

Change for the Better by: Jen Aquino

This term 'the new normal' bothers me. What does that mean exactly? How will that affect us moving forward?

I had a great childhood. I grew up in a modest home on Second Avenue in Little Falls, NJ in the early 70s. The neighborhood was filled with kids around my age and we all played together...all day long. The moms were cooking, cleaning and baking all day, while the dads went off to work. Our moms would sometimes pack us a picnic lunch and we could eat it outside, together! My mom always made us cupcakes or cake or cookies to eat every day. And boy, did we! It sounds ideal because it was. There were woods behind my house and a creek which, of course, I ended up in somehow or another – despite the warnings from my mom. Maybe that's where my lack of listening started. I still don't really listen. I would ride my bike everywhere, along with the other kids on the block. We walked to school. A sweet neighborhood school which we attended from K-8th grade. Yes, we walked. Together. No buses. And we felt safe. There weren't fast cars on the road because no one was in a hurry then. We didn't have computers or cell phones. We had our own two feet to walk to the playground at the bottom of our street – which I swear was a 14-mile walk, uphill, both ways. No one had a playset in their yard. It was bikes and our imaginations. Those were some of the best times in my life. We would play outside all day long. Only go home to eat something quick or use the bathroom, but then finally come home when the street lights came on. The kids in my neighborhood and I would make up

games to play, hiking through the woods behind our houses, imagine we were lost in the wilderness, sat on large rocks in the creek and talk for hours, climb trees, perform plays for our parents and just lived life.

Our parents would have dinner parties, sometimes progressive dinners, we would have block parties, and neighborhood kickball games.

The best life. I covet those days now, but I never really understood or appreciated the beauty of my childhood until I got older and became a mom. I noticed things weren't the same anymore.

But I'm not a fan of phrases such as "new normal" or "returning to normal" because what we consider normal is always changing. Whether it's a gradual or sudden change, we will always experience a changing world.

Change is normal and while it's normal to question and wonder how the world will change, I believe the bigger and more important question to ask is, "How will I improve and grow from the change?"

The world is changing but are you changing? Change is inevitable but whether you change is a choice.

Will you change for the better?

Don't think of it as returning to normal or a new normal.

Return as someone who is changed for the better and ready to thrive in an ever-changing world.

The new normal...Normal to you may not be normal to me. What is normal? Is it something we take for granted? What I want may be something you don't. It's a new way of looking at

old things. We have to be cautious moving forward. Some things are being taken away while new innovative things are being replaced. Like wearing masks...without holding up a bank. Social distancing. New normal. It's all about adjustment.

Social media has made a big difference in our life. That's a big change for some people. It's helps us connect with others. Some of us can reach out and speak with people we wouldn't have had the opportunity to before this time. Google meets, Skype, FaceTime, Zoom – or the old-fashioned way, pick up the phone and call someone. We are all trying our best to stay connected in a disconnected world right now.

I am getting the chance to reconnect, and in some cases, meet for the first time, with my neighbors as I go for a walk through the neighborhood.

Christian author, Sue Schlesman, who is also a pastor's wife, wrote some ideas down that I believe most of us can agree with. She said that this time has created a slower, more peaceful pace of life.

She also asks, does it really take canceled games, closed offices, and online school for us to realize that we are too busy? Let's cherish the opportunity to stay home out of the rat-race. Get more sleep. Read some books.

If you can, plan your work around your day instead of your day around your work. Doing simple things, you normally don't have time for can reveal how stressed-out and off-balance your non-virus life is.

Prioritize doing things you love and begin enjoying a slower life. A slower life like I had growing up. And now, because of

this virus, my daughter. I'm sure most of you remember a slower time.

During this time, we need to find greater empathy and patience. It's easy to panic, blame, or judge during a crisis. A national emergency is inconvenient. Not everyone responds to crisis the same way. It's a change most people don't prepare for.

As we move towards re-opening our state that hasn't changed in just a few short months, remember these two words: empathy and patience. Empathy dictates that I try to see the world through someone else's perspective.

Patience dictates that I control myself so other people can process and respond at their own pace.

These two skills are difficult to groom outside of catastrophe, but it's something we all have to work on as we come out of our cocoons.

Let's be more thankful. When you are grateful for the things in your life, big and small, you always seem to find more things to be grateful about. It's about loving, serving and caring. It's about choosing to make a difference in the lives of others each and every day.

We've been hit by a massive wave of change. Constant change is the new normal. We need to get used to it. This virus has disrupted almost every aspect of our lives – from remote schooling, to grocery shopping, to working from home, to many other things.

Since we've been staying at home, some of my neighbors, along with Al and I, have had outdoor, backyard parties...while social distancing around a fire pit. A few of the guys in our neighborhood had an outdoor Mother's Day brunch for us moms, while snowing and social distancing. Our kids play outside for hours, they ride their bikes, the moms bake and pack lunches for the kids. Some of us even tried to trim our children's hair...remember that time, mom?

I feel like my mom now. Living in a world where things have slowed down a bit, enjoying my neighbors and the outside, not wearing make-up, reading more, and appreciating all the things I had when I was growing up on Second Ave. So, in a weird way, I pray that some things stay the way they are right now. The beauty of childhood and the appreciation of the outdoors.

Let's keep it simple.

So, this 'new normal,' is it really new?

Thanks be to God.