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The Quarantine Diaries #2: We're all in this Together

Friday, March 27th, 2020

Last night, my husband and I spent some time looking out the window. All around us, apartment buildings were full of light. Even the old, gray Communist block down the street—the one I assumed was condemned—had suddenly sprung to life.

A man in his living room did squats. A woman folded laundry. We saw people cooking, eating. A couple danced in their kitchen.

I thought back to a few months earlier when Luke and I were on an Alfred Hitchcock kick. We watched "Rear Window," and the whole time I kept thinking, *Why doesn't anyone just close their blinds?*

In case you haven't seen it, the lead actor, Jimmy Stewart, is confined to a wheelchair—and in turn, his apartment. And because this came before the internet or even television, the only form of entertainment comes from watching neighbors through his window. There's a dancer, an artist, several married couples... I won't give away the whole plot; so I'll just say it's a Hitchcock movie, and Stewart sees something he shouldn't.

It's funny how quickly your opinions can change based on your situation. When we watched the film, I kept thinking, *This guy is seriously creepy. Just read a book and mind your own business.* But now, just 14 days into social distancing, I totally get it.

This morning, when I went downstairs to make coffee, Luke was already in the kitchen, staring out the window. "What are you doing?" I asked. "I'm just waiting for our neighbor to look over here. I want to say hi."

Mind you, he has not once spoken to this neighbor, nor has he ever attempted to wave.

I chuckled to myself as I put the perculator on the stove. When it was ready, I poured us both a cup, kissed him on the cheek, and headed upstairs for another day of online teaching.

A fifteen-minute Zoom check-in with my advisory kids, then an hour of Zoom workshoping with journalism students. Then a 15-minute break before the next class. During breaks, I usually go to the bathroom, do some stretches, and maybe make a tea. But today, I found myself unable to look away from the man across the street.

From my office, I have the perfect bird's eye view of his balcony—the one he built with his own hands just last year. It juts out from the attic and is filled with so much stuff it makes you wonder what the rest of the house looks like. Potted plants, a grill, several chairs and a table, gardening tools, paint buckets—and today, a work bench.

Hunched over, eyes focused, he carefully measured pieces of plywood, then placed them on the bench, perfectly aligned. He plugged in the power saw and began to slice with precision. Once he was finished, he sat down with one of the wooden blocks and a small tool and began whittling.

A Google Calendar reminder went off, breaking my concentration. Time to call my next class. One after another, all 20 students entered our Zoom classroom. Some had virtual backgrounds (think: outer space, the beach. One kid even had a giant frog perched behind him), while others displayed images of their bedrooms or their parents' offices. Occasionally, someone's mom or dad came into the frame—or, on the rare occasion—a younger sibling.

During the last two weeks, I've seen action figure collections, childhood treasures, and have met multiple dogs and cats. I've had one-on-one calls to help students create schedules and get organized. I've also been there to listen to many of them cry when it's all been a little too much.

In the evenings, Luke and I have gotten into a routine: talk about our days, rummage through the fridge and cupboards to see what we can throw together, convince one another not to drink alcohol, plop on the couch, and watch the latest episode of *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon.

I'd never really watched *The Tonight Show* before the quarantine, but when a friend shared a [YouTube link](#) to the first "at home" edition, I was hooked. Fallon's wife operates the camera, his girls draw the artwork and take turns interrupting the monologue. Guests are interviewed over Zoom, and make comments about Fallon's interesting home decor. Viewers get the rare opportunity to see celebrities on their couches, at their pianos, in their kitchens. Last night, Alec Baldwin rolled his eyes as his children treated his body like a jungle gym.

I guess it's kind of like those "Celebrities Are Just Like Us" features in gossip magazines. You know, "J. Lo shops for her own groceries!" "Beyonce goes to Starbucks!" "Chris Hemsworth surfs at a local beach!" Only now, these people are working from home—just like many of us.

It's been a strange two weeks, and things are only bound to get stranger. But it is nice to know that we're all in the same boat. (Well, not the same boat. More like millions of boats, at least a meter apart from one another, out to sea, without a scheduled return date).

