

SDRC Talking Points

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Life Experiences during the Pandemic

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Director's Message



Wind Beneath Our Wings

As the Center celebrates its 41st anniversary this year, it is indeed an opportune time to pay tribute to the men and women of SDRC who have been very helpful in the management of research projects at the Center—the CAP, APSP, and ASF staff. Past issues of *Talking Points* focused on the research activities and experiences of senior research fellows, research associates, and apprentices at SDRC. This time, *Talking Points* features the SDRC staff as a way to express gratitude for their unwavering support that brought all research projects to their successful completion. I call them the wind beneath our wings!

This special issue allows SDRC staff to share their stories about living, learning, and coping in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This pandemic, which came like an atrocious drop of a bombshell, adds more precarities to our future. Despite these apparent health and economic threats, our SDRC staff are trying to be resilient. Their memoirs manifest the different ways in which humans adapt and walk forward with courage, despite the unfamiliar roads that we are all traversing.

As told by our SDRC staff, this current situation taught them so many life lessons and allowed them to be in tune with the voices of nature and in touch with people very dear to their hearts. They narrate life stories of human beings' natural inclination toward helping others—even strangers; of human beings' natural tendencies to feel pain, express worries, and fear of what comes next, and of survival and adaptation. As depicted in their narratives, the pandemic has had its positive unintended consequences, which include the opportunity for self-care, self-awareness, personal development, and healing.

May this edition of *Talking Points* remind us of the power of faith, positivity, and prayers that will enable us to withstand this unfamiliar battlefield. As narrated through the stories of our staff, it is positivity and hope that has enabled them to face life day in and day out with patience and appreciation.

Indeed, in order for us to survive, we need to see this current situation of ours with a silver lining.

Live Jesus in our Hearts, Forever.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Jabar', written in a cursive style.

MELVIN A. JABAR, PhD

Director, Social Development Research Center

My Experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Reynaldo V. Porsuelo



Lockdown (during ECQ, GCQ, and then MGCQ) can be both fun and boring at the same time. Ninety days have passed very fast but the moment you decide they are ideal, the negative thoughts start to overpower your mind. It happens to me all the time, especially at night when I go to sleep. I feel stressed, frustrated and anxious about the future, and I often panic thinking that I must stay at home for the next two months maybe. Every passing day I have also been thinking that I might

not be paid my salary as I had been previously for the work I was doing. It was not at all easy but I have learned that it is important to keep yourself busy. So, whenever I feel anxious, I try to distract myself by watching a TV movie, checking social media updates, building a fish aquarium, and resting by sleeping or cooking.



I worry that I might lose my temper and patience from everyday life in the house. It is a routine every passing day, and I keep doing the same work I am doing. The pace of life before the pandemic was so fast, and I have almost forgotten what it was like. But I have friends and family. Like most of us

experiencing this lockdown, I used to think that it would be too difficult to be at home for 24 hours every day. But the truth is I am enjoying it. I have time to get in touch with my friends, my family and most importantly, with myself. I see myself laughing when my kids laugh. I hated to help my wife in the kitchen, but now I am preparing lunch/dinner for her and really enjoying it.

I heard somewhere that every house tells a story. It really does, but only when the people living there have some part to play. This pandemic will surely end, but believe me, we won't get another time to rediscover ourselves and relive these moments with our friends and family. I say, be a child again and let yourself go free. Stay home, and be safe.

It is not a great vacation that is going on, but a global pandemic that has caused a lot of suffering to people. I just hope it will be over soon and people can look forward to a better life. I would have said that I am a changed person, that this lockdown has brought me closer to my family. But then, I would be lying. Our tempers flare up. I can't blame anyone; we are all in the same boat. On top of that, my sons temporarily stopped working in the jobs they were recently hired in, which caused some problems of financial concern. And we are located in a red zone (or coronavirus hot spot).

Dateline COVID-19: A Learning Experience

Rommel M. Billena

*"Healing is a matter of time,
but it is sometimes also a
matter of opportunity."*

Hippocrates, c460-c.377 BC

It was an unprecedented event that originated in Wuhan's seafood market and eventually spread globally. It shocked populations from across strata of society. One thing that made me sad for sure was when our former AFED (Association of Faculty Educators of DLSU, Inc.) President, Dante Luis P. Leoncini, was waked in the main chapel of the University.

