

Bouncing Through Quarantine  
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When life gives you a pandemic, buy a trampoline.  
Said no one ever.

Except my wife, who, a month into the Safer At Home order, decided it was the most expedient way to persuade our children to get a little fresh air.

“Isn’t it also the most expedient way to get a broken arm?” I asked.

But after a month of being sardined alongside one another, we decided it was worth the risk.

To say that assembling a trampoline was more difficult than I expected would be an understatement. To say that it involved no four-letter words would be a lie. But it was all worth it to see my children’s smiling faces, which I observed from some newly earned distance.

Thanks to the trampoline, social distancing became easier for the kids. When trapped within its cage-like net, there was little chance of them coming into contact with anyone. An added benefit was that the trampoline allowed them to practice a rare moment of social distancing from their parents, and we from them.

Yes, it was a happy time in our household—right up until my son’s symptoms emerged.

It started with a fever, then a cough, then a few other ailments that checked off the boxes we feared. My son took it in stride, though my wife and I didn’t. Under “normal” circumstances, such complaints would have hardly registered on our parental radars, but these were different times. We called the Mayo Clinic, and after an intensive pre-screening process, were told to take Henry to the drive-thru testing tent in the converted lot to the right of the hospital.

We masked up, then made the short trip to the tent, where we were greeted by a health care worker protected behind a face shield. I rolled down the window to the appropriate level.

“Hi Henry,” the man said. “Could you sit on your Dad’s lap, please?”

Unbuckling, Henry climbed over the console.

Then, the man explained that he would soon insert a cotton swab into Henry’s nasal cavity.

“Will it hurt?” Henry asked.

It would, though the worst pain—at least for me—was the sense of doom that loomed over us for the next 12 hours, as Henry and I self-isolated from the rest of the family waited for the results. We whittled away the hours staring out the window as his little sister bounced carefree on the trampoline.

Suddenly the fear of a broken arm seemed trivial.

Was I scared? Absolutely. But not just of the virus. Equally troubling was what the virus had already revealed about who we are as Americans. That we would imperil our own lives for a day at the beach seemed bad enough, but that we would also imperil the lives of others to ensure our good time was nothing short of a moral reckoning.

At the time of this writing, we’ve lost nearly 6500 Wisconsinites to Covid-19. And so, we’re passed the point of pretending that our actions don’t directly impact the people around us. What we do matters. Always, but especially now.

The same principle holds true on a trampoline. One child's bounce alters the others' bounce. If the bounces are ill-timed, the kids disrupt each other. But when timed right, both kids are propelled higher than either could have managed on their own.

Just before bed, my wife received the email.

"Negative!" she shouted. "It's negative!"

Leaping from their beds and springing through the back door, my son and daughter reunited in a dogpile on the trampoline.

"We did it!" they shouted, though, in fact, they had done nothing to ensure this outcome.

Yet in doing nothing, they were doing everything that was asked of them. Day after day, they jump on their trampoline, they put up with their parents, and they keep everyone safe.

Tightening my bathrobe, I climbed onto the trampoline alongside them.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Ready!" they said.

Together, we sent ourselves soaring—defying gravity for as long as the world would allow.