



From the camera rolls of American phones, glimpses of 2020

By The Associated Press
today



A year like no other: Americans shambled through it, doing the best they could under circumstances that were uneven at best — and sometimes downright punishing.

As they endured, here and there they pulled out their phones and did what so many people do these days: They snapped photos of the world around them.

Snapshots of 2020. We all have them. And behind some are the stories of an era of pandemic and polarization and progress and upheaval and daily life — the visual representations of the lives people experienced and the moments they captured.

Associated Press reporters went back to some of the people they interviewed during the news events of the past year and asked a straightforward question: What image on your phone's camera roll tells YOUR story of 2020?

For the next three days, we are sharing some of their answers in photographs and words, adding new ones each day.

DALE TODD, IOWA

The Aug. 10 [derecho](#) that hammered Cedar Rapids, Iowa, with winds up to 140 mph severely damaged tens of thousands of homes and businesses and devastated the community's tree canopy.

Much of the city of 130,000 people was without electricity for a week or longer. "It feels like we got [kicked in the teeth](#) pretty good," city councilor Dale Todd says.

But Todd says the lack of power and air conditioning caused something "sort of magical" to happen: Once-distant neighbors came together to help as the city started a massive effort to clear debris.

Todd's family and neighbors gathered every night for community meals, at first featuring meats that had to be used or would spoil. They talked about their days and looked at the stars from Todd's backyard without distractions from cellphones or television.

In this photo, Todd's wife, Sara, fixes the mask of their 21-year-old son, Adam, who has severe epilepsy. Todd calls the photo a reminder of the "powerful sense of community that evolved."

"That is what is going to get us through this pandemic, through this next year with the economy," he says, "and hopefully it can be a model for how we rebuild our politics and sense of democracy."

— By Ryan Foley

RUTH CABALLERO, NEW YORK



(Courtesy of Ruth Caballero via AP)

When home health nurse Ruth Caballero looks at an April photo of her wearing her full kit of pandemic protective gear, she sees a feeling: "how scared I was."

Covered in a surgical gown, face shield, plastic cap and two layers of masks and gloves, she was heading into a New York City apartment [to see one of her first coronavirus patients](#), just released from a hospital.

"I remember putting all of that on and saying to myself, 'Please, let me be able to be as effective medically to help this patient as much as I can. And please allow me to stay COVID-negative,'" recalls Caballero, who works for the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

Moments later, Caballero came face-to-face with the ravages of COVID-19, meeting a tremendously weakened patient who asked: "Nurse, did they send me home to die?"

"No, they sent you home to live," Caballero remembers saying. "And we're going to fight this together."

Caballero's cellphone photo is a portrait, one of many, of New York City's fearsome battle with the coronavirus. During an early April peak, it was blamed for over 750 deaths a day in the city alone. Still, Caballero glimpses more than those desperate times when she looks at that picture.

She also thinks of how different she felt two or three months later, as that first surge subsided, protective equipment shortages eased and she gained experience caring for coronavirus patients — and seeing them get better.

By then, "I looked forward to being able to provide them with nursing care," says Caballero, who now has worked with more than 50 COVID-19 patients. "I'm not afraid," she says. "Whatever I can do to help them recover, it is one of my greatest joys."

— By Jennifer Peltz

LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA, NEW YORK

Lin-Manuel Miranda already wears plenty of hats: He's a Broadway playwright and producer, singer, songwriter, actor, rapper and composer.