On that very afternoon, March 9, 2020, all classes were suspended, and after the memorial service we all rushed to go home. We never thought that the interruption of school operations would last for so long.

Because the announcement was made on the spur of the moment, we were not prepared and did not think to bring our personal belongings and important





working papers with us. Then we learned that classes and work would be suspended for a longer time. Another best friend of mine passed away on March 15, almost at midday. I learned of this in the wee hours of the morning on March 16. I was unprepared to accept the news that was sent to my social media account. By midnight of March 17, the Enhanced Community Quarantine was to be in full force and strict compliance observed. On the evening of March 16 at around 8:00 pm, I left our subdivision to visit my friend's wake, which was held a 20-minute walk from his abode. I was surprised to hear a loud

siren from the barangay patrol that passed me as I crossed the road. I heard a voice from the PA system of the patrol car yelling, "The guy on the side of the road, you have to go home now!" I looked around for who he was referring to. In my understanding, the ECQ would not take effect until midnight of March 17. I returned to the subdivision gate, and the patrol told me that no one was permitted to leave until further notice. I begged him to allow me to go to the wake of my best friend as I needed to give financial aid to the bereaved family. I was permitted to do so, and left the wake before midnight. Luckily there was a lone tricycle waiting nearby, which brought me to my home. Two deaths of my best friends made the pandemic days unforgettable. (These friends, however, did not die due to COVID-19.)

Because I am used to being a homebody and living alone, the first week of the total lockdown was fine with me, until I noticed that my stock of food was running out. The LGU would not yield to local residents' requests to be able to go out until quarantine passes were released. Undaunted, I was sure that I could survive on a minimal food supply. Our enemy was unseen and it seemed to

be a silent WWC (a World War against COVID-19). In the next few days I received messages from unknown individuals asking for help so that they could buy food, as they experienced persistent hunger. Since a quarantine pass was issued to each family, I received mine. I extended my personal assistance to eight people whom I had no personal affiliations with—total strangers—in the spirit of sharing and caring for those in need. I know how distressful it is to be hungry. I sent cash assistance through a remittance center, and in one case I had to make the delivery personally, to a student who failed to return home after ECQ was declared. To this day, I receive thank you notes from these people. The pandemic, a serious health problem of coronavirus infections, has created examples among us. The spirit of sharing of resources is indeed a good avenue for enabling our needy brethren to feel that there is someone who cares for them.

The daily bombardment of news on radio and television dealing purely with COVID-19 matters was truly depressing and could make one agitated. Fake news flooded my private messages until such time that I decided to ignore those that were unwelcomed. One such claim—that

bananas can cure COVID-19 infections—made them pricey for a while. So many baseless statements abounded in social media.

Steadfastly, I spend some time praying for those who died from the pandemic, and for the safety of front liners, following their call for people to please stay at home so that medical practitioners can do their very best in healthcare and response. I spend some of my time repairing broken appliances and doing house chores since I live alone. Music really helps to relieve one from boredom and to look forward to brighter days to come. Reading health books and the Bible gives me assurance that I will be okay, and the world will, too! I have learned to eat less frequently so as to avoid becoming an obese individual.

We should not be overwhelmed by the unseen enemy, COVID-19. In the new normal, we should religiously follow the universal precautions/protocols of wearing our masks, washing our hands with soap and water and/or disinfecting our hands with alcohol, and practicing social distancing. Above all things, we can continue to believe in our omniscient God, the God of Abraham and Jacob, the sole Master of His creations and of the entire Universe.

Life within a Pandemic

Lyndia E. Navarro



Who would have thought that our way of living could be changed by an unseen enemy, COVID-19? The pandemic from the virus has put every one of us in a situation that we never dreamed would happen in our lives.

Three months ago, COVID-19 cases started to blow up the entire country. March 10, 2020 was when the University officially declared a temporary stop to its operations. An official announcement was released stating that a lockdown in NCR would

take effect on March 15. We headed back to Pampanga the day before its implementation. Almost all of the establishments had closed and there was no transportation at all. It was a wise decision for us to leave because my eldest daughter and my husband were with me in Manila. What if we had not been able to go to the province prior to the lockdown?

