me feel like I'm back on that dodgeball court, in a shrinking pool of people who haven't-yet-been infected. Now, the extreme dread of dismal outcomes during earlier waves has shifted to a grim equanimity: Resistance is futile. We'll all get it eventually. For most of us, the outcomes of infection won't be terrible as long as we're vaccinated. We hope.

Still, I keep doing what I can to stay well. I'm fortunate to be able to work from home. I minimize visits to public spaces, conscientiously masking and double-masking when I do go out. I temper risks with caution: A handful of indoor meals with fully vaccinated friends, at off hours in sparsely populated restaurants. It's my pandemic version of keeping the low profile that worked on the dodgeball court.

Of course, it occurred to me only years later—meaning just now—that if I couldn't throw accurately enough to take out my dodgeball opponents, I represented no tactical threat. Evading is easy when no one bothers to aim at you. In COVID-prevention terms, I don't know if my vigilance is paying off or if I'm just plain lucky. Probably both. But so far, I remain in play.

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