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Groceries

I went to the grocery store.

My television had been on a nonstop loop of the news showing cleared out toilet paper, disinfectant, and canned good grocery isles. Neighbors were starting to ask each other for suggestions of where to go to find some supplies so they can prepare to hunker down in their homes for a few weeks.

A few years ago everyone here was afraid that gasoline would run out and flooded all the gas stations in the neighborhood until all the stores had to close their doors due to a lack of supply. Come to find out, that was just a weekend Carolina rumor that disappeared as fast as it showed up when gas was restored that Monday. Rumors catch on here like wildfire and by the time you find out the truth -everyone in your neighborhood has already taken some sort of extreme action to protect themselves, like filing up all of their cars and all the gas cans they own to make sure they have gas when it's all gone.

We have the same kind of mania behavior happen each time a hurricane or any kind of natural disaster threat comes or way. So I was prepared for chaos when I left the house.

The parking lot was full, there were long checkout lines and only 3 carts available in front that normally has dozens of carts. "Alright, let's get this over with," I said to my husband

as he pulled out his phone to start checking off the list.

We quickly made it through the produce section, then the deli, and started walking towards the frozen section when we saw a crowd gathered around the poultry section.

A loud voice came from the crowd yelling, "I don't know why all of ya'll are surprised! Jesus told us he would show us and now it's time!" I couldn't tell who was yelling in the crowd but knew I didn't want to go anywhere close to it. I stood in the aisle over to avoid the crowd and sent my husband over to get the chicken breast. He came back a few minutes later shaking his head with disappointment.

"Went through all that and they ran out of chicken breast. Why do they need to stand right there? People are acting crazy."

People walking by us had confused expressions on their faces too.

We finished our list; substituting for things that were no longer in supply. Still staying at our weekly budget because, like I said, this is nothing new. I'll just wait until next week when the hype dies down and things are back to normal.

After we checked out, I noticed the crowd in the frozen food section was still there and would probably be until the store closes. Someone felt the spirit to preach in the grocery store (not normal) with plenty of people willing to listen.

My phone rang when we pulled into the driveway, we stopped

to listed to the voice mail over the car speakers, "Good evening this is the school director, in keeping with the Governor's order, schools beginning Monday through at least the end of this month will be closed. During this time all athletic and extracurricular activities are canceled..."

I have to go back to the grocery store today.

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School

"Good Morning! Wake up, get dressed. Eat breakfast, let's go! I'll see y'all downstairs!"

The schools were open for two hours, allowing the kids to drive-by and pick up their work. The elementary school was open earlier than the high school; so we would go to my son's school first, go to Target for school supplies, then drop by the high school on the way home.

"What day is it, we should keep a calendar to mark off the days until we go back to school, " my son said as he ate his cereal. "I'll mark the calendar and put it by your side," as I moved our Las Vegas themed calendar from above the stove to the wall above his side of the kitchen table marking the days off to show him we were on Wednesday, March 18th of 2020.

My daughter came downstairs shortly to negotiate her homeschool hours with the knowledge she collected from her friends a few minutes earlier about North Carolina school

cancellations being extended beyond the month we're told in South Carolina. "Let's just go based on what we've been told by the school so far, if things change - we'll change our plans," I said in an attempt to keep a sense of normalcy in her complex teenage mind.

We drove to the bus loop of the elementary school and were met by a 5th grade teacher, "Here's your packet of online assignments, here's the information for the specials, and do you need school supplies? Oh yea and do you want to take home a little aquarium?" She said as she walked back towards the school to grab the aquarium and supplies we didn't agree to but she knew we would. "Yes, thank you so much," I said as my daughter passed the aquarium and supplies back to my son. "You guys stay safe and we'll see you in a few weeks!" She said as she walked away waving quickly to us as she approached the car behind us.

We walked by the grocery section for snacks and noticed the bare isles of meat, eggs, bread, and toilet paper at Target after picking up school supplies. We grabbed a few things from the frozen section and made our way to check out. There were two open cashiers available but a long line for the self check registers. We went to the cashier - she looked happy to have some sort of activity going on in her space to break up the boredom of her day.

People were starting to prefer machine interaction over human more; fearing anyone near them could possibly give them

the Coronavirus. I avoided the machine because no one was wiping them clean from person to person, the cashier was clearly keeping her area very clean to protect herself and others.