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Quarantine Diaries

14 Comments

Jill Graddy POSTED AT 15:55H, 28 MARCH
A GREAT piece, Jen. A sure sign of the times.

Barbara L Feedricksen POSTED AT 18:03H, 28 MARCH
You inherited your daddy's knack for writing. Probably a little better!

Admin_jennifer POSTED AT 10:14H, 29 MARCH
I don't know about that, Barbara, but thanks 😊

Candace Barron POSTED AT 18:37H, 28 MARCH
I watched his show Thursday night, and also was entertained by the format. It was a great escape from these troubled times. I also liked your personal allegory, comparing your current life to the movie, *Rear Window*, which I remember well. Hoping your husband connects with a wave to your neighbor! It could lead to a friendship. They could hold up signs!!

Admin_jennifer POSTED AT 10:15H, 29 MARCH
Thanks for the comment, Candace! Great idea about the sign; maybe that can be his Sunday creative activity! 😊

Christine Taylor POSTED AT 20:15H, 28 MARCH
Another great one. Thanks Jenn

Admin_jennifer POSTED AT 10:15H, 29 MARCH
Thanks so much! 😊

Patty Blank POSTED AT 00:30H, 29 MARCH
I never watched Fallon either until he started the at home shows. He has a very interesting life. I loved his replay of Nicole Kidman's interview about their first meeting.
As far as viewing other people...you know I live on a ski resort in Colorado, right? Well March is always our busiest month of the year for tourists. For the first 2 weeks I enjoyed watching 100s of skiers and boarders of all sizes, shapes, ages and sexes everyday as they crossed the parking lot behind my condo on their way to the lifts. It is always so bright and brilliant sun, no one can even see me the parking lot behind my patio door. As the tiny ones would pass I admired the added tutu on the pink clad girl and the nosaur helmet even on the boy. Which ones were headed to the lessons because they loved being on the mountain and which ones were just assigned to a class because mom and dad wanted the day to themselves. (Many of my friends teach these lessons, I can tell you the second is the most common answer I hear). Then there are a group of girls and then a group of guys about 5 minutes later. At the end of the day they return 2 by 2. Lucky guys!! We also have so many seniors! The man usually walks 5 feet in front of his partner carrying both sets of skis on the way to the lifts. Coming back I will be the woman is 5 feet ahead of the man and she is still walking straight up and carrying her own skis, while he is limping and pulling his skis in a complimentary wagon. I think about where they live: Denver, somewhere in the US or from a foreign country. I wonder where they are staying, how long they will stay and why they picked my resort to begin with. Oh those silent thoughts are all gone now. Since March 15 when all the ski resorts closed all the tourists have disappeared. Now I wonder when and if the summer crowd will even show up this year.

Admin_jennifer POSTED AT 10:18H, 29 MARCH
Thanks for the comment, Patty! You should start your own series of "The Quarantine Diaries." Definitely strange, worrying times. Hoping you can enjoy the silence and stillness until the skiing dinosaurs and ballerinas return. xo

Craig Davis POSTED AT 03:34H, 29 MARCH
Very much enjoyed the window into your world as we all cope with the same crisis. And we all love in a Zoom world right now. This week I attended a wedding in California from Florida and participated in a series of interviews with Miami Dolphins players via Zoom. It is a vital connection for all of us now.

Admin_jennifer POSTED AT 10:21H, 29 MARCH
A wedding, huh? Now, that's a story! I've been thinking a lot about how social distancing is affecting these types of celebrations. Glad to hear this one was able to carry on in some way. If nothing else, it'll be a story they tell for the rest of their lives! Thanks for the great comment.

Jacqui POSTED AT 18:14H, 01 APRIL
You paint such a real picture with your words. I felt like I was in your world while reading. Thanks for taking the time to share your vantage point with us. I love reading what you write.

Jennifer Stevens POSTED AT 18:49H, 01 APRIL
Thank you so much for reading, Jacqui! Something for Sunday will always be one of my favorite blogs, and I'm thrilled that you're doing a weekly email now. Let's keep writing, reading, and cooking. xo

T. Dubs POSTED AT 12:52H, 08 APRIL
Think those boats should be two meters apart... or .0010799% of a nautical mile.