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Teacher's Perspective

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I am a teacher at a small school in Bluefield, WV. My husband works in the oilfield as a supervisor. We have two sons ages 7 and 10. A month and a half ago, we were a typical, middle class, busy family. Most evenings we would be found at the baseball or soccer field, or at a local church where I serve as Cub Master of our Cub Scout Pack. In the weeks since the Covid-19 "stay at home" orders have been put in place, our lives have been altered in ways that I never expected to see in my lifetime.

With the stay at home orders came the closure of schools, and the abrupt halt to both mine and my sons' daily lives. There were no classes to teach or attend, no sports practices or games to rush off to after school, no Scout meetings or campouts, no hanging out with friends on a Saturday afternoon, and, certainly, no Sunday morning church services.

Overnight, I went from being a classroom teacher to being my sons' homeschooling teacher while also still having the responsibility of teaching my students through virtual platforms. In order to maintain some structure for all of us, I had to create a school schedule for my sons that worked around my work from home schedule. They seem to have adjusted well to our new schedule, maybe even better than I have. Thank God for the resiliency of children. Although, my oldest son has shown signs of stress and anxiety such as not having an appetite and disruptions in his sleep pattern.

With the turmoil in the stock markets came the crashing of the oilfield, and with that went any stability my husband had in his job. His salary has been reduced to less than half, but I think the thing that has affected him the most is the uncertainty. Not knowing if he will be able to provide for us in the coming weeks or months; not knowing if the oilfield will ever recover, and mostly not knowing what he will do if it doesn't, as this is the only work he has ever known.

With so many changes happening so quickly, we have had to create a new "normal" for our family. The evenings that used to be spent doing extra curricular activities are now spent trying to find things to keep us occupied such as playing games or watching movies together. We have created a weekly tradition of sorts of going for a drive on Saturdays. We just pick some back road and drive for a while. There have been several weeks that our Saturday drive has been the only time we left the house the entire week.

We have not had much contact with our extended family during these weeks. We visited my husband's parents on Easter, and had a "porch visit." We stood on their front porch and talked to them through their window. That was the first time we had seen them in over a month. I cried for the entire trip back home. My sister and niece live in North Carolina so FaceTime has been the only contact that I have had with them. I'm thankful to get to see their faces on the screen, but it breaks my heart a little more each time.

One of the most surreal experiences of this whole thing has been trips to the grocery store. To see the empty shelves and restrictions on the number of items that can be purchased causes me great anxiety. I feel like perhaps if people would calm down and stop panic buying so much we could all have better access to the supplies we need.

Another source of anxiety for me has been the news, both local and national. In the late weeks of February, before the pandemic was declared, I obsessed over the news, and kept track of which states had confirmed cases. I would lie in bed for hours each night reading every article I could find and pray that maybe what I was reading was wrong. As the number of cases in the US grew, so did my anxiety. In mid-March, it finally reached a point that I had to stop watching and reading the daily news. I would be in tears and on the verge of a panic attack each time.

Currently, I try to keep up with the Governor's daily updates, but some days even that is too much, and I have to turn it off.

As these weeks stretch on, I find myself bouncing between the feeling of "I can't wait for this to be over so I can live my life," and "there's no way I can go back out into the world right now." The thoughts of having to send my children out into public spaces while there is still no vaccine or cure is gut wrenching. At the same time, I am fearful of what is going to become of our little town if businesses are not allowed to open soon. This area already has a struggling economy, and with even lower income and commerce, I'm afraid the few businesses we have may never recover.

Several nights a weeks, my family has been journaling about our experiences through this time. We take turns, and we each write as much or as little as we want. The one thing that remains consistent in our entries is that we end with a list of things we are thankful for that day. These lists have ranged from the big things like "I still have a job" or "nobody in our family has been infected with the virus" to small things like "Mommy made mac and cheese for lunch today." For me that has been maybe the most important thing during this time, to just try to find the good in all of the bad. When my children are grown, and are sharing their experiences with their own children, I hope they can say that through it all their mom helped them to remember that there is always something to be thankful for.