My two younger children and elderly mother-in-law would have been left alone in our house in Pampanga.

I started to worry and overthink the situation, so I decided not to watch or even listen to the news because the more I became aware that the positive cases of COVID-19 were rising, the more I got anxious and disturbed about what was happening. But even if I ignored the news, I still got updates from my friends through messages. As a mother of three children, it always bothered me, especially since we were living with my elderly mother-in-law. It was so hard for me because the mental unease was always there. My mind was bombarded with “What ifs”: “What if I contracted the virus?” “What if my family contracted the virus?” It tortured me every single day, from the moment I woke up and as I went to the grocery store. Every time I got back, going to the washroom was the first thing to do, then take a shower, change clothes and wash the used clothes immediately.

As we faced these challenges each day, more news arrived that startled us. One of our neighbors



became a PUI (or Person Under Investigation) because he was a close contact of a nurse who happened to be COVID-19 positive. Because of this terrifying information, we decided to leave the house and move to our other house near the fields called “Liko.” Only a few people were living in this area so we feel more complacent and safe here. However before moving, we couldn't figure out how to bring my mother-in-law to the other house. The elderly and those who are immunocompromised were restricted from going out, and another



thing was the curfew at 6:00 pm. So what we did was, we left the old house from dusk to dark so that no one would notice. We rode a motorcycle (a “tri-sikad”) and we covered my mother-in-law. After 15 minutes, we arrived in Liko safe and sound. The tri-sikad was a very big help during this lockdown because there have been no other vehicles available for transportation.

Living in a quiet place or area is a great way to safeguard our health and well-being. Since we live in a place near the fields, we came up with the idea to plant more vegetables to sustain our daily needs for

food. And we are lucky because our LGU has relief operations, giving residents food packs which are a very big help for every family in these trying times.

Life may be tough but we have to be tougher. It doesn't mean that since we are experiencing this pandemic, it is already the end. No. We have to keep in mind that hard times are not the time to quit. Our lives today may be very different from the norm before this pandemic happened, but we have to deal with it and accept the new normal.

It is sad to note that many have died, especially among our front liners. Everyone is affected yet it is a call for us to strengthen our faith in God. Fighting with an unseen enemy is very hard. This pandemic is not a reason to blame nor fight our government or anyone else because we are facing a crisis. The pandemic should be an eye opener to examine ourselves as to where we are in the service to our government and our fellow men. Above all, it is a time for us to think about where we are in our relationship with God. No one in the world likes what COVID-19 has brought us. I am praying that God will intervene in our situation, and eradicate COVID-19 very soon.

Faith over Fear in this Uncertain Time

Maria Catherine D. Domingo



It is quite depressing when uncertainty looms. Fear of what will happen in the future has been on my mind, most of the time.

The first two weeks of quarantine were spent mostly monitoring news about the COVID-19 pandemic. But after a while, listening and watching the news became more depressing each day, as the number of cases went up rapidly. Sensationalized reporting characterized social media posts and it created panic in me. I had sleepless nights because of this.

On the third week of quarantine, I decided to stop reading

social media posts and watching online news updates. To divert my attention from the current pandemic and make myself productive, I started decluttering our storeroom. It was a fulfilling task and made my mind forget the situation we were in for a while, because I got tired of the activity and then I was able to sleep fast.



I was praying that the quarantine would be lifted the following month, but I was frustrated when it was extended for another month!

Again, negative thoughts entered my mind, such as what if we lose our jobs like some people did in my husband's workplace, or what will happen to my daughter's schooling, or how would we access food and other resources.

Aside from these thoughts, I become anxious because my husband started to report for work in the hospital. Now, he would be exposed to and at risk of contracting the virus. The fear that my family might get the virus was always on my mind. But this is our life now. My faith is something I'm holding on to, to survive this crisis. I prayed that God would ease the burden and I knew that my faith in Him is greater than the fear I'm feeling.

Other things that I did to cope with my stress were gardening, crocheting, reading books and family bonding activities. I found them relaxing.

Work from home (WFH) was implemented and I am adjusting to the "new normal" of doing my work. I am grateful to the DLSU administrators for the care and support they have given to all employees in these uncertain times.

I hope and pray each day that this global pandemic nightmare will soon be over.

