

# FINDING OUR WAY

Life and teaching Drama amidst the Coronavirus crisis

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I was barely balancing the emotional titter tatter of the 'Should we stay or should we go?' question when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern over the outbreak of the coronavirus. It probably didn't help that I watched the streaming at 5:00am on the first day of my period.

I hugged the throw pillow on the couch and cried.

**'We're stuck and screwed', I thought.**

While the WHO did not recommend travel and trade restrictions, major airlines cancelled flights to China, the United States declared a level four travel warning and at least a couple of countries evacuated people from the embassies in Beijing. Several friends and colleagues left China the next day and a multitude of fears assaulted my mind, the biggest of which was, 'what if a travel ban was declared and we couldn't leave even if we wanted to?'

The mental titter tatter shifted heavily to the 'leave side' and it took all my strength to not fall off.

**The thing is, we couldn't leave anyway because my daughters' passports were expiring in August.**

So we're staying – not for any valiant or noble reason but because we had to. I could fight it or I can find peace with it. I chose the latter. But how did I ground my restless mind?

These are the steps I have taken.

- I shared with my husband about how I was feeling and we chatted about the pros and cons of leaving vs staying. Having an honest conversation allowed us to process the situation, our emotions and the options for our family. We came to a shared understanding and decision on what we wanted to do.

- I called a friend who is working for the WHO to get factual information about the Coronavirus and she confirmed that the WHO did not advocate evacuations for expats in Beijing. Though the virus is highly contagious, the fatality rate is between 1–3% and most severely affecting people in the older age bracket with existing pre-conditions. She said that we could keep calm and use the recommended prevention measures to reduce our chance of infection.
- I practiced *Magical Mornings*, a grounding exercise that focuses on gratitude, vision casting, movement, prayer and meditation that has put my mind, soul, heart and body at ease. During my lowest point, I prayed and meditated on Jeremiah 29 and Psalm 91 – it gave me peace and the reassurance that we are where we needed to be. My faith has been a source of comfort and strength throughout the years and biblical verses have often been a source of personal guidance. Tim Keller shared in a podcast that it was through times of sorrow and suffering that we become who we want to be and really, one can barely call this suffering.
- I made a list of dreams and goals that I can work on during this time. Rilke wrote: '*For the creator there is no poverty and no poor, indifferent place.*' One of my goals for example was to declutter our house and thanks to the Well Declutter challenge and Astra's guidance, I've nearly achieved that goal! Clear space. Clear mind.
- We have friends and colleagues who have also chosen to stay and we're connecting with our community through WeChat, playdates, walks, coffees etc. The feeling of loneliness and isolation can be debilitating and knowing that we're not alone has been helpful.
- I have a fitness plan and lead the Well Fitness group where women do 30–40 minute exercises in their own home. Moving my body has been essential – I feel better after exercising.
- I will try to stay away from social media that makes the situation sound graver than it actually is.

The ripple of this event has gone beyond the borders of Beijing. I hope these tools can help settle the storm within you, wherever you are.

### **TELL US ABOUT WHAT IT IS LIKE WHERE YOU LIVE**

The WHO's declaration that the Coronavirus is a public health emergency of international concern elevated the global response that triggered some countries to shut off its borders from all travelers coming from China, major airlines cancelled flights, foreign embassies like the United States and the United Kingdom evacuated its embassy employees and the international schools in Beijing are still indefinitely shut down.

Meanwhile we need to wear masks everywhere we go, wash hands more often, carry hand sanitizer and minimize contact with other people. Recently compounds have implemented strict rules that forbid visitors from entering residential areas. Some complexes have given their residents ID cards or certificates to monitor when they enter and leave and there are some housing compounds that have also limited the number of times residents can enter or exit their apartments.

## HOW DO WE MAKE THIS EXPERIENCE NORMAL FOR OUR KIDS (ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY KNOW THAT MOST OF THEIR FRIENDS HAVE LEFT CHINA)?

