**Headline:** Here Are the Good Ways Our Lives Are Already Changing as Coronavirus Halts Modern Life

**Teaser:** The conditions of this virus have communities rehashing togetherness, and relearning what remains when our money-based lifestyles slow down.

By April M. Short

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**[Article Body:]**

In the midst of an international viral outbreak that has people worldwide physically distancing out of social solidarity, so much about our cultural norms and lifestyle practices is off the table. Many are out of work for an indeterminate while. Many of us have paused the daily practices we are accustomed to, like going out to dinner, to the movies, to the yoga studio, to the gym, and to concerts; parties; dancing; and more. Unknowns abound about how businesses will recover, how long this will last, and how weird this might get. The global nature of this pandemic is unlike anything any of us have experienced, and it’s shifting how we operate.

Now what? What will we do as we are faced with this uniquely unsettling moment? Instead of fear-based reactions like panic-buying and toilet-paper-hoarding, how are people individually and collectively choosing torespond with resilience?

**Reframing and Solidarity**

For better or worse, this moment makes it evident how interconnected we all are. As Robyn Pennacchia outlines in a Dam Magazine [article](https://www.damemagazine.com/2020/03/19/rugged-individualism-will-not-save-us-from-coronavirus/), it is not rugged individualism that will get us through this crisis, but collective responsibility. Many of us are taking stock of exactly what is needed in order to sustain ourselves and our communities.

Without the usual money-based outlets, people are getting creative about how we spend our hours and how we’re building support. Many people are doubling down on garden projects, bicycling, hiking, dog-walking, [fostering animals](https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2020/03/20/alone-no-more-people-are-turning-dogs-cats-chickens-cope-with-self-isolation/) and getting around to those home projects they put off. As restaurants close, more people are [cooking at home](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/dining/food-shortage-coronavirus.html) and rethinking their eating habits, and the web is teeming with recipes, advice columns and social media groups dedicated to this home cooking resurgence.

People stuck indoors across [Italy](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/14/solidarity-balcony-singing-spreads-across-italy-during-lockdown) are singing to each other from their windows in solidarity. People locked down in [Spain](https://www.thelocal.es/20200316/balcony-concerts-apartment-block-bingo-rooftop-aerobics-this-is-spain-in-lockdown), and around the world, are playing distance bingo, holding balcony concerts, doing rooftop fitness classes, and more. Jokes borne of this weirdness abound online, thanks to heroes of comedic relief like 30-year-old Italian flight attendant Enrico Barberis Negra, who filmed himself [solo toasting](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgAwsBpjjNo) his own bathroom mirror reflection. It’s a golden age of [meme](https://www.vox.com/2020/3/9/21162031/wash-your-hands-coronavirus-memes) creation.

According to a [WebMD](https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20200320/covid-19-kindness-caremongering-is-trending?src=rss_public&fbclid=IwAR1f5Mbqj4lJSS3p6dYL7eY8syDu9gWZ9nRQTyTsUdOV1uAUIH2wE4XWGjI) article by Kathleen Doheny, “caremongering,” the answer to fearmongering, is trending. Creative acts of kindness between strangers have been springing up all over the place in light of COVID-19, by way of community phone trees where communities can ask for or offer help, Facebook groups where people request and offer neighborhood assistance, online meeting groups of all varieties offering peer support, and more.

While it’s natural and [healthy](https://time.com/5163576/ignoring-your-emotions-bad-for-your-health/) to feel deeply in this emotional moment, it is also necessary, where possible, to gather up our deep wells of courage, and to strengthen up our compassion practices along with our immune systems. While we can’t gather physically in the same ways, we can still reach out to each other and work to dismantle the [potential negative mental health impacts](https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation) of isolation.

*Eat Pray Love* author Elizabeth Gilbert, for instance, was up at 4 a.m. [sharing from her bed](https://www.instagram.com/tv/B9097N4h-co/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet) about anxiety and bravery with the Instagram community on March 17. She asked followers to share their stories of times in their lives when they’ve been brave. She told her own story of a time in her early 20s when she was working alongside cowboys in the Rockies, completely out of her comfort zone. She awoke in the middle of the night, she says, to an intuition that something was wrong. She went outside in the freezing cold alone to discover that the alpha mare, the horse responsible for keeping the whole herd together, had gotten severely entangled in the rope that she was tied to. As all the horses panicked, she realized she was too far from camp to run for help before the mare potentially asphyxiated herself. So, Gilbert says, she single-handedly approached the 2,000-pound, panicking horse, knowing full well that the animal could easily kill her.