When the quarantine was extended in April, I experienced stress again. Since our subdivision is located within a subdivision, we depend on public transport to go out, but this was suspended. It became problematic: How were we going to buy food and grocery items? What if we had an emergency situation and we needed to go to a hospital? Due to these concerns, I became so worried.

One day, a close friend sent me a message saying that she would pick me up to go to a grocery store. God answered my prayer. I am also thankful to my friend for helping me out in this difficult time. I bought a month's worth of food supplies and necessities.

A Day of My Life in Quarantine

Relly P. Limliman



As Jamie Paolinetti has said, “Limitations live only in our minds. But if we use our imaginations, our possibilities become limitless.” Many people—ourselves included—have been affected by this pandemic. No one really expected that we would be caught in a dreadful situation in which we would be locked down in our own homes.

Apart from our health concerns, there were other things that worried us, like lack of food supplies, our livelihood, and financial

problems. For me personally, it really felt like I couldn't do the things that I used to do. I started to think and feel that I couldn't overcome the problems I was facing. I feared that I might contract COVID-19 and become one of those people who undergoes 14 days of quarantine and then has to leave their family, not knowing what their fate will be.



extra time to do something that I love.

It's not a bad thing to include something in your daily routine that you enjoy. During my leisure time, I enjoy gardening in my front yard. My daughters and I set aside egg shells, banana peels, tea leaves and coffee grounds as natural fertilizers for our plants. We water the plants twice a week to nurture their roots and make sure they receive sunlight as food.

Nevertheless, I tried to fill my mind with positivity. Early in the morning, I would wake up at around 5:00 a.m. and boost myself with a hot cup of coffee or tea. After I was done, I would go for a walk around the village and start doing exercise like jogging. By 7:00 am I would return home and make sure that I eat a healthy breakfast and prepare myself for work later on.

There's such a big difference between working at home and working in the office. Now when I am done with work, I still have

In the end, with today's world, we can't avoid being afraid of what is happening. But if we allow fear and negativity to overtake us, nothing will come of it. We try to be positive in many ways. We do activities that we enjoy so that they will keep us happy and calm. We shouldn't let our emotions control us because in reality, we can surpass anything. We must always know that we are the driver in our life. I control where my destiny leads me. Our senses are the key that lets us imagine the unimaginable world, and that is something worth remembering.

Notes from My Quarantine Journal

Connie J. Maraan



Day 1, Tuesday, March 10.

Four days of work suspension. I finally put away my Christmas décor, six weeks after Chinese New Year. Happily, I locate three Serc tablets I thought I needed during February's validation workshop. I change the batteries in two watches and a clock. Now I have a surplus of time.

Day 7, Monday, March 16.

The week of suspension becomes a month-long lockdown. I fear I'll run out of drinking water, and raid nearby

convenience stores. I vow to stop eating fried food because I have co-morbidities, but I will never stop eating KitKats. I start reading Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*, whose heroine is a forensic anthropologist investigating extrajudicial executions. In Bandarawela are found four skeletons later labelled Tinker, Tailor, Soldier and Sailor.



Day 14, Monday, March 23. It's my father's death anniversary and I cannot go to visit. My only consolation is that my quarantine pass is delivered, so now I can buy groceries in a grocery store. CNN Philippines is back on air and they're giving us AC360, yey. It's 24 more days of quarantine, supposedly until April 15. I've saved quite a lot on gas and tolls, and my landline has suddenly become useful. I do my morning walks indoors now, and listen to VOA reports on DZFE to mark the time. But I really miss rescuing toys from Japan Surplus.

Day 27, Palm Sunday, April 5. Hey, it's a food package! Rice, sardines, corned beef and meat loaf. I would have preferred vegetables, but am not complaining. Lots to be thankful for, like daily TV mass with Fr. Tito Caluag. And after 45 years of living in Parañaque, I notice I no longer get the rumble of red eye flights taking off from NAIA. Instead, birds that resemble magpies wake me with their morning song. My appointment with the cardiologist at the clinic has not pushed through. I wonder how my heart is doing.