We stopped by the high school for my daughter to pick up her instrument to record her practicing for her band director on the way home. I got them organized in their new homeschool spaces before going into my office.

"Good Morning and welcome, I hope you all had a great weekend. It's 11am my time, I'm going to go ahead and get started. How's everyone doing?"

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Work

North Carolina's coronavirus cases exceed 1,000; Gov. Cooper's stay-at-home order begins Monday. South Carolina governor shuts down non-essential businesses statewide.

Non-essential workers don't have the option to work in the office anymore. Unless you are going to grocery store, hospital, or liquor store - the local police are enforcing the new order.

Working in the office is a preference for some people. Socializing and building relationships throughout the day was their normal routines. After going in the office was no longer an option for them, a few came to meetings consistently with complaints about how uncomfortable their new working environment was making them feel.

Surprisingly the people who work with us overseas were expected to take a dive in productivity but actually increased their workload. Removing the commuting time and providing them with laptops to work from home allowed them to do more than before. In hindsight, that makes a lot of sense.

Each state has been making their decisions around enforcing a order they feel people with common sense would be able to do if only recommended. Without enforcing; cities were having a large amount of crowds at parks, beaches, and even different house parties were popping up.

People weren't taking this serious.

At work, the label COVID-19 has started to be the buzzword for all projects to use to make sure everyone in the business would consider your work as essential during this time of emergency. By the time the directives make it down to the front-line the messages are interpreted and twisted different ways; making it difficult to determine the best decisions to support customers who are feeling the same emotional stress and reached out to help them translate all the changes.

How does the change impact them? What should they do now? When should they make decisions?

Some people seem to be tone def and continue as normal operations - ignoring the chaos around them. Others have been paralyzed by the changes. Mental health support is starting to be publicized more as it's starting to be very apparent - some

people are going through trauma.

My approach is to make sure everyone in the house keeps a routine or a rhythm to their day. In such an unpredictable time, the routines are a sense of comfort I can control. Although chaos is going on out there, we know what time to expect everyone in the kitchen for breakfast and when to expect to smell food cooking for dinner. We all have our dedicated work spaces and know where to find each other throughout the day.

Routines are also what I use to support my team at work, consistent meeting times and being available during the same hours creates a sense of security for them. Everyone really just wants something to depend on because the world around us is changing at such a rapid speed - we all don't know what to expect each hour of the day.

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Spring

I woke up in the morning with a sore throat and a cough...oh no, do I have the virus!

After laying in the bed contemplating where I would quarantine myself in the house - I noticed the window was open. My husband opened the window in the middle of the night which brought in so much pollen in the room that a layer of green across my night stand.

Realizing the allergies was the culprit of my sore throat;

I closed the window on my way to the bathroom. Claritin allergy medicine and a warm cup of coffee cleared me right up.

The weather guy working from home on the news mentioned the pollen levels in the Carolinas was extremely high yesterday but with everything going on any hint of illness is blown outta proportion in my mind. The weather conditions seem to get diluted down being mixed between the White House updates and our local news. Not too long ago, the weather was an important topic to discuss along with any local crime or business developments.

The bees are out and more birds are in the yard chirping loudly to each other as they fly from tree to tree. I've opened all of the house windows to let fresh air flow into each room. Uncluttering and whipping things down has been the constant activity in the house to help everyone forget about the fact that we can't go anywhere.

Speaking of housework, we ordered painting supplies from Home Depot last week. After hours of watching YouTube videos and training classes on painting - we committed to the project. From picking the right colors, to covering holes, to choosing the overall house design - we watched it all. Originally this was something we planned to hire someone to do but what the hell - we're home. We can do it ourselves and save some money.

Everyday since then packages have been delivered to our carport daily. The news advised we leave all packages outside for at least 24 hours to make sure if any virus on the boxes

would be gone before we bring them in the house. So we won't know if we have everything needed to paint our rooms until a few days after the deliveries stop.

Worrying about the next time we can go back to our normal lives has been replaced with thinking about home improvement. We've seemed to accept the fact that we'll be here for a while and the warm spring air is helping maintain positive spirits.

Spring is when a lot of things are born and winter stuff can be put away until next season.

