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## **Gratitude In A Pandemic**

### Gratitude in a Pandemic

Sometimes self care is listening to your favorite music at 3am on a Wednesday night. Thinking about all the things you're missing as you stare at the light on your ceiling. Making a pallet on the floor because it's the only sense of control you can find in the droning days once called a summer vacation. It's the vivid dreams (ones where someone from school you don't talk to is taking you on an adventure) your mind uses to keep you sane. Sometimes a pandemic is playing music too loud at 3am on a Wednesday night to keep anxious thoughts that scare you at bay, while you convince yourself that maybe you just like the song that much.

Sometimes a break from the stress is learning what products your Type 4 hair likes best on a Monday morning because school is no longer an option. Watching *Criminal Minds*, *Avatar the Last Airbender*, *Legend of Korra*, and badly produced rom-coms to laugh at while you follow a routine that seems never ending. An array of products frame the laptop on your desk. At first you had to remind yourself the order of each item: part hair, spray with water, apply cream, use oil, spread gel, twist, repeat. But eventually you find yourself getting lost in the 10th rerun of *Spiderman into the Spideverse*. And every two weeks I have a standing date with myself, my hair, and whatever I can find on Netflix that won't be unbearable for the next few hours. Sometimes a pandemic is a taste of independence and self love you haven't known before.

Sometimes father-daughter bonding is sitting on the porch people watching and talking about absolutely nothing and everything from 7 to 9pm. Maybe 10pm on a weekend. Dad sharing songs he hasn't listened to in ages and me sharing music I've only just discovered. It's next door neighbors coming over just to get out of the house and saying things like, "I hope we can be like this with our kids someday." Some days you cry because it all hurts too much. And some days you laugh at the guy with no shirt or shoes with a beats speaker on his shoulder; he always rounds the neighborhood on a bad day. Father-daughter bonding is watching your neighbor Trish tend to her plants and feed the squirrels. She likes to give out popsicles and fix loose screws on bikes for the kids in the neighborhood who are too young to wander the way they do. Sometimes a pandemic is talking to your dad from hours 7 to 9pm about absolutely nothing and everything with light R&B playing as you wind down.

Sometimes family vacation is going to Boyne Mountain when you haven't been in years. It's scavenging for things you can still do amidst Covid-19. It's fishing even though you hate touching the fish after you've hooked them, but now you need to throw them back. We find ourselves racing a storm back to shore because we are too busy listening to our music to notice the clouds approaching from a distance. We drive the streets in rain sheets that are eager to drench us and find a Subway in what feels like the middle of nowhere. We stop for sandwiches there. Later we find a boardwalk for food and wander into a thrift shop. There I find a beautiful and yet simplistic necklace. The only charm is a pearl locked forever into a golden enclosure. The light catches it perfectly when I carry it outside of the glass box. Sometimes a pandemic is family vacation on the lake, on the boardwalk, and in a thrift store.

Sometimes family game night is just gibberish and drool dribbling down your face as you read off cards from a game. It's howling laughter well into the night because no one can quite get the words you've repeated at least three times and you're trying to swallow with your lips spread wayyy too far. It's being the best one at the game because you've been talking to your three-year old neighbor Leah who still has her baby accent and is forced to repeat the simplest of requests constantly. It's trying to understand your sister's boyfriend's Detroit accent when he can't even speak correctly with the hard plastic pulling his face into a terrifying smile. Sometimes a pandemic reminds you it's not evil

to learn to smile in a crisis.

Sometimes the Fourth of July celebration is dancing in the dark to music you've known since before you could speak. After shooting the few fireworks we have left over from weeks of boredom, my brother and I grab a speaker from the inside of the house. The night still feels young and soon we're dancing. I'm teaching him to do the Kid N Play dance to the rhythm of "Poison" by BDV. Our laughter, ringing in the still air between distant booms, is enough to attract a neighbor who has just sent the last of her guests home. She comes to our porch and I drag her into our circle of happiness and bad dancing.

Sometimes the Fourth of July brings your sister home in the name of family, and the commotion outside of the house leads her to join your private party. It makes her shake her head and scrunch up her nose at the next song in your dad's playlist until she talks her way into dee-jaying. For an hour the four of us sing to each other and dance away everything wrong with the world.

Sometimes the Fourth of July helps you find your footing when you're barefoot in the grass belting "Electric Relaxation" by A Tribe Called Quest. Surprising your dad when he realizes you know more words than he does. Sometimes even your mom comes outside after working hours much too long and makes it a party of five. We teach each other new dances; my sister tells us about what she calls the Detroit shuffle. Later I show my family this new footwork move I've been doing for weeks. Midsummer mosquitoes threaten us with a promise of regret in the morning when their injected serum grows into a red itchy bump, but we dance on. And if you're dorky enough, the slap you give to a mosquito on your shoulder becomes a dance move.

When we take to slow dancing, my dad twirls me around on his finger as we two-step well into the night. And when all of us finally decide we've had enough of the bugs and bats dancing with us, and the soles of our feet ache, we slowly migrate back inside at 3:32am. Sometimes in a pandemic the end of the night is bittersweet, but you know everything will be okay because you feel so at home and you can't think of a single way the night could have been better. Sometimes in a pandemic, you're not so afraid.