Day 56, Monday, May 4. My Meralco bill arrives on paper—proof of life, ha-ha. I go to Robinson's to make my payment, since the grocery lines at Hypermart are unbearably long. But it turns out that I'll have to stand in a socially distanced line for 30 minutes here as well. At one point, the rather sloppy fellow in front of me asks his wife, “Di ka ba kukuha ng olives para sa pasta?”, turning his head slightly to see if I am listening. Later at the counter they leave behind a cart

full of goods, mostly imported, because she doesn't have the cash to pay for them. She moves away from the unwanted cart like the items weren't hers—like they carry some sort of virus.

Day 84, Wednesday, June 3.

I drive the farthest distance I've done in three months, the 10 km+ from Doña Soledad crossing over to Muntinlupa, to settle overdue business. It's familiar yet new, even freeing, to be able to travel what is now a long way away, when in a former life I would drive six times as far, every weekend, without fail. And now, after reading over twenty truly enlightening books during lockdown, I've chosen a work of chick lit, a rom-com, about a woman who “journeys into the unknown, and the wonders of her world.” Yes, true, it's not exactly pandemic literature. But I'm making the most of a bleak situation. This contagion isn't leaving any time soon, so I choose to leave it. As a daily practice. In any exercise that



will take me away from it. Because such things still do exist, in the spaces where I resist capture, or infection, or grief. The possibilities are many, in this place that I keep safe, in a place where I still have me.

My Covid-19 Experience

Ailene G. Agang



Starting with the news of the spreading of the virus, I have felt so afraid, not for myself, but for my family, especially for my parents as they are more vulnerable to risks. I am confident that my body can fight back the virus, but carrying it home has been what I am afraid of. So, my siblings and I have made sure that everyone practiced preventive measures during the ECQ, and we do this even up to now. Our eldest sister and her entire family—her husband and her four children

(aged 15, 13, 5, and 3 years old)—had managed to travel from their home in San Mateo, Rizal, to ours in Caloocan City before the lockdown officially began. We did not receive any financial support from the government given that we were not qualified, which was okay, but we did receive relief goods and we were happy about it.

On the other hand, the quarantine period has given us plenty of time to bond—there are fourteen of us in the house. It's the first time I have spent longer than two weeks at home (after we moved here in 2013 from Malabon, our hometown) with all my family members present, and this has been so meaningful to me. I really do cherish each moment—playing with my niece and nephews, each laugh, all the teasing, the pranks, the scolding, movie marathons, the shouting of “kakain naaahh!” every mealtime, the “hinaan niyo TV nag-cacall na si Ate!” whenever my call center agent sister starts her WFH duty, every “Tita gawa mo po ako ng bahay bahay”, “Tita ligo na ko, di na ko amoy suka paumbong” of my three-year-old niece. I cherish every little thing also because by next month, our only brother—our youngest—will be married and will be living away from us for good, and after the lockdown, we will all go



back to our normal lives—staying in our boarding houses and coming home every weekend or on different schedules.

The quarantine period has also contributed to my personal development in terms of skills enhancement, like I finally have the luxury of time to learn to play the keyboard, at least the basics. I have also started working out regularly and appreciating bits of nature through my mother's mini garden.

The most anxious person in the house during this period has



(in terms of their mental health), and I am happy I can help them with their situation. As for myself, I practice journaling to manage my mental health, which really helps me, especially in these times. Also, to avoid getting stressed out, I practice letting go of the things I cannot control, and this saves me a lot of energy.

We really cannot tell what will happen next. All we can do is do our best to keep ourselves safe, to keep our family members safe, to always be mindful of the current situation, be self-aware, try to contribute to the community, offer help but know our limitations, treasure every moment we share with our family, and thank God for the life we have. We might not always be in control, but surely, God is, so let us learn to let go and let God.

been my mother, yet she is also the one breaking the rules, something that is actually common nowadays. It is hard when you cannot assure your family member health security and the news adds more stress for each of us. Although I also fear the unexpected events that happen outside, I try my best to balance the atmosphere inside our home, always seeking to mediate when the situation requires me to. I also try reaching out to my friends who are having hard times during this period

