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The Start of the New Normal

Anika left the Holy Child campus on Thursday, March 5, after her history midterm. As she was walking towards her car, all she could think about was how much fun she would be having this spring break--because it wasn't like any other spring break--this was her senior year spring break and she was leaving for the Bahamas in 7 days with 4 of her friends and it was going to be "epic"! But, little did she know, it was the start of an "epic" spring break but for all the wrong reasons.

Over the next few days, Anika packed up all her pretty new swimsuits and vacation outfits. She was daydreaming about how much fun her and her friends would have at the beautiful beach, lounging by the pool, and taking selfies for their all-important Instagram accounts. Throughout the week, her mother kept talking to her about staying safe, making good choices, and reinforcing all of Anika's expectations of having an "epic" time. Her mother's stories of her own Spring break trips in high school and college were "epic".

Over the course of the week, Anika noticed that her mother kept watching news reports and participating in long conference calls from her friend's mothers talking about whether the trip could happen or not. Anika and her mother knew that there were concerns over a new virus called coronavirus that started in Wuhan, China, and it was spreading rapidly to other countries. The news was reporting that there were some real concerns about whether or not traveling to

foreign countries was safe and that there might be difficulty returning to the United States if they did take the trip.

Night after night, one by one, 3 of the 5 friends called and said that they had decided not to travel. Anika and her friends were very disappointed. Anika's mother was the fourth mother to decide that it simply would not be worth the medical concerns and safety issues to go on the trip, so the last girl to be notified was devastated. Although the girls planned and talked about wearing masks and rubber gloves and carrying Lysol wipes to wipe down the airplane seats, which sounded almost overly cautious to Anika and her mother, they remained uncertain if they were making the right decision to cancel the trip she had been looking forward to for months. Finally, after watching the news and reading as much as she could about this new, mysterious virus, they decided together that they made the right decision and it was just not worth the risk.

Anika went about her life as she normally would, she slept in late, saw friends, and spent time on her computer talking to friends who had various opinions about this new virus, and how it would turn out. But, it really sank in on Sunday, March 12, when she and her mother went to the supermarket and saw literally everyone wearing masks and panic shopping with carts that were overflowing with food, toilet paper, cases of water, and snacks. The shelves began to empty very quickly in front of their eyes. Her mother suggested they go for lunch to a diner, and were told that they could be served, but that the restaurant was being ordered to serve the last sit down meals at 2pm. Anika had no idea that this would become the "new normal" over the next few months. The following day, Anika watched President Trump address the nation referring to the virus as COVID-19, and declared it to be a national emergency which had begun on March 1, 2020.

A few days later, Anika received word from Holy Child that after the spring break, she would not be returning to campus, rather staying home for the next two weeks and doing online classes with a system called Zoom. Both Anika and her mother thought the concept was interesting, but would be short-lived, and before no time, Anika would be back on campus because the virus would be under control and life would go back to normal. But that was not the case.

The online classes were somewhat challenging for Anika because of her ADD, and her mother really had to stay on top of her to focus. During the classes, her classmates and teachers spent quite a bit of time talking about how they didn't like computer classes, felt overwhelmed by the ever changing restrictions, and couldn't believe they had to "shelter in place" in their homes following the Governor's orders. The "new normal" became families watching tv regularly to keep informed about all of the new statistics from the previous night, making on-line grocery orders, staying in touch with family and friends via Facetime, and most conversations were about which stores had new stocks of toilet paper and paper towels.

Anika and her mother watched the news daily and learned of the increasing positive cases of the virus all over the world, as well as the death toll increasing daily. What they both found most alarming, and will never forget, were the scenes from all of the New York hospital emergency rooms filled with the medical professionals wearing hazmat suits and working tirelessly to take care of what seemed like a never ending trail of stretchers with very sick people. And the news about how they were running out of personal protection clothing for all hospital staff, ventilators for the patients, and how the hospital morgues were unable to keep up with the number of dead and ice trucks had to be called in to "store" the dead until proper arrangements

could be made . They cried when family members spoke of both young and old relatives who had passed alone, as they were unable to visit, and at times watched their loved ones die on an iPad held by a nurse, and reports of children and families all over the country who were in desperate need of food, as millions had lost their jobs as a result of the “pause” that was put on all businesses rendered not essential.

Anika realized that her “losses” - being denied saying goodbye to her classmates and teachers on a more formal last day of class, her spring break trip, skirt signing, and prom were all really insignificant in this chapter of her life compared to other people in the world. The thousands of people that lost loved ones, the millions of people who lost their jobs, and the “loss” of all American’s freedom to go and do what they want to do, when they want to do it, and with whom they want to do it, is far more significant. The requirement of wearing masks in all public places, gloves, temperature checks, social-distancing, are now going to be the “new normal” for quite some time. Large gatherings such as festivals, concerts, and sporting events will also not be the same for the foreseeable future, and the possibility of colleges in the United States not starting in August - those are all significant.

Anika realized that her generation - the class of 2020 - will hold a significant role in history. Years from now, children and teens will be studying this time in history and the pandemic’s effects on this country, and the entire world. They will be able to learn what to do in the event that a global pandemic occurs. She spent the past two and a half months thinking about her future and realized that life is a constant series of challenges, and if she lives by the motto of the foundress of Holy Child, Cornelia Connelly, “Actions Not Words,” she will live her life to the best of her ability. Every day an individual is faced with obstacles and every day you have

the opportunity to be like Cornelia. You can choose to have faith, show love and dignity to every human being, and make a difference in the lives of those less fortunate. Anika learned from Cornelia that the best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something and not wait for good things to happen to you. When you go out and make good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, and you will fill yourself with hope. If this is your choice, just like Cornelia, you will triumph. If you have strong faith, even in a pandemic, you will triumph.