

PARTY OF ONE

Your new normal in my old home office

Back in those halcyon days of, oh, four weeks ago, a friend shared a jokey tweet from Sam Adams, a senior editor with Slate. Adams wrote that the most frightening aspect of a pandemic that forced people to stay in their homes for 90 days would be that “the only ones to survive will be freelance writers.”

It's now Day Numbersomethingorother of The Big Sequester, folks. It's the end of the world as you know it, but I feel fine.

This “new normal” the coronavirus created is generally not much different than any of normal day I've had for the past 16 years as a work-at-home writer, a socially distant profession well before it became de rigueur. The commute to my office remains congestion-free, provided the dog doesn't cut me off in his haste to attend to his own business outside. My three-martini lunches still consist of a seltzer and leftovers with Jim Rockford, P.I. I'm always home in time for dinner because I'm always home and someone needs to cook.

Except now those nighttime meals are no longer made for me and my family. They're for me and my three new full-time office mates.

“Why is Dad so happy?” asked my daughter. We evacuated her two weeks ago from college and she reminds us daily that she wishes she was back there.

My astute wife, an HR executive, answered, “Because you're living in his world now.” This proves why she's winning bread in Corporate America while I'm pre-treating undergarment stains in between crafting these columns and ad copy to try to stimulate hot tub purchases during the pandemic. Also, I might have given myself away with a maniacal laugh.

My son offered no comment. It was noonish and he was still sleeping as a high school senior relieved of a 7:20 a.m. first bell will do. At least someone is taking this “shelter in place” stuff to heart.

Having the family under one roof during these times of plague and TP hoarding, while comforting to my paternal side, regularly reinforces why I never looked back when I left the cubicle farm back in 2004.

On the first day of our group confinement, my wife conducted a hostile takeover of our living room. She set up her command post in my easy chair, cranked the heat to pit-stain level and polka dotted every surface with a rainbow of Post-its. This forced me to trade lunches with Rock-

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ford for the sounds of her frequent conference calls in which she'd skillfully soothe a panicked global workforce with optimism like, “We can still check the box if we assertively e-enable interdependent core competencies by bringing to the table authoritative revolutionizing of the cooperative synergy and value-adding with a robust secret sauce.”

Alas, my cushy easy chair proved not ideal for my wife's work or her back. So she moved upstairs, relocating my daughter out of the spare bedroom she used for studying. Is that a home version of corporate raiding?

The sink in the employee break room, formerly our kitchen, soon became a landfill of used plates and glasses as my coworkers lazily bypassed the adjacent dishwasher. No one turned off, let alone cleaned, the empty coffee pot. And someone used the microwave to reheat the previous night's mahi-mahi. Heh heh heh.

Before my coworkers began randomly barging into my office to complain about boredom, TPS reports and missing red staplers, I did what I would do on any old normal day when faced with a difficult work issue. I took the dog for a long walk.

These days that lets me revel in spring blooming along deserted roadways under skies silent except for the singing of birds and the buzzing of landscapers who no virus can contain. And all the while we walked, I meditated on the question of when my world would return to me and their world to them. For their sakes, I hope it comes soon because I will survive. It has been written.

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