

## Still Normal: Be the Floof and the Mender, Not the Predatory Jerk

By Karen Francis-McWhite, March 25, 2020

So. How are you doing? I suppose that much of how you are doing will depend on:

1. How you are feeling, medically;
2. How you are faring, sequestered in your home; and perhaps chiefly,
3. What you are reading.

Personally, I was feeling panicky recently because I had a dry cough, with some breathing difficulty, and occasional flushes of heat. But then I took my Claritin for my seasonal allergies. I deep cleaned and aired out the house, stepped up the grooming of our coat-blowing house bunnies, and I remembered: (1) it's been more than two weeks since I was in the metro Seattle hot spot, so I'm not likely cooking up COVID-19; and (2) I'm on the cusp of perimenopause and regularly flirt with hot flashes. Yay.

So far, my daughter and I are faring relatively well. She has been begging to be homeschooled for over a year - despite begrudgingly liking her school - and so she has now put some swagger in her footed pjs as she follows my rapid devolution of [the daily schedule](#) I had optimistically created for her.

As for the reading, I have decided to read no more than one article per day about the illness, and instead focus my reading on examples of resilient community development in light of this sudden and radical change. Thanks to this [thread](#) about this [article](#), I am convinced these resilient models will be part of a cyclic new normal.

I also remain a devotee of memes, and to my mind, there are three memes making the rounds now that sum up - I think - where we are and the options available to us.

This sheep escaped a farm and spent 6 years in the mountains, during which time he grew 60 pounds of wool. Wolves tried to eat him, but their teeth could not penetrate the floof. You don't have to turn hard to survive the wolves, just be really, really soft and fluffy.



Anthropologist Margaret Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

'A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts', Mead said.

We are at our best  
when we serve others.  
Be civilized.

- Ira Byock

Gun owners watching non gun owners stock-pile apocalypse supplies for them.



## *Be the Floof*

I live in a lovely river valley, where our Big City has a population of under 40,000. But there are more than a dozen small communities and towns in the three county metropolitan area. We are a predominantly conservative region, with pockets of purple and even blue. But we increasingly recognize that we need, and can support each other more NOW than ever before.

We just need to:

1. Distinguish between needs and wants, and then right-size our needs
2. Get creative with the technology we have
3. Focus on gratitude over greed

Like most communities, we have seen our grocery, big box, and Costco stores denuded of critical supplies at various times over the last two weeks. But we have also seen neighbors posting to the community Facebook pages expressing their need, while others offer to fill those needs - for free, or rarely, at cost. Local grocery stores are providing custom hours for the elderly and at-risk shoppers, and they are capping the quantities of critical staples individuals can purchase to ensure a steady supply.

We have seen area restaurants expressing dismay and anxiety, and only occasionally partisan defiance. But we have also seen - in less than 24 hours - the creation of an [open-source list of restaurants and shops](#) offering delivery or curbside service, which quickly became a [robust website](#) for restaurants and other small businesses. And we have seen a largely nonpartisan shaming of the defiant businesses who have since either changed their business models or closed. We have seen our neighbors and friends laid off, with many (though admittedly not all) finding replacement work at grocery stores and with delivery services.

Many of us - even those, like me, who were already working from home - are learning how to work from home, teach our children, nurture a household and manage our own self-care, all within the footprint of our homes and property. This has required the patience of Methuselah, and a change in the frequency and nature of our use of technology. During the first week, I saw the flood of meeting and event cancellations, with only a trickle of reschedulings. But I hope we

will see more of the latter. I am a fan of using [Doodle](#) to find the optimum meeting time, and I've set up my [Calendly](#) so that constituents in my region can easily calendar time for a call or a virtual meeting with me. My work still largely functions during the traditional 8am - 5pm work day. But I am also offering some earlier and later meeting times because as a working/homeschooling/single parent, I recognize that some non-traditional availability will simply make the most sense for myself and for others.

Technology is helping to alleviate critical pressure points in other ways as well. In [Italy](#), a company bought a 3D printer to make respirator valves for a local hospital. In [Syracuse](#), a couple is 3D printing face shields for their local hospital. [Gamers](#) are deploying their gaming PCs as networked supercomputers to aid research into a "[new wave of projects](#)" simulating potentially druggable protein targets from SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) and the related SARS-CoV virus (for which more structural data is available)." And while the gamers help problem solve, states [like Michigan](#) are using interactive maps to help children who usually receive free and reduced lunch access meals. Even [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) has provided virtual meeting options.

Tech is also there to aid in stress management. When it all just gets overwhelming and one desperately needs some cuteness and/or beauty, you can find inspiration in [the Cyprus man](#) who is using a drone to walk his Pomeranian. Zoos and aquariums are [live streaming adorableness](#), and concerts are being live-streamed on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. While other platforms, like [Patreon](#), are helping artists develop and maintain membership networks that support their creative work. And of course, we are using the technology to connect with our loved ones more frequently.

