

The <<<<Quarantine>>>> Checklist

By R. F. Gonzalez

WHY WE LIKE IT: *The Covid themed subs we got for this issue ranged from the very good to the gawd awful This is an example of the very good.*

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1. You can't hang your heart at home forever.

Home may not be exactly where your heart is after all this. Hearts wake up early and complain because traffic sucks, or because the kids refuse to get ready, or because the toaster broke, or because the coffee tastes like dirt. The other day my heart cracked an egg into an iron pan and the yolk burst. They do it so much better at restaurants. That's where my heart is - sitting at a table in a vinyl booth while waiting for some mean service from a disgruntled waitress who I'll still tip because

maybe she needs it more. My heart is not at home, though. It sleeps at home, reflects at home, is safe at home, loves my people at home - but it doesn't hang there.

2. Don't go crazy.

This is going to be the coldest summer ever. Not that it's going to be cold, but that this whole isolation, lockdown, distancing thing has made everything frosty. Everything. If cold had complexion, it would be pallid. It would look sickly. Don't go crazy. Cold is death and tastes like ice cubes and feels like a metal chair on your back in the morning. Everything feels cold lately. You can hear the clink, clink, clinking of cold everywhere.

3. Have kids, they said.

It'll be worth it. If you don't have kids, then you may be lonely. And if you do have kids, then they may be lonely because they miss their friends more than anything. You. You might not miss anything if you're an isolationist anyway. This quarantine is just a season like any other. Maintaining six feet between people is more relief than anything because you crave the space. If you're socially inclined, then those six feet may as well be six hundred. But the kids, keep them close - like, within a foot or so.

4. Have a drink.

Sip it from across the street with your neighbor. It can be any drink because they won't know what's in your cup anyway. They're too far to tell. Share a green tea and mischievously pour sugar into it. Toast a coffee from afar and make it Irish, if you want. Share an ice-cold water and let them think it's water and not some other intoxicating drink on the rocks that you made at home.

5. Don't horde.

My kid wanted some cheap noodle soup the other day. Couldn't get it for her because for some reason the fear of impending doom had been projected from toilet tissue to paper towels to soup - like some bizarre consumerist eco-chain that's gone ablaze. Sorry, darling, but there was no soup at the store. But why? she said. Because people are scared and when they're scared they horde tissue and soup. I wish they'd make up their minds, she sighed. It was gasoline last time.

6. Yay! Working from Home.

Even with super focusing powers, working from home is still chaotic. I'm trying to write this story for the zine but my kid wants pretzels. I get him pretzels. Wrong kind so he screams at me for failing as a father. Two minutes of writing and all I've written is *Two minutes of writing*. I've got to grade my classes but the essays are worse than getting the wrong pretzels. I manage to squeeze in two hours of solid work in ten hours.

7. Coffee is life.

Seriously, my coffee drinking has turned into a frenzy. Instead of four cups a day I drink eight, yet I'm sleeping more and waking up less rested. There must be a science behind this which I'll have to check out sometime, which means never. They shut down all the coffee houses too, which means my office is closed. I took the two-dollar a day cheap rent for granted. Now, the real rent is due and the landlord is showing up like a 1970's pimp caricature to make sure we have it. I wish we could pay him with coffee. Coffee currency - that would solve everything.

8. Take a drive.

Take a drive for no other reason than to be alone. Tell your wife and kids that you've got important errands to run - the most important of which is to get a sandwich and eat it in the most serene place in quarantine history - a widely paved parking lot. Watch the cars zip by and wonder what parking lots they are driving to since they can't possibly be driving to the one you're in (since they just zipped by, of course). Maybe they'll check back later to see if you've relinquished the lot. Sit there longer just so they can have a story to grumpily tell themselves later. *Can you believe that jerk? Sitting in my lot, smugly eating a sandwich on my errands break. I hope he chokes.*

And for a moment you choke on a piece of salami. Karma is still a *B* even in pandemics.

9. Don't cough.

Cough quietly or else everyone will think you're infected. I was walking the grocery aisles a week ago and I coughed and looked around to see if anyone had heard it through my mask. Nobody. I coughed again and it was a phlegmy cough, one of those wet hacks that could be allergies, a dust particle, a cold, too many cigarettes, or the vile virus itself. So, I attempted to cough quieter than I've ever done before. I couldn't manage the tiny heaves so I abandoned my cart and hurried out to my car where I gripped my steering wheel and yelled obscenities about the absurdity of closing playgrounds. It was liberating for a moment before the rigidity of this new life suddenly hit me and robbed me of breath anyway. The irony made me want coffee.

10. Art.

Take up an art - any art. Writing is probably the easiest art to do because everyone has been using words since they were children, and in writing you use words to paint pictures (because you're not talented enough to actually produce anything significant on canvas). The only drawback is that once you've written something it has the tendency to stick to your character, taint your life, and estrange people who read themselves into the words you've committed to paper (or internet

pages nowadays). Put it like this. People don't admire an abstract painting and say, Yeah, that blue one, that's me. I'm that blob. Writing is a lonely, solitary art, so maybe it isn't the best one to take up during the quarantine since this disease is already the champion of keeping us distant and estranged. Writing is also pandemic and it's unlikely we will ever find a cure for it. The virus is like writing - it's never going away. Maybe.

11. Infection Perfection.

We could go away instead and leave the virus to fester on its own and without bodies to infect. Or even better: we could reverse roles and infect the virus. You've got a case of human, the virus-doc would say. Oh, sweet virus-gawd, no. What will happen to me? At which the virus-doc would say, you may experience a temperature of 98.6, patches or stretches of skin growing, hair sprouting, oxygen saturation of at least 94, tirades about a wife and kids which you don't have because you're a virus, and extremely violent episodes where you will horde red blood cells or virus-toilet tissue and virus-soup. Or petrol (Why the hell not?) But what will I tell my virus-daughter? Oh, no, the infection has begun, the virus-doc would say. We should quarantine you.

The End

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Hog a parking lot and watch other cars envy you. Share a drink from far away. Don't horde, because everyone already has and so there's nothing left. We live in a state of infection perfection. *The Quarantine Checklist* consists of mini-vignettes about coping with the pandemic. Simple acts like shopping, drinking coffee, and relaxing have all been redefined as risky behavior. Accepting that the virus is here to stay means that these behaviors will also remain with us even after the social measures have vanished.

AUTHOR'S BIO: I have a short story published with The Piker Press literary magazine, titled *Meaty Machismo* (2019), as well as a short story published with The Acentos Review, titled *Flip-Flop* (2020). Also, I have a non-fiction book published with McFarland & Company, Inc., titled *Chinese Gong Fu: Toward a Body-Centered Understanding* (2019), and a fiction book titled *Love is a Cheerleader Running* (2019) published with Wings ePress, Inc. I also hold a PhD and am a writing instructor in Dallas. R.F. Gonzalez was born in Nicaragua. After living in Europe and Central America, he moved to the United States where he works as a writing instructor, investor, and writer.