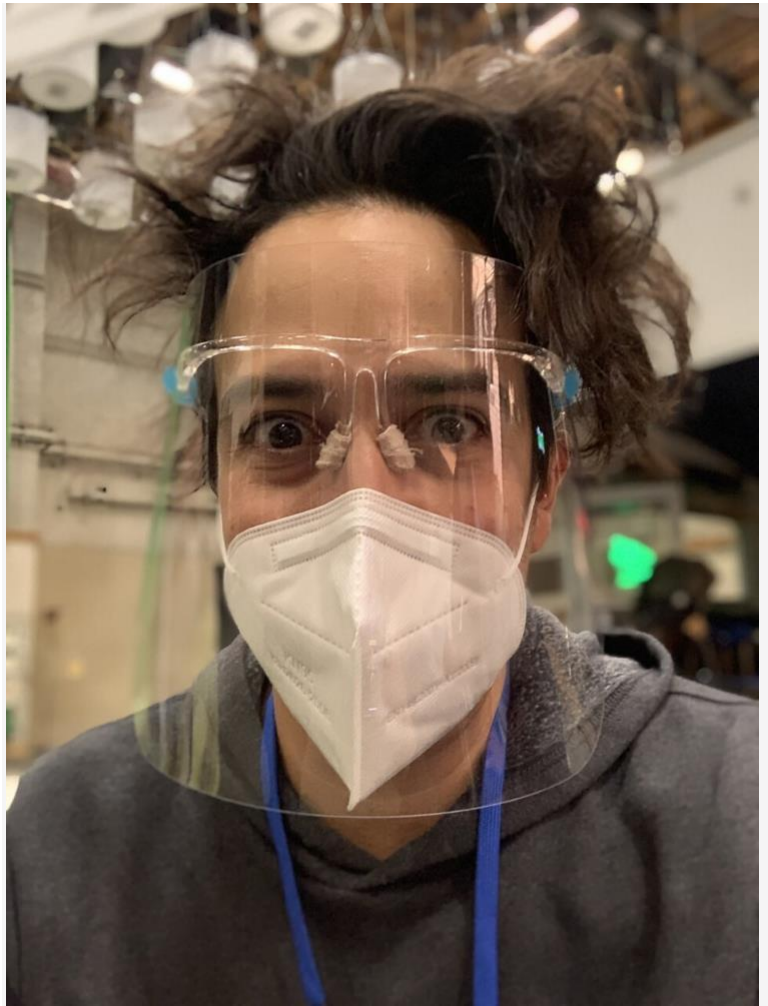
But at the beginning of 2020, he was set to add a new title to his resume: film director. Until the coronavirus pandemic changed his plans, that is. Netflix had to shut down production of his directorial debut, the musical drama "Tick, Tick... Boom!," earlier this year after only eight days of shooting.

"We started back up again in September. We wrapped just before Thanksgiving. And I'm incredibly grateful and proud to say that we were able to finish filming with no one getting sick, no delays," Miranda says.

With wild hair and eyes wide open, the entertainer — in a face mask and face shield — took a selfie on the New York set of the film, which stars Andrew Garfield and Vanessa Hudgens. It will be released next year.

"The picture you're seeing is me at the end of the day of our most complicated musical sequence. ... So that's why my hair is literally standing straight out of pure exhaustion," he says.

"We really kind of learned a new way of filmmaking," says Miranda, who this year released the 2016 filmed version of his Broadway musical "Hamilton" on Disney+ as well as "We Are Freestyle Love Supreme," the [Hulu documentary](#) highlighting his improv skills. "It was a lot on top of what is already a hard gig, but it also made finishing it all the sweeter."
— By Mesfin Fekadu, AP music writer

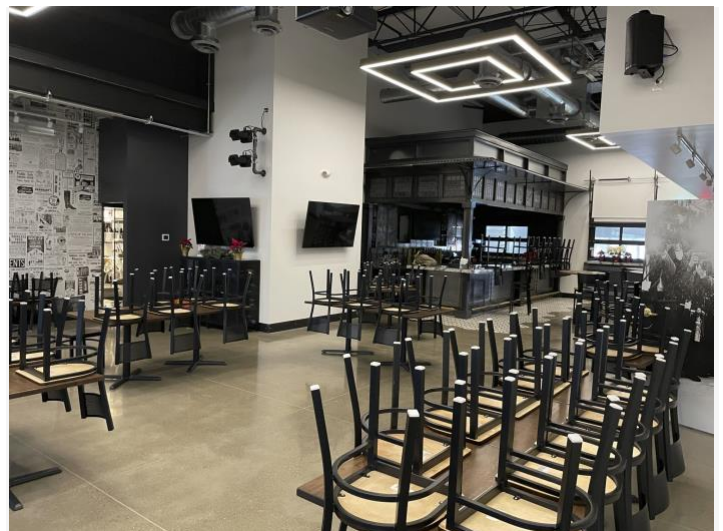


(Lin Manuel Miranda via AP)

ADAM RAMMEL, OHIO

Adam Rammel enjoyed seeing a full house at his brewpub, Brewfontaine, and had high hopes for his second location next door, the Syndicate. But for three months, from March 15 to June 5, the Bellefontaine, Ohio, restaurants were [closed](#) to indoor diners and limited to takeout and delivery. Rammel can't shake the image of upside-down chairs on tables in an empty dining room.

Social distancing and customer anxiety have reduced the restaurants' Friday and Saturday night crowds from an expected 130 people to 60 at best. With winter here, Rammel and his co-owners have given up on serving customers outdoors. Like other restaurateurs, he hopes the widespread availability of a coronavirus vaccine will bring back the crowds.



(Adam Rammel via AP)

Asked how he's been able to get through [more than nine months of anxiety](#), Rammel said he's been helped by "an amazing support system with partners, including my family. Trying to remain positive. And bourbon. Lots of bourbon."

— By Joyce Rosenberg, AP business writer