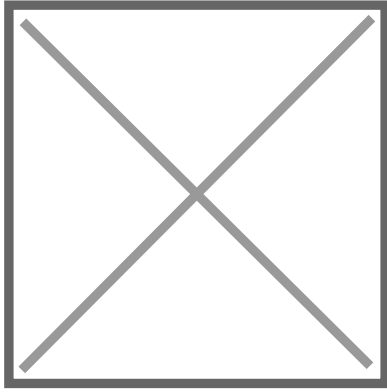




Clarity During Quarantine

Description

***I wrote this back when most of us were in lockdown, so while the rules have been somewhat relaxed since then, it still very much applies.**

Iâ??ve been wanting so badly to get back into writing regularly, even going so far as to post on social media so I could somehow be forced to hold myself accountable. But for reasons unknown to me, ones which my therapist and I are attempting to work through (lol), I have been hesitant. Among one of the reasons of which I am aware is that my brain keeps taking me in opposing directions. On the one hand, I really want to revisit my more satirical style, making people laugh and further polarizing myself from those around me. However, on the other hand, I also feel myself being pulled in to a deeper and more thoughtful direction â?? one which I hope and feel will be able to reach just as many people.

I have every intention of adding content that is provocative and humorous, but for this particular post I have to follow my gut. And my gut is telling me that right now, although the world needs the opportunity to laugh, it also needs an opportunity to be more introspective. Therefore, for the purposes of this post, I am going to discuss three things I have learned during this pandemic-driven quarantine and the new versions of normalcy of which we are all being forced to embrace.

I remember watching the news after Covid began to spread, thinking how horrible it was that in so many places around the world people were having to be locked inside their homes, only allowed out for the absolute necessities, while also being forced to wear masks in public and maintaining a measured distance from everyone else around them. I knew it would eventually hit the US, but I tried to stay optimistic about how quickly and effectively we would find a way to get it under control. Unfortunately, due to a severe lack of proper leadership and humility, this was not the case. And as it became more and more pervasive throughout California, many parents and I would discuss our thoughts about continuing to have our children attend school, and how likely it would be that, at some point, this would no longer even be an option.

On March 13, 2020 this discussion became a reality. We were informed that our children would remain at home until further notice. To say that none of us really had a clue what this would look like would be an understatement. Now, I am aware that each state had its own protocols regarding this situation, so I

am only speaking from a Californian's perspective.

Amongst the moans and groans of the uncertainty that we were all experiencing, we had to deal with the many emotions and questions that began circling all of our brains. Would they have the kids continue school from home? And if so, what would that look like? I'm not a teacher! How will this affect our kids emotionally and intellectually? How the hell am I supposed to navigate through this and remain strong for them? In one email it became clear to me that, whatever the outcome for the kids would be, I would have to be in charge.

Now before I continue, I would like to extend not only a profuse apology to any and all teachers around the world who take on the numerous and often overwhelming responsibilities of ensuring our kids become educated and more prepared for the unknown that is adulthood, but to also recognize that they do so while being ridiculously underpaid and under appreciated. I, myself, was often a nightmare of a student to teach. I had severe ADD and was unmedicated. I was what they called a "daydreamer". I talked incessantly and was constantly looking around at the bazillions of colorful posters and artwork that covered every inch of every wall in every classroom. Basically my eyes would wander everywhere except where they were supposed to. I remember in 2nd grade my desk was actually removed from the classroom and put in the hallway; that is how disruptive I was. In 3rd grade my teacher, Mrs. Clegg, had a blue book, and if you got into trouble you had to come up to the front of the class and write your name in it. I got into trouble so often that not only was my name in that book every single day of the school year, but I would have to then add numerous checkmarks next to it in order to keep track of how often I was scolded. I used to think I was just being picked on and purposely singled out, which sometimes definitely was the case, but 97% of the time I was called out deservedly so. On the flip side, I was also a very good student and I got very good grades (until high school, but that's an entirely different post), but unfortunately my attitude and behavior overshadowed my accomplishments. So for that, I am truly and sincerely sorry. Due to my learning disability, and due to the fact that I was thrown into a learning environment tailored for only one type of student, I feel in a way that I was set up for failure. And I definitely still feel that that is the case today. Not all kids are the same, and not all students learn the same way. If adults learn differently, how can the educational system expect anything different from children?