We've turned our home into a 'Fun-bruary' zone with kid-friendly learning stations, placed a gym mat in our living room, set up a music studio and spend quality time with each other. We've also set up a home station for eLearning for ourselves and the kids.

My husband and I are both teachers and trying to manage eLearning for our classes and for our kids simultaneously is REALLY HARD. There's nothing easy about it. Teaching one's own kid is practice of patience and self-control. Often I've wanted to throw their iPads out the window. I teach Drama which is fun but now I need to sit with my second grader as we go through math, writer's workshop, reader's workshop and the most difficult - Chinese! They are in the dual language programme and I have zero language proficiency in Chinese. My Pre-K daughter goes through the home studio through self-directed learning choices that also includes watching Disney's Sofia in Chinese. Yes we've been using television to teach Chinese to our daughter.

We haven't figured out the balance here and take it one day at a time but we were thankful when more families came home to China and on blue-skied days we meet at the park where kids can run around and have some social time with their friends. Speaking of social time, we adults need it too. I'm a part of a We Chat collective of women, called Well Women, in Beijing contributing uplifting articles to unite the community, give them something positive to focus on and strive to thrive during this very strange and unprecedented time in China.



## TELL US ABOUT HOW YOUR TEACHING LIFE HAS CHANGED

Everything! My teaching is now entirely through an e-learning multimedia platform. This is new ground.

## WHAT DO YOU WISH OTHERS KNEW ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE?

I have mused about this on a blog post that I feel answers this question about what others should know and be aware of

[www.dramayogi.com/blog/wuhan-coronavirus-a-season-of-waiting](http://www.dramayogi.com/blog/wuhan-coronavirus-a-season-of-waiting)

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THIS EXPERIENCE BOTH PERSONALLY AND/OR PROFESSIONALLY?

I've created a *Magical morning* practice that has helped ground me spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically every day. I've combined ideas from the following thought leaders Marie Forleo (*Everything is Figureoutable*), Rachel Hollis (*Start your Day Journal*), Hal Erod (*Miracle Morning*), Marshawn Evan Daniels (*Believe Bigger*), Three Good Things (from Berkley's *Greater Good*) and also do physical exercises from the Beachbody programme.

My Magical morning practice includes the following:

**M:** Meditation

**A:** Affirmation

**G:** Gratitude

**I:** Imagination and visioning

**C:** Create

**A:** Action (exercise)

**L:** Literature

## WHAT HAS BEEN SOMETHING POSITIVE THAT HAS COME OUT OF THIS EXPERIENCE?

For me it's relationships, family and community. The quality time that I've been spending with my family and the long walks with my husband, Steve, have drawn our family even closer together. During this time, I've been a part of a Well Women collective.

We've been educating, inspiring and motivating each other through a multimedia platform mostly with WeChat and we've built communities around initiatives that have been helping women strive to thrive during this time. Through this initiative I have

led a 21 Day Fitness Challenge (we have over 300 women in the group with about 80 posting consistently) and a Style Challenge. These things though it may seem simple have been an enormous source of positivity and encouragement in the community.



### TALK

Have a deep and honest conversation with your spouse, partner or closest friends about how you are feeling and make a shared decision for your family

### GET THE FACTS

Research factual information from an authoritative source. The World Health Organization has useful information on their website.

### SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Find a spiritual practice for grounding. Write a gratitude list every day. Look for the blessings around you rather than what you don't have.

### WORK ON YOUR GOALS

Write down dreams or goals that you can work on during this time. Write the dream as if it already happened, list the action steps to take and schedule them into your day.

### CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Connect with others who are also staying in your city. Find "stayer" groups near you and if you have friends that you know are virus-free, arrange small play groups or walking dates.

### MOVE YOUR BODY

Move your body. You will feel better. Join the Well Fitness group and be a part of a supportive community of women who support each other to reach their fitness goals on a daily basis.

### CURATE YOUR MEDIA

What you focus on grows. It's a balance between being informed and being influenced by media.

### FOLLOW US ON WECHAT



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