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Beaches

Over the last few weeks, people have been showing numerous acts of kindness through these challenging times. From stocking up food banks to local artists creating paintings for healthcare workers to mask-makers buffering the medical community's tight supplies. A lot of people are distracting themselves from the anxiety of the unknown by shifting their focus towards helping others.

Although it might be too early; South Carolina has decided to open their beaches and retail stores next week. People out of state still can't enter, so hopefully with that limitation along with most people still staying at home - the number of cases won't spike back up. Opening the economy back up will help struggling small businesses and their employees get back to

making a living to support their families. The stimulus checks or any other government financial support won't last long.

At my house, we're still focused on painting all the rooms in the house. We have paint and supplies spread across rooms and available to anyone bored who wants to grab a brush or a roller. All of our food has been delivered from local farms, wineries, and Amazon - leaving out the house hasn't been necessary except for walks around the neighborhood.

We've adjusted to using what we have available versus going out to get what we need throughout the week. This time has really shown how resourceful we can be with the supplies we have on hand. I like the way our family has been making things from scratch and learning new skills. My daughter taught herself how to bake, my husband taught himself how to use a smoker, and my son and I enjoy all of the homemade food coming our way.

We've had a few days of cold temperatures, so it's still too soon to transplant our garden outdoors. Hoping for more consistent weather next week to move the plants out. The garden will reduce our dependence on frozen produce and help us supplement meat more; if the production is reduced like they've been saying on the local news.

Nothing will be back to normal as we knew it before the pandemic but in some ways - I'm okay with that. Some changes are for the best and I hope they stay. Forcing ourselves to be more self-sustainable has been a game changer because we're

seeing how much we really didn't need things that we thought were mandatory, like going to the grocery store throughout the week or consistently driving back and forth to the city for things that could be delivered.

Let's see how South Carolina does with reopening beaches and retail stores. North Carolina is watching and will probably follow along if the virus case count doesn't change dramatically. If everything goes well, people will slowly be able to get back to work and build our communities back up.

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Open for Business

Restaurants and stores opened in South Carolina opened Monday. The stay at home order was lifted and the Governor advised that he fully expects us to use common sense - still keep a reasonable distance away from others. Some people seemed to go out and dine in restaurants; others stood in line waiting for their favorite retail stores to open. Most people are choosing to stay put because the news is still reporting new cases and deaths on a daily basis.

Unemployment checks are paying more than what some people were making on their job; so some places are having a hard time bringing their employees back to work. The fear and risk of returning is too high for some to go back to their jobs and continue business as usual. A lot of companies are offering

virtual employment options that make them more competitive than places that have not adjusted to allow that level of flexibility.

Our family is choosing to stay at home; luckily my husband and I can be productive at our jobs virtually. We live near farms who deliver our meat and Amazon/Walmart deliveries make up for the rest. At the end of this month we'll start weekly pickups with our CSA and will buy our groceries online at a grocery store nearby who will deliver your groceries to your trunk at a scheduled time.

School has been canceled for the rest of the school year which makes me think it must be tough for some people to go back to work without having a place for their kids to go during the day. My son's teacher came to our house to visit which was a huge surprise because we live at least 10 miles away from the school. Her love for students was intense enough to drive miles to each child's home to give them goodie bags asking them how they are doing to check into their emotional well being.

Every event my daughter was involved with in high school has been changed to virtual meetings. College entrance exams have been changed to online tests, state tests have been canceled, and in some states children with their temporary driver's license can bypass their driving exam requirement to get their license. Although we can't predict next school year, a lot of discussion is happening around what we will do if school

doesn't resume in the fall. What will the new normal look like at school? How will the kids adjust back into going to class after being out for so long?

Other states, including North Carolina, extended their stay at home orders for another month. Although we have similar statistics, I guess our state felt it's worth the experiment to save the local economy. Places such as Charleston and Myrtle Beach are high volume vacation areas who would take a huge economic loss if they had to keep everything closed through the summer. Millions of dollars would be lost but would it be worth lives being lost? I guess time will tell if the decision was the best direction for us to go in or if this is too premature of a risk to take.

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When it Rains

We went out to pick-up food from our favorite restaurant on the Catawba river last weekend.

People were pouring into the streets when we got near the parking lot. Women walking with strollers, men walking their dogs, and crowds of teens preparing their canoes on the trail at the end of the road. No masks in sight.