Now, the reason I make this point, is because this leads to the first thing I learned during quarantine. I knew my children would have a much easier time focusing on work when in a smaller environment, free of countless distractions. I knew that I would be taking on a role unlike any I had previously experienced. And I knew that, as overwhelming and stressful as it would be, it would also provide me with the opportunity to see exactly what I would be capable of when left to my own devices. Homeschooling three children, two of which have ADD has been challenging, to say the least. I was constantly running back and forth from room to room, monitoring each kid's progress and trying as best as I could to be there for any and all questions they may have had.

There were definitely struggles taking on this endeavor. One of my sons had a habit of looking like he was focused on his work, only to find out that he had simply been reading on his school iPad. He had fallen so far behind that I had to actually sit next to him to ensure each item on his work checklist was completed, and then would make him show me the computer as he submitted it. This was beyond frustrating and to the detriment of the other two kids, but alas, we somehow made it work. I know how difficult this arrangement was for most parents, and I know that the school districts were completely unprepared for this sudden change, so we were all kind of winging it and it truly was a case of "the

blind leading the blindâ??.

Another thing I would often think about during this time was how parents who worked full-time managed to pull off work and homeschooling together. I am very fortunate that for the time being I am able to stay home and give 110% to helping my kids. And as overwhelming as that has been for me, I cannot begin to fathom how it must have been for working parents. And what about parents who couldnâ??t afford to have childcare for their kids during the day? How did they manage? I have felt many bouts of guilt trying to imagine what that must have been like, and I have the utmost respect for any parent who had to work around these obstacles, with or without help.

So, having said that, during quarantine I have learned that I am capable of being an active participant in helping educate my children, above and beyond what I thought was possible. To those moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. who have had to take on the role of caretaker and teacher, I applaud you, as I applaud myself. We did it. We all survived. And now, knowing that the coming school year will also be done completely online and from home, I am confident that I will be able to continue learning more about myself, as well as learning about the best ways to help my children grow and challenge themselves in such a unique learning environment.

Piggybacking off of what I just talked about, I would like to discuss the second thing I have learned during quarantine. To give you a brief background on my situation, I am divorced and my ex-husband and I share the kids 50-50%, so I do get breaks from the craziness of single mom life. Parenting of any kind is stressful, but doing it without the benefit of a partner, sitter or full-time or even part-time nanny brings new meaning to the word â??stressfulâ??. Oftentimes I fall into bed at the end of a particularly long day of playing, disciplining, (cooking) occasionally, etc., and I fantasize about the day they go back to their dadâ??s and I finally have time to myself. On the flip side, however, once theyâ??re at their dadâ??s I almost immediately start to miss them and feel like a part of me is missing until I get them back. And this brings me to the second thing I have come to learn and appreciate during this time. In this nightmare of a society we are all currently living in, quarantine has given me a true gift. The gift of time. Time I had been missing while they were in school. Time I had been missing while the kids were busy with sports, at friendsâ?? houses, while they were busy with extracurricular activities of any kind, etc.. At any given moment I was able to look at them, smile at them, hug them, kiss them, play with them, even argue with them. Itâ??s crazy to me how quickly time passes. One minute youâ??re changing their diapers and reading them books about the alphabet, and then you blink and theyâ??re in grade school, middle school, high school, etc. We all know that once your child starts to experience puberty, their desire to hang out with you begins to dwindle significantly and the times when they thought you turned on the sun in the morning and the moon at night become but a memory. It all just happens so suddenly. It is something that happens whether or not you want it to or are ready for, and it is something that happens to each and every one of us.

