One Yolk or Two?

A new way to make egg salad, and other conversations triggered by the enforced isolation caused by the coronavirus health crisis.

June 23, 2020 By Jeff Neurman

There is no question that we have all suffered through the “stay at home” precautions that have been in place for, depending on where one lives, over two months. Here, in the greater New York City area, I mark the official start of this period as Friday, March 13, not just because that is a bad day in its own right but because it was that particular day that we received notice that schools would be closed “for the remainder of the month.” Of course, “remainder of the month” is actually to be interpreted as “remainder of the school year (and possibly much longer)” but it was, at least in my somewhat informed view, a necessary step. I say this both as a concerned parent and one with self-concern (read: cancer).

So in the more than 75 days since then, it has been a challenging period of living in close quarters, home-schooling, alternative sleeping arrangements (since my wife is a doctor dealing with her share of coronavirus patients) and relocating my affairs and effects to the guest bathroom, which I have unfortunately realized I now prefer to the one which forms part of the master suite. Luckily for me, there is no end in sight to all of this so I will be able to continue to brush my teeth, occasionally shave (I see no reason to do it regularly these days because, absent an intrusive Zoom call, who is going to see my visage anyway?) and enjoy my new Navage nasal rinse in the relative spaciousness and privacy of my own dual-vanity “facility.” I do worry, however, that we are now just a short step away from Ozzy and Harriet style bedroom accommodations. As a minor consolation, if that does come to pass, I am pretty certain I can claim for my own twin bed Andrew’s Star Wars sheets. They are not a high thread count, but they are awfully cool.

Yet, I realize there are many people in the rest of the country—and admittedly some here locally who seem to have not watched the news for the last three months—for whom this imposed solitude is drawing to a close. Or at least so they hope. I have seen the photos and videos of the beachgoing revelers and bar patrons who, in a decidedly bizarro-Wild West theme, have chosen to go maskless in order to be outside “the law.” As someone with a compromised immune system, and who actually believes in science (despite its inherent flaws), I wish those people well and also that they eschew New York or anyone headed this way for a minimum of the next several months or, preferably, until an effective vaccine is in widespread usage.

I do understand, however, their need to get out. First, people need to make a living. And for most of us it is hard to accomplish that objective while sitting at home watching Netflix. Or Disney +. Or

Amazon Prime. Or, honestly, any of the things that seem a lot better than working. (If you have exhausted those, I recommend the Smithsonian Channel, particularly the early seasons of Air Disasters, since none of us are flying anywhere anyway.) But since, in such a cruel twist of fate, even actors and other Hollywood types seem to be unable to work—and thus produce more for us to rather mindlessly consume—even this can't sustain us forever. There was a short-lived rumor at the outset of the pandemic that our local cable provider would be opening its archives of movies to allow us all to watch their extensive libraries at home, on demand and for free. But we are talking about the cable providers so of course that rumor turned out to be nothing but a suburban legend.

Perhaps more vital than the ability to make money, however, is the need to get out just to cling to the remnants of one's sanity. This need is most pressing, I believe, amongst the grandparents in our virtual midst. I often wondered – long before I had ever heard of COVID-19—what my parents must talk about day in and day out. But now that they have no one to really interact with I know the answer: Nothing. Of this I am acutely aware because of the verbal interactions that I have had with them since they, down in Florida (which of course attempted to ban people from New York altogether in a rather extra-constitutional move), have been essentially forced to interact in-person with no one but each other. My parents have been blessed to have been married—to each other—for over 50 years now. So the range of possible new subjects to cover under even the best of circumstances—which these are certainly not—must be a challenge.

So too is it with our phone calls. To be upfront about it, I had difficulty following the uneventful non-events of their fellow Floridian retirees' comings and goings even before all of this. I just could not really make my mind, razor sharp though it might (or might not) have once been, focus on who "mahjed," which I don't think is a word that really can be used as a verb. (For those reading along who are neither of Jewish nor Chinese extraction nor an expert in Qing dynasty recreational activities, this is a reference to the game/social excuse of Mahjong.) Thus, imagine the exponentially increased challenge of trying to stay riveted when it is no longer a match of wits against the Pearls and Ferns of the world to see who walked away with the grand sum of $5 but against some free Internet-based software. Similarly, I found it a challenge too great for my feeble mind to account for who hosted what "driveway party" or the starting rotation of the water volleyball squad, particularly given the proclivity for minor orthopedic issues that tend to ravage the septuagenarian athletic scene thereby constantly shuffling the line-up at the last minute.

Yet, even that, I now forlornly realize, I should have been more attentive to. Because topics now have decelerated to what have to no longer qualify as anything remotely approaching a conversation. You see, just the other day the big news for my parents was the discovery—in the tradition of Marie Curie or Magellan—of a new way to make egg salad that apparently involved using more egg yolks than entire eggs. For those mathematically and/or culinarily challenged, what that means is that they used an extra yolk. They did not say how they repurposed the now seemingly superfluous white which was originally part of that egg's oneness, but knowing my parents and their thriftiness I am sure that the extra white made it into something as well. I would have asked, but upon realizing that our phone call had descended to the level of an analysis of the appropriate number of yolks to put in egg salad (which really is stretching the definition of "salad") I decided that coronavirus—and cancer—aside that it was clearly time to end this seclusion. I fear

that if — or, more pointedly, they—do not so end this isolation from the world the next step in this descent into intellectual non-existence will be another article mailed to me on the proper way to fold a fitted sheet. And, yes, the word “another” is not a typo.

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