

The Thrilling, Totally Boring Adventures of the Newly Vaccinated

A pandemic altered ordinary life. Shots are slowly returning us to our beautifully banal routines.



Illustration: Zohar Lazar

By Jason Gay
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The text messages from vaccinated friends arrive daily, reading like notes from brave explorers on faraway adventures.

You're never going to believe this, but.... I flew on an airplane.

I took the train. I haven't been on the train in 14 months.

I sat inside a restaurant. Incredible. I nearly wept when they brought me the menu.

Sometimes there's photographic proof: *I'm at the ballpark!*

Sure enough, there they are, amid a scattering of fans in a socially-distanced stadium.

Yes, it's a little ridiculous, crowing about mundane trips and the type of ordinary events we used to take for granted, but I appreciate every one of these notes. They feel like a hopeful sign. We're not yet back to normal—who knows how long that will take, and what normal will be like when we get there—but more and more people are vaxxed and feeling better about a cautious return to old haunts and habits.

Guess what.

What?

I worked in the office today!

Before the pandemic, I would have been confused by such a message. *Who brags about going into the office?* Now I am on the edge of my seat, like they're recounting a trip to the North Pole.

You worked at the office? Tell me everything! Was anyone there? Was the boss in? Were you in sweatpants? Was my desk still a mess? Did you go to the melancholy salad place? I miss the melancholy salad place.

To state the obvious: I am profoundly lucky. Not everyone has had the privilege to stay at home, wait it out. Those of us who could owe a great deal to those who could not. Case numbers show that this is far from over.

The vaccination effort, too, remains a work in progress, with lots left to do, but shots are starting to build momentum. Social media teems not only with proud, post-vaccination selfies but also first-time-in-a-while announcements.

First time I've _____ in a year!

Maybe it's a workout class. Maybe it's a favorite bar, newly opened. Maybe you're seeing vaxxed co-workers you've only seen on Zoom, now in person, in the flesh. (Don't they look different? They have feet!) Maybe you're wrestling alligators for the first time since your alligator wrestling league suspended its season and cost you the 2020 alligator wrestling championship.

It's slowly...coming...back, and while it's smart to be careful, I think it's OK to want to share upbeat events.

The best stories are the hug stories. Who doesn't like hearing those?

Hugged mom for the first time in a year.

Hugged grandpa for the first time in a year.

Hugged the neighbor's labradoodle for the first time in a year. Is that weird? I just love labradoodles.

I re-hugged my own mother just the other day. Let me confess something embarrassing: I'm not a great hugger. My poor mother has spent too many years putting up with feeble hugs from the arms of her deadbeat son. I have no idea why she puts up with me.

But this hug, the first hug in many, many months? I knew it was important. Vaccinated mom. Vaccinated child. A historic hug for the family unit. I'm not going to say it was my best hug, but it would probably land safely in my Top 20.

It's a whole new me. I'm running wild. I've ridden on the train four whole times this month. I'm writing this right now from a restaurant. Just call me Indiana Jones. Next week I might go into the office, too. Wish me luck. Adventure awaits.

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