When COVID Came To Our Village

By Dr Zewlan Moor
Illustrated by Michael Magpantay
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Original illustrations by Michael Magpantay

When COVID Came To Our Village
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When news of COVID first came to our village, it was in dribs and drabs. Gossip here, a rumour there.

We heard about a sickness coming out of China.

*It is only in China, right?*
*No, now it is in Italy.*
*Uh-oh, it has crossed the border to Germany and Austria...*

Then, on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic. That meant the illness had spread around the world.

*You can only catch it if you get bitten by a bat.*
*No, if you eat a bat.*

The rumours kept coming. It was hard to know what to believe. I wished I could ask someone I trusted, like my cousin Wallis.
Wallis is a nurse in the city. She teaches other nurses all around the country. She is very busy, so we do not see her much. But every November she comes back home to see family and run a clinic.

She has a special talent for giving the starting-school vaccinations. She tells a lot of jokes. We are usually laughing so hard at the joke we do not realise we have been jabbed!
She paused. “The virus mainly affects older people and people with other illnesses. But even young, fit people have ended up in hospital.”

My friend Ao nudged me. His eyes widened.

“So I was very surprised to see cousin Wallis in our village in April 2020. The elders called a meeting to listen to what Wallis had to say.

“You have probably heard about the pandemic. The illness is caused by the COVID-19 virus. It makes it hard to breathe. It also causes cough and fever.”
“The virus has spread around the world,” Wallis said. “We think it spreads through respiratory droplets, via coughing and sneezing.”

Ao and I looked around. Could there be droplets sitting on the grass in front of us?

“Stop shaking hands. Wash your hands regularly. Our village is lucky to be a bit protected because it is so isolated, so far away from other places.”
“How long will it take?” asked Maba, one of the farmers.

“Up to two years,” Wallis said. Gasps came from the crowd.

“Looks like the rugby match is off,” I whispered to Ao.

Silence fell as what cousin Wallis said sunk in. How long would this virus hang around? What about the rugby match with the neighbouring village next Saturday?

“We pray scientists will make a vaccine soon,” Wallis said.

“How long will it take?” asked Maba, one of the farmers.

“Up to two years,” Wallis said. Gasps came from the crowd.

“Looks like the rugby match is off,” I whispered to Ao.
Cousin Wallis said, “People are working very hard. My friend is working in the lab 16 hours a day!”

Maba nodded. Those were the sort of long hours he and the other farmers had to work at harvest time to get the job done.

“In the meantime, we should try to stay at home as much as possible cousin” cousin Wallis said.

“Try not to touch your eyes, mouth or nose, because that is how the virus spreads. Cough into your elbow.”
We did all that she asked, but over time people got sick of staying at home, waiting for the vaccine.

Time dragged on and, after a year, people stopped being so scared of the virus. Instead, by mid-2021, they became more scared of the vaccine.

How do we know the vaccine is safe?
It seems to have been rushed out.

I worry about toxins.

I have heard the vaccines contain tracking devices! Linked up to the internet.

I heard overseas people are rejecting some brands and sending them here. Why should we get second best?
I wrote down all the worries in a letter and sent it to cousin Wallis.
She sent a reply a few days later. Our prayers had been answered! A vaccine was coming, in record time. It contained a tiny portion of the virus. Not enough to make us sick, but enough to stir up the army of cells in our blood that fights against the sickness. Just like the other vaccines we got before we went to school, the ones that made us stronger kids.
I got to work passing the message from cousin Wallis around the village. Most people listened and said they would come to get the vaccination.
The next week health workers brought vaccines to our village in cold-pack containers. They set up a tent with folding chairs as an open-air clinic.

Children were not allowed to get vaccinated yet. So most of my friends stayed home and looked after the little kids. I went along to the clinic in case I could help.
I marked out crosses on the ground to show where to line up, 1.5 metres apart.

I helped guide Maba to his seat. I poured him some water.

Then I watched as the health worker—his name tag said Peter—jabbed Maba.

Maba rubbed his arm, “Ow!”
Peter shook his head, “Ugh, that’s terrible. So terrible, it might just cheer people up! How about I fit you with a mask and you can stand at a safe distance and tell people jokes?”

So I did. And it was fun.
And that’s how we were protected when COVID really came to our village. Some of us got a bit sick, but nowhere near as sick as people in neighbouring villages who had refused to get vaccinated.

No one from our village had to go to hospital in the city.

But I know I will go to hospital one day. Just like my cousin Wallis.
You can use these questions to talk about this book with your family, friends and teachers.

What did you learn from this book?

Describe this book in one word. Funny? Scary? Colourful? Interesting?

How did this book make you feel when you finished reading it?

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About the author
Dr Zewlan (pronounced “Shoolen”) Moor is an Australian medical doctor and author whose passion for social justice was formed on childhood visits to family in the Philippines. The stark inequalities she saw at the age of 8 made a lasting impression. She is thrilled to be published by a publisher who embraces the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—Library For All. It fulfils two long-held dreams: to contribute to international public health through health promotion; and to bring the joy of reading and language to all children.
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