“I calmed her down as much as I could, and it took me about an hour, but I slowly unwound her from the ropes,” Gilbert says. “I feel much more relaxed just getting to tell the story… Remember that we come from an ancient tradition of people telling each other stories in the night when they’re scared… I love you all so much. One tangled knot at a time, we’re gonna get through this.”

This is a new scenario, and we are all discovering new ways we can cope and support ourselves and our loved ones.

**Our Systems Were Already in Crisis Before the Pandemic**

Lest we forget, we were already in the midst of an existential crisis that threatened all of our systems and ways of life before this virus outbreak: the climate catastrophe. As a recent [article](https://www.fastcompany.com/90473758/what-would-happen-if-the-world-reacted-to-climate-change-like-its-reacting-to-the-coronavirus?fbclid=IwAR0EfyI1LYTSKJTTTXBFbVhcJ0CaNUPaSaUEM7loLVCjYZadz4LTG2RE_08) in Fast Company asks, “What would happen if the world reacted to climate change like it’s reacting to the coronavirus?”

The health impacts of the climate crisis have [already been killing millions of people every year](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-09-23/climate-change-already-killing-us). The conservative estimate of future deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 due to global warming alone is 250,000, according to a 2018 [World Health Organization report](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health). There is already a human-caused mass extinction of animal species around the world, and if our human systems continue [operating at the business-as-usual rate](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/hot-planet/climate-change-were-not-literally-doomed-but/), the not-so-distant future of humanity looks [bleak at best](https://www.livescience.com/65633-climate-change-dooms-humans-by-2050.html).

Emily Ehlers, the environmentalist writer and illustrator behind the online brand [Eco with Em](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/), shared her short graphic novel called [“A Radical Reframing of Covid-19”](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/posts/3050445505017522?__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARBtu8s_C61dGxslNT0oxKO3T6Il_BwKVMxKfC4OXIDKtLwxsYA8CZJUHtW-aL_MOy5NPJ3JbCDCWmJdnehvnw9uSzQaaaNcbJ9MpCwz7anTP4747XIVbFA_B32ickJsFVID-tcp3Abvs2_VtzuuIVdzMBswHJfOM5VK5OkXQ2uYy1G_8qdNaszG3YGquQL8B_EfVBfsYvrivqN4CB2kOwCsNFsyiarM8J_H8J5qxvNm25B3Qk7BZQcuja6KZVFFl30EJsraryIn-hidqoULfSLTvWOYRnu2j3EE1VTTQioUHHF7RreW2YvxV1juM0UR_7Puzb9k2k6RywoJynzXJAnlRA&__tn__=-R) on March 11, which asks readers to consider what COVID-19 might teach us collectively. While recognizing the scary reality of the virus without trivializing the loss and grief it brings, the graphic novel asks readers to consider the possibility that this is a wake-up call moment for people and planet. Ehlers [writes](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/photos/a.773013192760776/3050445111684228/?type=3):

“We’re already seeing huge economic impact. Families are under massive financial stress. As one such family I feel your pain, believe me. But surely now is the time to explore a more sustainable economic model?... Because infinite growth on a finite planet is impossible.”

The novel [goes on](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/photos/a.773013192760776/3050445175017555/?type=3) to implore readers to imagine this as a “wake up call that gets people to understand the importance of our local food systems,” and stop being wasteful. “Let this be the impetus to learn traditional ways of food preservation,” she [writes](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/photos/a.773013192760776/3050445311684208/?type=3&theater). “We can let it teach us about the [power of kindness and community](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/photos/a.773013192760776/3050445371684202/?type=3&theater).”

