What to Do With Your Quarantime

Take these lessons from my quarantine to help you make the most of your COVID-19 quarantine.

May 7, 2020 By Justin Birckbichler

Like it or not, COVID-19 is our current reality. A ton of new information seems to come out everyday – something about flattening curves, when we can reopen the world, and how regular injections of Lysol/Clorox is really all we need to end this thing! (That last one is a real thing that was said, but please don't do that.)

However, the biggest thing on a lot of people's minds is what to do with themselves during this time of quarantine. Here in Virginia, we've been under a "Stay at Home" order for about a month, with about six more weeks to go at minimum. Many people are starting to get very restless with boredom, even choosing to rally at the state capital in protest of… I'm not really sure to be honest. Nothing says "let's end this pandemic" like gathering in close proximity.

Yet I don't find myself gathering up my AR-15 and heading down to Richmond to "Liberate Virginia," and not just because I don't own a gun, but because I do own common sense. When I underwent chemo from 2016-2017, I was under a self-quarantine for over three months, with no energy, a myriad of symptoms, and horrid weather. March to June, while the climate is nice and I have plenty of energy? Sounds alright to me.

While I do understand there are far reaching economic and health impacts of this pandemic, here are some simple ways to keep yourself occupied until we can safely go back out into the world. These all helped get me through my quarantine and I have faith it can help you.*

Watch, write and read.

The amount of movies I watched during chemo was only matched by the volume of words I wrote. Movies and writing were my go-to source of entertainment. Between Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, Prime Video, your own personal collection, and more, you probably have literally thousands, if not millions, of movies to choose from. Might I suggest watching the Marvel Cinematic Universe (in chronological order, not release)?

Writing is also a cathartic way to spend time. I have a complete record of everything from discovering a lump to the present day online, in addition to numerous other pieces hiding in my Google Drive. You never know if you (or your descendents) might want to look back on this time of pandemic. Your writing could even become a famous primary source in a history class. Bonus points if you embellish some details – I'm thinking zombie uprising wouldn't be too far-fetched.

One thing I didn't get to do much during chemo was read, thanks to the effects of chemo brain. However, I'm more than making up for that now, and I suggest you do the same. While most libraries are closed, you can still get digital books through almost all of them, or order books online. What a good time to get caught up on the latest mystery everyone is reading. Spoiler – it was the butler. It's always the butler.

Take a nap.

Aside from the whole "literally getting toxic chemicals pumped through my body," a lot of my time was spent sleeping. Though toddlers and babies seem to resist the sweet, sweet embrace of a good nap, I highly recommend you invest in some quality Z's in the middle of the day. That Zoom call can probably wait a few hours – it can't be all that important. (Justin Birckbichler and ABSOT does not take any responsibility for losses of jobs from following this advice.)

It's really hard to keep a solid sleep schedule during this time, especially when you don't "have to" be awake at any specific point. That's why a nap can be a crucial part of quelling some boredom. As I shared a few months ago, I highly recommend a sleep mask and weighted blanket. While I've been a big proponent of daily meditations, I've also become a big fan of guided meditations into sleep, and I know a lot of services are offering some for free nowadays.

Cook something new.

One of my fondest memories of chemo was making homemade pizza on a "good day." It was nice to have that time to prepare a meal from scratch, and now many of us have oodles of it. Take this time to make something new that you've been craving, but haven't seemed to have a free moment to make. In this time of quarantine, I've been on a Mexican food kick and made fajitas, enchiladas, and more… all within one week. RIP my digestive tract.

Get active and outside.

I distinctly remember being able to go on a walk towards the end of my chemo experience and feeling the rewarding experience of being outside in nice weather and having some independence. I may have also gotten lost in my neighborhood, but that's neither here nor there.

Outside is one of the only places that hasn't been shut down to the general public, as long as distancing is still followed. I've been spending a lot of time on video calls and I try to get outside when I can. Ironically, it's raining today, so I am inside, but it's been nice overall. A brisk ten-minute walk around the neighborhood can turn around my whole day, and I've enjoyed exploring the local battlefields. I also have started to do P90X again since my gym is now…you guessed it, closed.

Plus, with all the aforementioned watching, reading, sleeping, and eating, you really should consider working some physical activity into your daily routine.

Stay social through virtual means.

Humans are naturally social creatures. While I am a self-identified introvert, I do enjoy talking to people through digital means. Throughout chemo, I spent loads of time texting with my friends and did some video calls here and there.

Feel free to make it a virtual game night! There are plenty of new apps and websites that let you participate in remote game nights with friends from all over the world. I literally did a game night with a friend of a friend who lives in the Czech Republic the other day.

Let me be clear – you can still be social with others, while maintaining physical distance. Do not attempt to approach anyone within six feet until we are told otherwise… and always stay at least six feet away from bears.

Don't forget what this was like after quarantine is over.

Eventually, quarantine will end for the general public. However, millions of people will still be immunocompromised and have to stay in self-isolation. When this all blows over, make a conscious effort to remember how it feels to be quarantined while everyone else in the world is. Then think about how isolating it might be to be one of the only people in a community having to do this.

We will eventually get back to some semblance of order and normalcy, but my one wish for this quarantine time is for all of us to develop a greater sense of empathy and compassion for those who have to do this day in and day out for weeks, months, or years on end.

*I didn't mention to do regular self-exams, but that's pretty much implied at this point since you're on this blog.

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