This crisis is revealing just how quickly and sincerely we can be the floom for each other. We are developing and nurturing the best iterations of what we can be as a society. It just requires helping where and how we can, including acknowledging and accepting when the bravest thing we can do is to sit at home in our jammies, reading a book or binge watching a series. Each helping act, each minute we stay at home, weaves a thread in the safety floom - a communal web of protection - we need to not just protect us from the coronavirus wolves, but emerge stronger and more resilient on the other side.

## *[Be the Mender](#)*

We are rapidly creating a web - or woolen floom - of community resilience and mutual care that will not only help us manage the current crisis. They will also help us heal and mend and better prepare for the next time. Even if there isn't a "next time" with respect to Corvid-19, there could be another comparable shock, given the size of the human family and the interconnectedness of our societies.

So what shall we do to prepare, even as we are actively working to mend our families, neighborhoods, communities, states, and nations today?

I think we must continue to build and nurture community and note the ways that our community building strategies will need to adapt both over time, and on a dime. Nihilistic go-it-alone strategies may appear to work in the short term - as one hoards critical supplies - but the self-destructive nature of nihilism always becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This can be avoided

by becoming part of the community building during these times. Case in point: a local buffet restaurant with a very partisan owner proudly and publicly declared its intent to stay open in defiance of our Democratic governor. Within less than a day, the restaurant had to take down its Facebook pages and ended up closing its doors because the community - including many who are otherwise politically sympathetic to the owner - demanded it. In the end, the restaurant not only shuttered for the time being; it worked with a local community organization to repurpose its inventory of perishable foods into meal kits for the food insecure members of our community. Like the anonymous caretaker in the Margaret Mead meme, we can be the tourniquet and splint for the brokenness in our society, as an act of acute compassion in the moment and committed civilization at our core. Mad Max need not emerge today.

A recent Scott Berinato [article in the Harvard Business Review](#) helped name the phenomenon of Covid denialism and defiance, coupled with the creative resilience and basic compassion that have also stood out. It is grief. It helps me to understand that we are all in collective, multi-staged grief.

*We feel the world has changed, and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn't feel that way, and we realize things will be different. Just as going to the airport is forever different from how it was before 9/11, things will change and this is the point at which they changed. The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we're grieving. Collectively. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air. ... we're also feeling anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief is that feeling we get about what the future holds when we're uncertain.*

There *will* be a new normal after this. And it somehow feels like the normal that will become will be more delible and scarring on our collective memory than even the Spanish Flu or the two World Wars were. After all, in those three cases, we seemed to learn the wrong lessons because the mistakes that helped create those crises were repeated again and again for other, smaller scale ones. This time, we have increased global literacy and immediate global communication tools that are helping erase the barriers of witness and testimony, as well as response and adaptation. We are really and truly in this crisis together, which means we see each other responding to it in various stages of grief, at the same time.

*Understanding the stages of grief is a start. But whenever I talk about the stages of grief, I have to remind people that the stages aren't linear and may not happen in this order. It's not a map but it provides some scaffolding for this unknown world. There's denial, which we say a lot of early on: This virus won't affect us. There's anger: You're making me stay home and taking away my activities. There's bargaining: Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right? There's sadness: I don't know when this will end. And finally there's acceptance. This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed. (Scott Berinato, "That discomfort you're feeling is grief")*

We proceed by staying in the moment, focused on what is the next best thing we can do for ourselves and for others. We proceed by acknowledging that the grief response will look and feel different for all of us. Some will appear to zoom to acceptance at lightning speed, when in fact, they may be wearing acceptance and preparedness like a bargaining Cloak of Invisibility. Some may appear to be callous and calculating in their apparent acceptance of a Randian-Darwinian math that counts on generational sacrifice for "the greater good." But even

they may be acting out the anger at the heart of their feelings of powerlessness. How we respond to reactions we view as repugnant or unhelpful should perhaps harken back to Margaret Mead's anonymous caretaker: how can we respond to heal the brokenness and the grief, rather than compound the fracture?

## Don't be the Predatory Jerk

To be fair, while we manage our grief and work together to heal the societal brokenness revealed or exacerbated by this crisis, we have to be vigilant about those who have no interest in healing. They are content being the wolves who the caretaker has to keep at bay from the mending.

They are [the patent trolls](#) blocking the development of Covid-19 testing. They are the hoarders who [attempted](#) or [actually did](#) turn a profit on critical supplies. They are [the domestic abusers](#) who are using the Stay-at-Home orders as a carte blanche to terrorize their families. And in my humble opinion, they are the corporations who wasted generous tax cuts on stock buybacks, and now demand cash bailouts, despite their access to loans at near 0% interest rates that the citizens paying for the bailout could only dream of.

Now is NOT the time to see weakness in the caretakers nor is it the time to prey on those who have no caretakers nearby. It's not the time to exaggerate one's hardship to extort resources from those who have much less.

Now is the time to floof and to mend. We are grieving. We are healing. We are building a New Normal that unsurprisingly retains much of the good that existed in our communities before December 2019, even as it reveals the creation of new kinds of goodness. The New Normal will revolve around how we do commerce, shelter, food security, education, and of course access to health care. But critical elements of the Old Normal still apply:

be neighborly and cultivate networks of mutuality and support; be patient with oneself and with each other, as we grieve, transition, and grow; and don't be a predatory, selfish prick.

