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# Family Matters



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**C**hester County, Pennsylvania shut down on March 16, 2020. Work and school went 'virtual', travel plans were cancelled, and courthouses and businesses were shuttered. Our oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was home from college for spring break never expecting she would be trapped at home with us until late May. Our youngest daughter, Christina, was suddenly facing the rest of 11th grade by Zoom. My practice came to a screeching halt overnight. Our house was full of frustrated (and somewhat anxious) women. My poor husband.

It was understandable that the kids were upset. Elizabeth enjoyed her freedom and independence at Pitt and was anxious to return when they abruptly closed the dorms and made her stay home. Christina was just a day away from getting her driver's license and finally getting her freedom when the test was cancelled with no new date in sight. The girls couldn't understand why they couldn't see their friends. My girls jokingly tell me I am a bit 'extra' and I admit that I can be, mainly about the big things like safety, curfew and the like. COVID made me a bit crazy at first because we didn't know who was most at risk for severe complications or worse. Kids



are walking petri dishes at any age, so there was definitely a concern about them bringing it home, so we kept them locked down completely. As a result, those first few weeks weren't pretty. There were many days I wondered how it was going to work.

Something had to give. We couldn't spend our days fighting over something we could not control. We all resorted to distraction. We started a puzzle. I finally read some of the books I'd stacked up. The girls started a workout plan. The spring semester passed by Zoom. We each settled into a routine that worked for us, but regardless of how we spent our days, we came together for dinner. Before quarantine, the girls would sometimes return to their rooms after dinner to watch TV or talk to friends, but something changed. They stuck around and they roped us into playing Monopoly and Clue. We played a lot of cards and rediscovered dominos. While we played games, we explored new music and playlists and Christina turned us all on to TikTok. What first felt like prison started to feel quite enjoyable. I refer to that time period as the "sweet spot" of quarantine. Each of us was content to be together, right where we were, with no worries about what we were missing, and grateful to be safe and sound.

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our food. My family pointed out how much different (i.e. older) I look when I don't color my roots for 5 months. Despite hoarding bread flour and yeast, I will never have the energy to make bread from scratch, even during a lockdown. There is a lot to learn about survival from watching 10 seasons of the Walking Dead. And, the big family gatherings we host on holidays are far easier than a day full of Zoom calls with grandparents.

As a family, we've always been close. What struck me about quarantine was that we started to connect with our girls on a very different level. Suddenly, these little girls we raised (and admittedly spoiled a little bit) were all grown up and facing new obstacles, some of which we couldn't fix or explain. We talked through things like anger and disappointment over what we were all missing, the fear and anxiety about getting sick or getting our loved ones sick, and how we could emerge from this time improved in some way. Steve and I tried hard to instill in our kids a sense of resilience and optimism in the face of disappointment when they were little, but this was the first true test for both. I suppose these are things that can't be taught as much as experienced, and we were proud of how they dealt with the fallout from quarantine.

My kids weren't alone. Many of their friends and several cousins missed out on milestones like the end of senior year. They commiserated together and helped each other through it as best they could. I have no doubt this will all make them stronger in the end, but we struggled with how to explain that to them while it was happening.

Eventually, the draconian lock-down ended and Elizabeth immediately flew the coop to stay with a friend in Philadelphia for a while. Even though the city was still closed for business, she was back to living the life of a 20-year old and out from under our thumb. Christina finally got her license and started working. Eventually Elizabeth returned home again because as nice as freedom is, it is expensive, and without opportunities to work in Philadelphia, the grass was definitely greener at home.

Elizabeth returned to college in late July 2020 and is living happily ever after with her friends in an off-campus apartment. Usually by the time she leaves for college we are all ready, though I must admit it was hard to see her go this time. Christina has lost her senior year to Zoom, and is holding out hope for a prom, in-person graduation, and a 'normal' college experience in Fall 2021. To help her through this disappointing year and prepare us for the empty nest, we did what anyone would do - we added a new golden retriever puppy to the family. Nala is full of joy and energy and she is completely enamored with our 5-year old golden, Rocky. He is not as pleased to have her here as we are, but we know they will be buddies just as soon as she stops chewing on his ears.

This time in quarantine, though not what any of us wanted at first, turned out to be a gift. After Elizabeth left for college in 2018, we never expected to have both girls under our roof for an extended period of time again. After the initial shock wore off, we slowed down and took it in, knowing this was found time together. We'll likely never get it again. For my kids' sake, I hope that's true. We want them out in the world and living happily ever after. And Steve and I have no doubt we will enjoy the empty nest phase of our life knowing that is the case.

Our girls have both told us that they look back on quarantine fondly, and we do too. We went into quarantine running on all cylinders. Steve and I traveled most weeks and the girls were consumed with school commitments, sports, work and a busy social life. While I miss some of the travel and the in-person aspects of my practice, it felt good being together at home while it lasted. I was content knowing my family was together and we were safe and sound. Once they move out, we don't know that for sure, so all we can do is hope and pray they have what they need to thrive and that they don't forget about us. I like to think that each of us are emerging from the 2020 quarantine with a renewed sense of gratitude for family, our health and a willingness to focus on the things that really matter.