

Not Yet Storyworth 4C: A Day in The Life of a Covid Vaccine Tourist

This morning dawned (get it? ;-)) at 2:30 with the plan that a neighbor across the way would follow Dawn & Me to the park about 15 miles north from our winter home in Inverness. We had heard horror stories, and witnessed them ourselves, trying to get reservations for the Covid Vaccine at the Publix Pharmacies, at the time the only published means in Citrus County Florida. Only to be shut out without seemingly ANY ability to even LOOK at the availability of slots, they were snapped up so fast.

So we heard that the Citrus Department of Health (DOH) would be having a “wait in line” session from 7 AM this morning, with shots starting at 9, at a park 15 miles north of us. Having seen the messes in other counties, we decided to leave early and simply wait. Turned out that was not a good plan ;-)

But dutifully according to plan, we left at 2:30 AM with neighbor Carol following behind, since she did not know where it was. We had scoped it out beforehand. Turns out Carol NEVER drives at or above the posted speed limit, while I have a penchant for getting DOWN to it only on rare occasions ;-)) So it was a boring and tedious drive, and ultimately fruitless.

It became even more so when we arrived on the road at the Park entrance to find physical barriers, and illuminated signs warning not to wait nor block traffic. Which was reinforced by a Sheriff in his patrol SUV with the blinding light bar. So we headed to a place nearby we knew was not operating, figuring we’d wait in that lot. Only to find some barrier logs. We could easily have driven around them, but they were too obvious to not expect some repercussions had we done so.

I must say; it is doubly difficult to figure a new plan when you have someone in the car behind you who has NEVER driven behind you. I had a friend lose a really nice Subaru wagon because she was following a “friend” who didn’t know how to drive, and caused her to crash MY car when he drove like he had no idea she was there. So I parked another ¼ mile away at a closed gas station, only to have the same Sheriff turn on the light bar.

However, he quickly turned it off. So I sat and waited for some indication; I was off the road, parked in an entrance way to the gas station lot which in no way blocked ANYONE, but where we could readily get into the queue for the Park when the time came. But soon the Sheriff pulled up and rolled down his window to tell me we could not park there either, because “if everyone does, the station can’t operate”. Not sure I agree with his logic fully, but it was obvious we would lose the battle even if we were right. So Carol left to go back home. We toiled around looking for an open place, and thought we’d found a diner with lit signage saying so, only to see a “Closed” sign on the door.

The cop had suggested we might simply keep driving around, which made little sense to us, but we must not park along the road anywhere. So we, too, headed home, stopping at McD’s for breakfast and to top off the gas tank on the way. And set the alarm for 6 AM, reasoning that EVERYBODY would get the same treatment from the constabulary as we did. Not quite. When we got back to the park, cars were backed up for MILES in both directions, and LOTS of people were parking along the road, overwhelming the police.

I reasoned that we had about 35 minutes before the 7 AM gate opening as posted, so I drove to the west side of the park to turn around, at about the number of cars I figured would be moved just before we got to the gate at 7. Thankfully, more people were coming from the west, which was the ONLY side which was open eventually, and one of them let me into the line because a cop crossed in front of me to chase people from the shoulder. It’s dog eat dog here in the Sunshine State, when it comes to Covid Vaccines ;-)

In fact, a number of things changed in simply the past few days; because there were a bunch of “Vaccine Tourists” from both other states and other countries who had gotten slots, Governor DeSantis declared that ONLY those who could show they actually lived here in Florida, by means of some tax or utility bill or the like, would be allowed to get the shots, despite the Covid coordinator having previously indicating that ANY American was eligible because they were provided by the Feds. But that included Snowbirds like us, so we were back in the “lucky” over 65 group, the only non-healthcare workers so far on the hit list.

Anyway, we had thought we would offer Carol a ride with us, but her lights were all out, and she’d said she would drive herself about 6:30, which on our returning home seemed to not have happened. Probably because there were more cars in that line than could get shots anyway. In fact, my plan had worked almost perfectly per their signage, as we arrived at the gate at 7:02. And had at least 100 cars ahead of us. But they let at least another 500 in AFTER us, and lined us all up parked on the grass awaiting our turn in the order we had arrived into the park. We brought our filled-out forms, licenses, SunPass receipt showing our address, and our Title to the property, but they seemed to take our word for it simply because our forms stated that address.

They actually started shots about 9 AM, but they had clearly started allowing cars in the gate well before 7. We did not care; we were now obviously going to be in the first few waves of recipients because of my guessing the distance we’d need ;-) And at 10:10 AM each of us got our 1st shot of Moderna Vaccine, with cards instructing us where and when to get the 2nd shots, late in Feb. Keep your fingers crossed ;-)

We waited the requisite 15 minutes to be sure no adverse effects, and Dawn hit the fixed potty room there during that interim. I had used the same jar I keep by my bedside through the night, because I could use it in the car. And we headed home, arriving just after 11, feeling like we’d put in a whole day already ;-)

As Jess admonished us, we must continue using masks and avoiding people even after getting the shots, because there ain’t no guarantees of anything except those from Mr Murphy, and HIS are not the kind you want to cash in. So we’ll continue to be careful, but we feel we can breathe a LITTLE easier tonight than we did at 4 AM today ;-). We hope you all have luck in getting your vaccine as soon as possible, too ;-)

Joe Holzer 1/23/2021