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Family Values in Quarantine

A pandemic is an outbreak of a disease that spreads across an entire country or the world. Right now, we are experiencing a pandemic with Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. If you contract the disease, you will have respiratory issues, including coughing or in severe cases, difficulty breathing, a fever, a sore throat, and you will feel tired. This virus is most damaging for the elderly and those who have a compromised immune system but it can infect anyone and everyone. Those who have other medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, heart diseases, or lung diseases, need to be extra careful during this time because COVID-19 progresses very quickly and can have long-lasting impacts on these people, and may even lead to death in severe cases. However, during these stressful times, people are reevaluating their values and focusing on their loved ones as this disease continues to spread. This reordering of values seems to be a common theme that goes hand in hand with major illnesses like the Coronavirus pandemic and the Influenza pandemic of 1918. People are realizing how important their family is to them as they are all being impacted by this virus in different ways.

In the narratives from my classmates and the narratives from the survivors of the 1918 flu pandemic, the common theme of valuing your loved one appeared in the majority of them. Almost every person discussed what their family and friends mean to them and how them not being able to see their loved ones have proven to be difficult. In one such narrative, Ashley Nault discusses her family values in respect to her grandma and mother when she states, “This pandemic has made me realize how important it is to make sure your family members are okay and have what they may need” (Nault). Ashley does not want to be the cause of her grandmother becoming infected, therefore she made the decision to follow the rules of social distancing and stay away from those who are most vulnerable and from those who are most likely to spread it to ensure that she does not contribute to the spread of the virus. As a result of this, she is unable to see her mother because she is working on the front line in a hospital where she could easily spread the virus to others. Her mother could contract COVID-19 at any point but “nothing is stopping her from doing her job and making sure other people are getting the medical help they need” (Nault). The fact that people are still choosing to work even though they could get sick, parallels with many workers during the 1918 flu pandemic. For example, in a narrative by Caroline Wernecke Pharris she explains how her mother was forced to work in order to provide for the family because Caroline’s father died from the flu. In this situation, Caroline’s mother prioritized her family and as a result she had to send the children off to live with their grandparents as she tried to support them financially. As Caroline and Ashley both gained an appreciation for the matriarch figures in their life, they also had a new respect for these people who worked to support their family. In both of these narratives, Ashley and Caroline reevaluated what is really important to them and both placed family above everyone else.

The restructuring of values to place ones’ family at the forefront, was also a common theme during the 1918 flu pandemic. The flu pandemic resulted in the deaths of millions of people worldwide, and thousands of people in the United States. Everyone was at risk of being infected and dying because doctors did not know how to treat it and medicine was scarce. As a result of this, those that were healthy did everything they could for the sick in hopes that they would recover. One narrative that spoke to me about family values was written by Clella B. Gregory about her experience and what they went through on their farm in Kentucky with their family. Everyone in her family became infected except for her father, she states, “Dad kept us warm and fed and he also helped others in our community who had the illness” (Gregory). This narrative shows that during hard times people tend to focus on their family over other things, but also will help those they care about. Similar to what Clella’s father did, Ashley’s father also helped members of his family. Ashley expresses this when she states, “If my grandma needs anything, my dad makes sure that he’s the one to go buy it and not risk her going into a store and becoming infected” (Nault). As a result of the grandmother’s compromised nature, Mr. Nault has taken on the responsibility of caring for her. This parallels to Clella’s narrative because both fathers did what they believed to be the right thing, even though they placed themselves in a compromised position. These decisions made by the fathers manifest the idea that family tends to be prioritized during hardships. I also feel that during this time, we all need to take precautions in order to protect those we love. Clella appreciated the things that her father did for them while they were all sick. As a result of this dedication, Clella, her five siblings, and mother all survived the flu and the father did not become infected. Furthermore, the father also valued friendship because he was willing to go out and take care of the neighbor’s livestock while they were unable to. This man shows that sometimes bad situations can bring out the best in people.

Humans are social creatures and we require this social interaction in order to keep ourselves sane. This idea could not be truer now, as we are all quarantined in our homes. Similar to the father in Clella’s story, one COVID-19 narrative touches on the value of friends more than all the rest: Madelyn Chu’s narrative. She has made new friends in college that have made a lasting impact on her mental well-being. Friends are very important to have because they provide companionship and human interaction that is different than that of your family’s interactions. Madelyn tells the reader that, “I’ve lost half a semester with my friends, but during these two weeks at home, I learned that it’s okay to prioritize friendships before family for the sake of my own well-being” (Chu). As a result of the virus, the schools had to close down to prevent the spread and progression of COVID-19. However, this seemed like a necessary thing for many students because we all reorganized our values to place what we truly deem important above all the rest. While being trapped in my house, I also realized how much I long for those friend interactions and miss seeing those people outside of my family. Madelyn and I both love our family but not being able to see friends has proven to be difficult.

Similar to Ashley, Caroline, Clella, and Madelyn, I also reorganized my values to have my loved ones before everything else. Since being home from college and quarantined in my home, I am forced to sit here and think about everyone I am close to. I am unable to see my sisters as often as I would like because they are both still working and are out in the public frequently. My oldest sister, Caitlin, works at a hospital in the unit for critical patients that have tested positive for Coronavirus. She is exposed to the virus every time she goes into work and is petrified of bringing it home to her family. My middle sister, Rachel, works in a factory and although she is not coming into contact with known infected individuals, there are a lot of older people that work along side her so she is extra careful not to get them sick. Not only are both my sisters at risk, but my mom is as well. She is immunocompromised and is at a very high risk of becoming infected. I have placed my mother’s safety above everything else during this hard time. During these times, it is important to keep those close to us safe and by doing that, we all have to make sacrifices. I have given up spending time with my sisters and my friends to keep those I love safe.

The common theme that seemed to appear during this Coronavirus pandemic is the same one that seemed to appear during the flu pandemic of 1918. By reorganizing one’s values to focus on loved ones, you gain a new respect for them and feel an urgency to protect them. By reading the narratives of my classmates, the narratives of the flu pandemic survivors, and through personal experiences, I can safely say that by listening to the guidelines put out by officials and practicing social distancing techniques you can protect those who you love to ensure that they do not become sick. This is very important to do during these types of pandemics because of the speed of infection, the lack of medicine to prevent and treat the disease, and that it can affect anyone and everyone. Almost everyone has someone close to them that is at high risk. By the end of this pandemic, we will all be impacted in some way – whether it be that someone close to us gets infected or we get infected – there will be life-long consequences. In order to keep those we love safe, we must be willing to sacrifice seeing them as frequently as we might like, going outside for unnecessary reasons, and limiting our exposure to the public as much as we can.

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