



## **The New Love Landscape- Connecting our Elders and Our Children in the Time of Zoom**

By Aeron Hart

It's hard to remember how it began now. The beginning of lockdown, although palpable even in memory, was a rushed flurry of overnight changes, and all I can really remember was this feeling of barely holding onto myself. We live in a small house, my husband, 10 year old and I. Suddenly I was running circles around the house, picking clothes off the floor in one bedroom, doing teletherapy in my daughter's bedroom (I'm a grief counselor), then opening the door to the living room, and being a mom and a wife on the other side. I would tell my husband "I have another Zoom client now, I'll see you in an hour", and he'd call back "the governor just ordered a statewide lockdown", and I would shut the door. The news kept coming, and I steadied myself and tried to hear the sound of my own voice. I sat in the morning with a whiteboard in bed with my daughter, creating an hour by hour schedule of general ideas for stuff to do- art from 9-10, practice some piano, outside time 11-12, lunch 12-1 with tv break ...etc. I remember calling my mother at 7am one morning and it felt like my heart had cracked like an egg and tears ran down my face- just total shock and a delirious barrage of new confusing things to manage- Zoom calls with clients, Zoom school, deaths in the news, stockpiling canned goods....you get it- you were all there too.

I know that on top of that, was the feeling of the divide between us and my mother (who lives in Virginia) feeling suddenly as continental and gargantuan as it actually is, with no way to get across. The summer plans for visits with each other seemed to wilt on our tongues over the phone as we tried to problem solve and reason and brainstorm wild ways of still making it work: "yeah, but maybe if you took a train, with a private compartment, and you didn't stop, and then....yeah...that won't work." There was no way around the sudden absolute space in between all of us, and that felt more interminable by the day. All we could say over and over again was "I don't know. I just don't know what's going to happen. When will I see you again?".

However, enter Zoom, our unlikely hero in this world crisis. I don't know when the first time Aeon, my daughter, and my mother saw each other face to face. I know getting my mother on there took at least 20 minutes of attempting to email, send an invite, get her to receive the invite, and then Boom- we were face to face. I remember my own sense of relief immediately, the feeling of taking care of both my mother and my daughter at the same time. This became the routine, at least three times a week, they would get on together. At first, they opened a Gogledoc, and were able to figure out how to both edit it. They created a coauthored story about their experience in quarantine 2020. Then they drew oversized man-eating vegetables and created characters "Rambunctious Ravenous Rabid Radishes Ravage your Relatives". What

can I say, I'm related to wacky people. Next my mother was showing Aeona chords on a piano, discussing philosophers from the 1700's, or showing cat videos on Youtube.

In other words, what was spontaneously created was a connection that was unprecedented and vital. They had this technology available to them prior to the pandemic that rocked our worlds, but had never had more than a 5 minute phone conversation before- it took a crisis to hurl them into the tech ether together, and bond in this dynamic, powerful way. For me as a working mom, it was the difference between chaos and control, between emotional freefall and stability. It was a miracle.

Our senior citizens and our children are suffering now more than anyone- they are the least engaged, they are isolated, and their roles in society have been taken from them. They have the least control over what's happening, and are feeling, in my experiencing, more anxiety and depression than other age groups. If you have loved ones in your life that are locked in their own quarantine bubbles and are struggling to stay afloat emotionally, perhaps a connection like the one my mom and daughter had could be something to try. No one is suggesting anyone do quantum physics or have some powerful cathartic connection over Zoom, but a simple interaction to check in and see each other's faces could provide immense value in an otherwise hopeless situation. A symbiotic relationship can form in which seniors feel they can contribute to their adult children's life, they are enjoying their grandchildren, and feeling seen in their isolation. Children can learn precious lessons from the seniors in their life that they otherwise could never have time for in the barrage of school and afterschool activities that cram their lives. They can simply ask one another how they are, laugh about a funny video, share a hidden talent or a secret. It could be the medicine the people in your life need.

Maybe try it by just giving an older relative a quick Zoom tutorial, and meeting with them yourself. Remind them that your kid doesn't need a professional tutor or a therapist or a best friend, they need *you*- granpa, grandma, aunty- a loving voice, a presence. Someone to tell them that the dragon they drew on their art pad in their bedroom is phenomenal. Someone to tell them who Shirley Temple was, or what life was like for them in the fourth grade. Someone they can play their cat video for and laugh with. It could be that small connection that gets an older relative or an isolated child through their week, until we all are on the other side of this thing. I know in our family, it's been unforgettable gift.

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