When I first found out that my kids would spend the remainder of the school year at home and on lockdown, no less, I was less than thrilled. What about me? What about **my** free time? I didnâ??t sign up for this. Donâ??t I have **enough** responsibilities raising these kids? Having had a chance to reflect on life before lockdown, I find myself feeling grateful. Grateful that I have this extra time with them. Grateful that while being forced to stay indoors and unable to run around town freely with friends and keeping busy with the other activities that come with childhood, I have been given a gift â?? a true gift. I have been allotted more time to foster my children, love on them and time to do just about anything with them within the confines of our little bubble. We often take the time we have with our children for

granted. We are so busy being focused on our lives and feeling annoyed by the neediness of our kids that we often forget what truly matters â?? **TIME**. Time is something that, no matter the socioeconomic status of a person, you just *donâ??t* and *canâ??t* get back. You *canâ??t* buy it. You *canâ??t* negotiate it. You *canâ??t* barter it. Time is something that overshadows everything, and we have absolutely no control over it. So during this quarantine, I have learned that time is something I didnâ??t realize I had so easily taken for granted. For time is something that has more value than anything else in this world, and it is something I hope I always remember to appreciate.

Now, the last realization that I am going to discuss in this post is one of which I had already been keenly aware. It is a realization that has apparently eluded many of us and continues to elude us, and is one that I believe is absolutely paramount to oneâ??s self-awareness and growth. The profoundness of this didnâ??t even really occur to me until I began to receive messages about it from people from places around the world, and they were people from all different backgrounds. I think perhaps my previous posts were what prompted many to reach out, for most of these people are actually strangers to me, but it makes me smile. Knowing that for whatever reason, I am one of the people a perfect stranger feels comfortable enough to contact with even the most personal of stories or dilemmas gives me a pretty fulfilling feeling. Maybe I am arrogant for saying that, but I am speaking my truth. One of my greatest joys has always been knowing that I am a safe place for absolutely anyone who needs an ear or a vault in which to store their secrets. I have played this part for many of my friends, as well as perfect strangers, and it is a part I hope to play for the remainder of my life.

Now, to get to the point of what Iâ??m trying to say. The realization that so many people during this quarantine have had is the realization that their circles should be much smaller than they are. That the people they have spent so much time and effort trying to impress, and the groups they have spent so long trying to be a part of, are in reality, not as important as theyâ??d always thought theyâ??d been.

With so much time spent at home, and with so much time being able to have the introspection that so many never realized they so desperately needed, many people are coming to realize that, as individuals, they are enough. The fancy purses, fancy clothes, fancy shoes, fancy cars, etc. mean absolutely nothing in the grander scheme of things. During quarantine there is no one to try to impress. There is no one to try and â??one upâ??. There is no one to try to convince to like them. Without all the â??stuffâ? â?? without all of the fancy stuff people typically try so desperately to collect in order to present themselves a certain way, they are simply left with who they are as people. Thereâ??s no fancy party that requires a certain level of dress. There is no clique to try and impress and infiltrate with various stories of fabulous this or fabulous that. No. Instead, what we are left with is us simply presenting ourselves as we are. People from all different socioeconomic and ethnic, religious, racial, and a plethora of other backgrounds being thrown together into the chaos and uncertainty unparalleled in recent history. To me this has been a rare and deeply profound opportunity to look within ourselves and really prioritize our lives. An opportunity to decide what is and what isnâ??t truly important. What we need versus what we want. And even more specifically, whom we want and *donâ??t* want as a part of our circle.

I would like to be very clear. In no way is this meant to judge or admonish anyone who enjoys the finer things in life; rather, it is meant to show that each and every one of us has an inner us that weâ??ve either forgotten, neglected or masked with the extraneous â??stuffâ? in our lives. What an irony this is. While being told how important it is to wear a mask, too many of us *donâ??t* realize that even before all of this happened, we were already wearing masks. Metaphorical ones, but masks nonetheless, and this

is particularly true in Southern California. The media has taught us what our idea of "perfect" should be, what we should value and how we should prioritize those values. But take all of that away and what do you have? What you have is your own ability and responsibility to make those decisions. The ability to decide for yourselves what should and what does truly matter to you. Does that \$1000 pair of shoes really make you better than anyone else? Does that designer bag with a matching designer dress really showcase who you are, as a person? Or does it perhaps showcase who you think you should be, how you think you want others to see you. How collecting the "stuff" somehow equates to being better.