The waiters at the restaurant had masks on but customers were not using the same level of caution. A false sense of security was in the air and people of all ages were acting like

nothing ever happened.

Although new cases and deaths are still being reported on a daily basis, social distancing practices took a back seat to enjoying the weather in crowds. Even our Amazon deliveries that used to show up on time have slowed down their pace due to outbreaks that impact their service level agreements. How can people ignore reality?

Well, if deaths and illness doesn't work then mother nature might have something else for them. Hurricane season is starting early here. Hurricane Arthur poured on the outer banks and will stay in that area for a while until it moves away towards Bermuda. Strong winds and flooding water has a way of making people stay home.

A few lessons I learned this weekend:

- Don't let your car sit for weeks; your tires will go low
- A lot of people think the state opening means an end to social distancing
- Local businesses need our support to stay open
- Children are sad watching adults not make good social distancing decisions
- The local news isn't displaying the reality of what's going on in the Carolinas
- Delivery services may not be ready for another stay at home order

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Black Lives

Protests to stop systematic racism made the virus take a back seat for the last few weeks.

Generations of my family were emotionally triggered by the events in different ways. People old enough to have seen this kind of frustration happen before were paralyzed with heavy memories of injustice while the younger ones were outraged by the realization that the world isn't as fair as they thought.

Everyone is being forced into hard discussions around racial issues that, if not dismantled, will result in another generation of pain.

Our towns were torn up however it felt as though the destructive aspect of the protests were not done by locals. The businesses that were impacted were places black and brown people shop versus the more posh places in the suburbs. Someone knowing the dynamics of the town would have known the best places to make more of a financial impact.

The peaceful massive protests led by the NAACP and other local organizations made the most impact and gained the most attention by decision makers. Most people seem to want to be on the right side of history.

The most difficult part of this has been explaining this to my children. Their questions are difficult - why wouldn't the

cops be found guilty if we saw what happened? How long will they keep the police in jail? How can we help make black lives matter?

My responses have been very straightforward because I'd rather them hear the truth from me than make up their own minds based on social media.

We've seen this happen in the past and the killers have been found not guilty. Systems didn't change and everyone continued on with life as if nothing happened - except for black people who keep the feeling of "lesser than others" in their hearts. Hopefully this time we will see change. Hopefully this generation will get things right by demanding equality. I will help and support them anyway I can to promote progress towards a better global society that values diversity.

South Carolina is still completely open. People are walking around without masks and sitting in crowded restaurants while the number of virus cases still rise daily. North Carolina has taken the phased approach and just did their phase 2 last week; barber shops and restaurants have opened their doors. They still have capacity restrictions in place.

The schools are preparing their plans for the fall. Deadlines for deciding if they will have everyone remain at home or have an adjusted in class experience are due by July. Some local companies are allowing people to volunteer to go into the office a few days out of the week.

We have still been social distancing - wearing our masks and only going out for essentials. Until we have a reliable vaccine or the numbers of cases stop increasing, our trust is based on common sense versus decisions made solely to save the economy and not lives.

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The Spike

Cases in the Carolinas spiked and we know why.

Like I told you before, as soon as the Governor opened everything a lot of people here stopped social distancing. I've been the only person wearing a mask in a lot of scenarios during the past few weeks. From the crowded restaurants to the overpopulated beaches - even whole families in the grocery stores are not taking this virus seriously.

Until this week.

Multiple days of over 1,000 cases set new record highs. Debates around if masks should be mandatory are now becoming more visible because there's still those people who don't want to be told what to do by the government. Concerns around allowing the police monitor and reprimand people for not wearing masks, especially during this time of civil chaos, has delayed

what has been a quick decision in other states.

Myrtle beach, Charleston, Hilton Head, Outer Banks, and all of the other coastal town's economies depend on people to come visit during this time; but are they trading off the well being of their residents? As hospitals fill up to capacity, residents worry about being able to get proper care if they experience serious symptoms.

The school district has asked the public to start wearing masks to help make it possible for the children to return to school in the fall. Decisions are being discussed around how school will look in the fall (in person, virtual, a mixture of both) but won't matter if the cases continue to rise.

Deliveries are starting to be more unreliable, stores are starting to run out of certain meat, and we're running out of new movies/shows to stream.

I'm not sure what the answer will be - hoping for more clarity in the next few weeks.

