

I remember when...

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A hug is a rather personal thing.

Generally speaking, you only embrace someone you know rather well or are very familiar with.

Although sometimes there is a hug-by-proxy type of thing where you are introduced to someone who is close to someone you know, where they give you a hug because it's a way of saying they welcome you into their life, or you are distantly related.

Several years ago, I noticed a trend in younger people ? generally middle school or high school age ? where hugging became the norm every time they saw someone they knew.

Because of my job, I spend considerable time in places like local arenas where younger people congregate.

I would see a group of five or six kids run into another group of five or six kids in the arena lobby, and they would all hug each other. Every kid hugged every other kid they just ran into.

I thought that was a little much considering they all probably saw each other that afternoon in school, but they were always smiling and happy, so no harm done.

Then COVID happened. Kids were learning from home, and there was a general 'no contact' rule pretty much everywhere.

Kids were taught to never touch anyone and remain six feet away from other people.

Now, those younger kids have moved into middle school and high school.

They still seem happy to see other people they know when they meet in the arena lobby, but the hugging culture seems to have disappeared.

Kids were taught that touching someone else means you could get their germs, and they seem to have taken that seriously ? no more hugging.

I would imagine the whole 'cooties' thing has a lot more meaning in school yards these days.

I bought my last vehicle during the height of COVID. It was a bit of a challenge because vehicles were getting scarce, and you had to make an appointment just to enter the dealership to look at a car.

I bought a vehicle and made an appointment to go in and pick it up.

A good friend of mine worked at the dealership, and when she saw me, she came out to say hello and gave me a hug because it had been a while since we had seen each other.

The salesperson looked absolutely shocked that her co-worker had actually touched a customer.

I didn't mind at all.

However, later, I hoped this wouldn't turn into some kind of situation where the salesperson would run to the general manager and

announce that my friend had touched a customer and possibly set off a germ chain reaction that would result in the dealership being fined and shut down.

The COVID era changed so many things, and I think we are yet to realize the final impact.

I know of quite a few sports groups, clubs, and organizations that were either banned from meeting during the pandemic or members simply stopped attending out of fear of being in any kind of social setting.

Many of those groups simply faded away and have never recovered.

I also know of several service businesses that were forced to close and never reopened.

Just a few days before the pandemic was announced and some businesses were ordered to close or greatly restrict their service, I interviewed a young woman who had just realized her lifelong dream of opening her own cafe.

A few days later, she was forced to close her doors and was only allowed to serve pick-up orders. It wasn't enough, and she had to close shop.

Her dream disappeared because of the pandemic.

The pandemic has also drastically altered the way we say goodbye to loved ones who have passed away.

Funerals during COVID were very restrictive. My own mother died at the start of the pandemic, and initially, we were told we could have only five people attend any kind of funeral, including the officiant.

That number was increased to 10 prior to the service. Her funeral ended up being a family meeting at the funeral home prior to a drive to the cemetery and a short service where the funeral director insisted we all stand six feet apart.

The good part of that service was that many people actually did arrive, and parked their cars in a ring around the cemetery and watched from afar so as not to break distancing rules.

Since COVID, many people have been eliminating funerals altogether. After announcing the death, the obituary states, 'a celebration of life will happen at a later date.'

However, with rare exceptions, those celebrations never take place.

It is sad to think we are losing a tradition of a fond final farewell.

The COVID pandemic took many things away.

Some things may return, but others are gone forever.