Being in quarantine and without the ability to show the version of yourself **with** the "stuff", do you still like who you are? Many of you will say yes, many of you will say no, and many of you won't know how to answer. And you know what? That's ok. Because being locked in your homes with no fancy parties, or parties at all for that matter, no crowds to strut by, no school functions that may give you the opportunity to show up another parent, etc. should hopefully help most of us realize that instead of looking to others for validation, we need to look within ourselves. Instead of asking ourselves, "Would Brenda think this looks cute?" or "If people at the school function, soccer game, local coffee shop, etc. see me with the latest Gucci bag, will I be invited to their party?" "Will I be invited to Brenda's Sunday girls' brunch?" Instead, what we should be asking ourselves is, "Do I really care?" "Do I really **need** Brenda to like me?" "Is it really up to Brenda to make or break my feelings of self-worth?" "Do I really **need** any of that?" "Do I really **want** any of that?" "Does any of that stuff make me a better human being?" "Does having a nicer car than the other men and women around me **actually** make me better than them?" "Does being invited to a social gathering because I am perceived a certain way based on the "stuff" I have validate my place in this world? My worth in this world? My value in this world?" And perhaps more importantly, "Is being surrounded by people who feel that having all of the "stuff" makes them somehow better than someone else really what I want or whom I want in my circle?"

It's amazing to me how many people completely lose their identities when left with only their personalities as a way to identify themselves. However, what amazes me even more is seeing some of those people come to the realization that they have more offer. That something clicks in their minds and they realize that they spent way too much time, time you can never get back, trying to present themselves as an idea and not a reality. That they don't actually want to constantly feel exhausted trying to put on a façade that doesn't match who they truly are. They don't want to feel that even from the sanctity of their own living rooms, people they so desperately sought the approval from are still attempting to somehow one-up them or make them feel like life is some form of a competition. After all, is that even a staple of friendship? Do we really want to call someone who only ever seeks to be there for you and treat you like an equal as long as you're not doing as well as or better than them in some way a friend?

Someone who, as soon as you begin to become equal (in their eyes) to them in some form or fashion, will try to do whatever they can to either bring you down or try to change someone else's opinion of you in order to put you in a not-so-flattering light? The answer is a resounding **no**. No you do not. And if you think you do, then you need to do some more self-reflection. I in no way mean that as an insult; rather, it is meant to challenge you and push you into being the best and most authentic version of yourself as you can be. And part of being or becoming the best version of you is surrounding yourself with people who inspire you, support you and want nothing but the best for you, all without judgment. You want to surround yourself with people who will push you to achieve your goals with unfettered

support and encouragement.

If you think about the people in your life whom you call "friends", and if you realize they don't meet any of this criteria, then it's time to start reevaluating what it means to be a friend and what kind of people you want to call your friends. Find a tribe that matches your vibe. Who knows, maybe the same people you are reconsidering your friendships with are having their own introspective realizations. If that's the case, then it is your job to be there for them in the same way they should be there for you. Just make sure that while you're being there for them, you're first being there for yourself.

There is a lot more I could say about the things I have come to realize during this period of unparalleled uncertainty, but for now I feel that these are three areas of the utmost importance, or at least they are to me. For those of you who may be rolling your eyes at this post, fret not! I also have a few things I've learned from my friends during quarantine that are much more satirical than this, but at this very moment, I feel it is important that we focus on *what's* important, and what value we bring to this world as teachers, as parents, as friends and perhaps most importantly, ourselves.

~ Kate

*PS "Brenda" is a random name I chose for this post. In fact, I don't actually know anyone named Brenda, so please don't message me asking why I singled you out. lol

Category

1. Uncategorized

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