Ehlers shared on Facebook and Instagram about the inspiration behind the mini graphic novel: “I know the world is scary right now,” she [writes](https://www.facebook.com/ecowithem/posts/3050445505017522?__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARBtu8s_C61dGxslNT0oxKO3T6Il_BwKVMxKfC4OXIDKtLwxsYA8CZJUHtW-aL_MOy5NPJ3JbCDCWmJdnehvnw9uSzQaaaNcbJ9MpCwz7anTP4747XIVbFA_B32ickJsFVID-tcp3Abvs2_VtzuuIVdzMBswHJfOM5VK5OkXQ2uYy1G_8qdNaszG3YGquQL8B_EfVBfsYvrivqN4CB2kOwCsNFsyiarM8J_H8J5qxvNm25B3Qk7BZQcuja6KZVFFl30EJsraryIn-hidqoULfSLTvWOYRnu2j3EE1VTTQioUHHF7RreW2YvxV1juM0UR_7Puzb9k2k6RywoJynzXJAnlRA&__tn__=-R). “I wanted to put something out there for people who are struggling to know what to do. I don’t give any answers because seriously… who has ’em… but I did maybe want to remind everyone of our own agency, even when there’s a crazy ass pandemic raging.”

The long-term resilience of our species will require a dramatic shift in our ways of being, whether or not this pandemic goes away soon. And ironically, the pandemic has already forced us to see how the [Earth would rapidly begin to clean and heal](https://www.salon.com/2020/03/24/how-eco-activists-can-use-this-terrible-moment-to-help-save-the-planet_partner/) if people stopped, or even slowed, our constant pollution.

As humanity quarantines, the streets quiet. In [Italy](https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2020/03/13/italy-emissions-coronavirus/?arc404=true), [China](https://www.axios.com/coronavirus-nasa-images-china-pollution-clears-7dd8961d-0627-4342-ab0d-029c872ced1e.html?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=onhrs&fbclid=IwAR3vTD5AO3E5W3aSDIKbd0KQcp21pQZEnldBIsLZtFfzCKoxRHQT4EIv9V8) and around the globe, there are already many reports of dramatically improved air quality. NASA imagery shows the dramatic improvement of air quality in China as factories shut down, for example. Similar reports are beginning to filter in from around the most polluted parts of the U.S. The constant traffic and thick smog that have become hallmarks of Los Angeles, for instance, [are vanishing](https://metro.co.uk/2020/03/19/coronavirus-ends-las-notorious-smog-air-pollution-people-stay-home-avoid-roads-12424002/), after just days of people staying home.

There are also [reports](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/nature-is-taking-back-venice-wildlife-returns-to-tourist-free-city) of Venice’s murky water clearing up and fish returning to the tourist-free canals. And, while there has been [some discrepancy](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2020/03/coronavirus-pandemic-fake-animal-viral-social-media-posts/) online about exactly where, according to the [Calgary Sun](https://calgarysun.com/news/good-news/venices-murky-waters-have-cleared-a-silver-lining-in-italys-battle-with-covid-19/wcm/25358912-b3fb-45a6-a4b9-240d7258f434), dolphins have reportedly been spotted for the first time in years, in areas they normally avoid outside of Italy’s coastal cities. After a very short pause, we are already witnessing hints of what is possible when humans slow our constant, noisy, poisonous systems.

As a [video message “from the virus,”](https://youtu.be/a2gdztJU1zY) posted on YouTube by Darinka Montico, artistically details, nature has offered warnings about our long-term health as a species for a while now. The difference now is that we have no choice but to listen, for a moment.

The video is inspired by “[An Imagined Letter from COVID-19 to Humans](https://www.gratefulweb.com/articles/imagined-letter-covid-19-humans),” written by Kristin Flyntz, which has gone viral.

We are being forced through this strange circumstance to see what can exist outside of our industrial systems, outside of our traffic systems, outside of our money-based lifestyles. We have been dealt a momentary pause, a crisis in the midst of our existing crisis, with lessons embedded throughout.

We don’t know what will come, but we do have the capacity to decide how we choose to move through this moment, and face the many challenges that await us. We can do as advised in the Mary Oliver poem “Instructions for Living a Life”:

“Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.”

And if we are lucky, we can find our deep breaths. We can trust that endurance lives in our genetic memories, as thousands of ancestors braved challenges beyond comprehension before us. As writer Linda K. Hogan puts it in her 1996 [book](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/549952.Dwellings) *Dwellings*, “Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.”