

FAMILY REUNION Camden (left) and Aaron (right) catch up with their grandfather for the first time in months. Manit was born in Lampang, Thailand, and spent his adult life as a doctor.



MASKED CELEBRATION (Left to right) Camden's father Mike, brother Aaron, mother Mae, grandfather Manit, grandmother Vara and Camden gather for Thanksgiving.

MANIT'S STORY

Strong through separation

Grandfather of junior Camden Reeves Manit Kantipong fought a diligent battle against COVID-19 this year — and came out on top.

For many elderly men and women across the world, the pandemic has been isolating. Medical conditions that come with age have placed seniors into an especially high-risk category, and many have had to spend time away from their loved ones.

Junior Camden Reeves's grandfather, Manit Kantipong, has experienced this isolation at a life care facility apart from his family.

"2019 is when my grandpa first went to the hospital," Camden said. "He was there for a few weeks, maybe a month. After that, he moved to Life Care Center of Plano, and he hasn't really left there besides going to dialysis treatment a couple of times a week."

Struggles with dementia have separated Manit even further from his family.

"He's been experiencing some memory loss, so he's disconnected from a lot of what he used to be accustomed to," Camden said. "It definitely doesn't help that he's separated from us."

As COVID-19 spread throughout the last year, visits from Camden and his family became less frequent to protect at-risk tenants of the life care facility.

"When COVID hit, we really were not able to visit him at all," Camden said. "It was all FaceTime, and he's not really great about answering his phone, so we were barely able to talk to him around September and October. They started letting people visit outside if they showed proof of a negative PCR test, so my mom started going a lot. We all went as a family two or three times."

Before the facility allowed visitors, Camden and his family found different ways to communicate with Manit.

"We wrote messages on pieces of paper and taped them to his window," Camden said. "He told us he really liked it because they stayed up for a long time. Even through storms and stuff, he would just look at them and be reminded that he still had us on the outside."

Thanksgiving of 2020 was a chance to reunite the family. Manit was finally able to join Camden and his family — even if it was just for a night — and he spent almost three hours with his relatives.

"It was great to reunite with him, and it definitely cheered my mom up," Camden said.

The Reeves planned to see Manit again on Christmas, but Camden's brother — Aaron — tested positive for COVID-19, preventing the family from visiting.

Camden remembers how strange Christmas Eve celebrations felt seeing his brother in person only a few times throughout the day.

"Christmas Eve definitely felt a lot different," Camden said. "Especially with my brother not around. We would leave food at his door as well as new clothes, soap and shampoo, but we didn't really get to see him. When we watched the Christmas Eve service online, he just signed in on his computer and watched it while we were all downstairs."

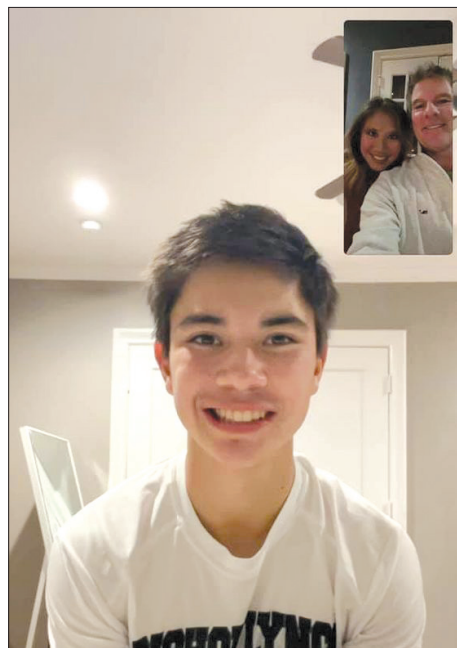
Christmas Day was not much different. Aaron was able to spend only half an hour downstairs with his family before he had to return to his room.

"I don't know if it was us or 2020 overall, but the Christmas spirit didn't feel the same as it normally does," Camden said. "When Aaron was getting his gifts, he was in this far corner away from the rest of us with both a mask and face shield on."

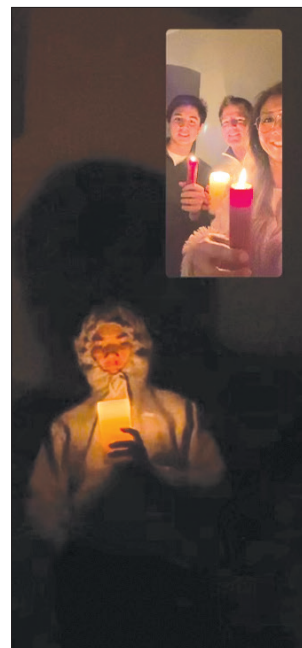
Despite their troubles, Camden and his family have received a lot of support from their friends and relatives.

"Lots of people have reached out to me to offer prayers," Reeves said. "Even though I haven't told a lot of students outside of my church group, we have received a whole lot of healthy support."

Manit contracted COVID-19 Jan. 13. His recovery period was a time of uncertainty for Camden's family — when he tested positive, Life Care Center of Plano staff moved him to the COVID-19 wing of the facility. During his time in this wing, Manit didn't communicate with his family, and his mental health deteriorated, suffering heavily from loneliness and depression. Eventually, Manit was moved to a hospital.



MAKING IT WORK After testing positive for coronavirus, Camden's brother Aaron joins the family via FaceTime on Christmas Eve for a makeshift candlelight service (right) and to catch up and open Christmas presents (left).



"We couldn't get all of the information about how he was feeling, but I did think it was a good sign that he was in the hospital and was getting better care," Camden said.

Fortunately, Manit is now virus-free, a relieving development for Camden and his family.

"He no longer has COVID, but it was definitely scary for all of us," Camden said. "I'm sure it was scary for him knowing how risky it is, and how dangerous the virus can be."

Through observing COVID-19 guidelines, Aaron has high hopes for the future.

"Stay positive and trust that everything's going to turn out fine," Aaron said. "Stay safe, wear masks and do everything you're supposed to, and everything should be fine."

Although filled with stress and worry from the beginning, 2020 is in Camden's rearview mirror. With widespread vaccine distribution on the horizon, he's cautiously optimistic for what's to come.

"The vaccine is a really good sign," Camden said. "We're moving away from this whole year and the craziness with COVID, but I still think it's going to be pretty scary. I don't know what it's going to be like going back to restaurants or stores without a mask on, but I'm looking forward to transitioning back to normal life. I want to have a normal senior year experience. We can only hope it's all completely back to normal by then — but you never know."

STORY Austin Williams, Toby Barrett

PHOTOS Courtesy Mae Reeves