A Personal Reflection on the Effects of the Pandemic Lockdown

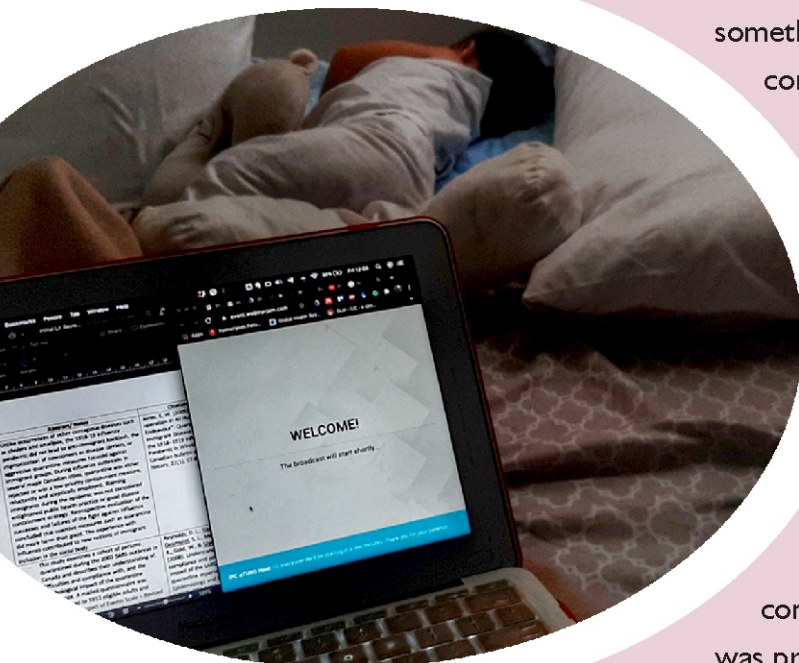
Klarizze V. Siddayao



I can still remember the last day I was in the University. I packed my office things but did not take everything with me since I never expected the extent of the lockdown. As I logged out of the office and bid goodbye and said “Take care” to my co-workers, I was happy that I would be coming home early to my family. I went straight to the bike parking area—it was a relief that my bike was still securely locked to the fence. I quickly prepared the lights for my one-hour bike

commute home. That day marked the 32nd day of my bike commute journey and I was planning to commit to riding my bike to work, every day.

Then all of sudden, the government ordered a lockdown in the whole of the metro to keep the virus from spreading to other parts of the country. We did not expect that the school lockdown



something that my family was committed to doing, to stay safe and to stay alive. As the days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months, it seems I have lost the sense of time and day. The waiting game for everything to go back to normal has caused anxiety and depression for some.

Losing physical or face-to-face contact is not something everyone was prepared for or expected.

Since my husband is a firefighter, I have to endure the task of taking care of our son alone, and keeping our home in order whenever he is on duty. From this pandemic, I finally have a first-hand experience of the challenges faced by single parents in a work-from-home situation. Initially, I longed for a work-from-home set-up so that I could personally take care of our first-born. But then I discovered that the transition to work-from-home was not going to be easy, although I cannot consider this to be a real transition since the change of work setting was sudden and forced by the pandemic.

At first, I tried to do my daily work tasks along with parental duties, but I noticed I felt unaccomplished at

would be extended beyond the prescribed period and how it would change the way we lived and worked. It has now been more than 100 days since the last day of work in the University.

On the first day of the lock down, everyone was asked to stay home, especially those deemed to be more at risk of dying from the virus. Since we were used to going outside, it has definitely been a challenging and an uncomfortable experience to stay put at home for a long time, without any concrete timeline on when this will end. Certainly it was

the end of the day. Despite having naps and sleeping for eight hours, I could not help but feel tired. Being at home has made me feel more tired compared to working in an actual office. I feel jealous of some of my social media friends who have achieved a lot of things and been productive in the middle of a pandemic. Luckily, my partner is available to talk to and provide emotional support on what I am going through. It has helped me gain an awareness of my thoughts and feelings of being overwhelmed by the situation and my expectations. I realize I am not in full control of the situation. Reading articles on how to cope during the pandemic has also helped me to adjust and manage my emotions and thoughts.

I cannot deny feeling worried and afraid of what lies ahead. At the same time, I also have to make sure that I take care of our son well, that everything at home is in order, and that I deliver work outputs. In a way, I feel relieved in being able to take care



of our son, but I did not expect the possible adjustment in my other roles and responsibilities in my career. The new normal has made me reconsider a lot of things in my life. It's a difficult and challenging time to be both a parent and a career person, but I have to carry on and never lose my grip on what keeps me sane and grounded in the middle of this pandemic.

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