

Parenting in Crisis

by Judit Vega, Esperanza staff

My family was in a self-imposed quarantine almost 2 weeks before the City's *Stay Home* order. I started Spring Break with a 3am ride to Santa Rosa with my 2-year-old Lulu with a febrile seizure. Over the next week, the illness ran through my house, infecting the other three kids with the same symptoms of fever, cough, and exhaustion before finally settling on me. I started working from home, as school was now cancelled. I was the only adult in the house, as my partner had gone to El Salvador just the week prior. I struggled through the day, trying to work while feverish and with pounding headaches, blaming the oak trees that try to murder me every year in the spring with their pollen. My two young daughters clung to me, missing their papa and not understanding their increasingly despondent mother. My 17-year-old son helped distract and occupy his brother, fed the kids, and took them out in the yard to play soccer. My cough soon deepened and at night as I struggled to breathe I would lie in terror wondering why I was denied testing and what would happen to my children if I was hospitalized without anyone to care for them.

I recovered after two and a half tough weeks, and my kids and I have tried to quickly adjust to this new world of Zoom meetings with fighting kids and screaming half-naked babies invading screens; and 15 to 20 minute blocks of uninterrupted work. This, in addition to preschool online classes; multiple elementary teachers with their confusing array of google classroom; Zoom and website passwords; and a senior year of high school now without a prom and likely, sans graduation ceremonies. The initial joy of seeing teachers and classmates on screen wore off quickly for my 10-year-old with the added drudgery of daily homework and an anxious nagging new teacher. My oldest son anticipates that he will more than likely start college in the Fall—online, at home. We have all lost our patience with each other more times than we can count. I felt upset for a while because I felt that I was failing at both parenting and my job at Esperanza—and was increasingly short with the children, and getting depressed. El Salvador closed its borders on March 11th. Our family is now separated because of immigration until this pandemic subsides. I am praying for patience and grace for myself and my kids.

Now into this fourth week of being at home, we have now come into a daily, irregular rhythm. The kids all now have an imperfect schedule of online class, outside time, quiet time, homework, play and chores—not necessarily in that order. I have ceased to be the screen police. After several failed attempts at getting up very early, I was inspired by my insomniac oldest son to start working late into the morning while the little ones are asleep. The children have several video calls three to four times a day with their father. Relatives and neighbors call, drop off treats, and have conversations from the sidewalk. We are edging towards a strange type of solitary normalcy.

From a movement perspective I am excited for what this moment means for the re-examining of our systems, and the break-



Judit, exhausted, trying to orchestrate work, teaching and caring for the family at home without her partner. Below: Judit with her daughters Lulu and Maya.

necessary to build anew. I think this is a scary time for children, but holds possibilities. Besides missing their teachers, friends, and also my son's high school graduation—what will the longer term effects on their education and emotional development be?

My children have always been told of the history of struggle and survival of their own families and of their people. I am 2-3 generations removed from the coal mines of Webb County in south Texas and my campesino grandparents in rural Michoacan. They have always heard the stories from their dad of growing up during the civil war in El Salvador, hiding in bomb shelters, the lack of food, the dead bodies, the trauma of it all. We have endured far worse for centuries. While I have struggled to explain why we can't go to the playground, or visit aunt Lola to the four and the two-year-old; or when, and if, they can ever go back to school; or why borders are closed and Papa is not here with us, now—I trust in their resilience. It is bolstered by the love and constancy of their family and the strength of their ancestors. I am thankful for that, as thankful as I am for being able to weather this storm by still working—and having the means to work from home and be with my kids during this time, in our home.

Larger questions loom large. How do you explain the devastation to the community and world to the kids? How can I anticipate the loss of health and possibly life of loved ones on this scale?

How can I help my graduating senior understand that the world is still wide open for him, despite the reality that the world will never be the same? There are so many unknowns, but in all honesty there are never really any absolutes in parenting or life. We all just have to have faith in the strength and resilience of the children to bring us through.

