**Prepping in the time of the virus – sweating the small stuff**

**Date Line Hangzhou, China - February 22nd 2020.**

I have been indoors since the 21st of January with only 4 excursions outside the community in which I live. These are the takeaways (no pun intended) from this China Crisis.

My main message is stolen from the astronaut Chris Hadfield in his book “An Astronauts Guide to Life on Earth”. His message which is central to Astronaut training is SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF – in this virus situation it’s not just about bog rolls and beans.

**People**

People are your enemy. People are the vehicle viruses use to fulfil their biological destiny, which is to enter a host body and multiply. The medical reason is: “to deliver its genome into the host cell to allow its expression (transcription and translation) by the host cell. (Thanks Google)” So like humans, it just needs to reproduce.

Stay away from people – is my main message

*The small stuff*

1. About 2 meters is the minimum distance you should be near other people if you can manage that. When walking the dog, or going out, I give people a wide berth.
2. I do not get into the lift with other people in it I wait until the lift is free for just me. I have stopped people getting in with me or if they insist I get out and wait. A lift is a confined space – it’s not worth the risk –if the virus is airborne.
3. There are videos online of people spitting on lift buttons and door handles. I do not touch the lift buttons with my hand. I don’t wear gloves so use other things, my key, the handle of my dogs lead, my finger through the plastic of the rubbish bag I’m taking out and so on.
4. When having to sign in or out of the community or the supermarket as we did initially, I used my hand sanitizer/alcohol spray on the only pen available.
5. The guard needed to see my passport to write the number down. I didn’t let him hold it, I held it out for him to see.
6. Note: if/when using an alcohol based spray around the home remember alcohol is inflammable. There have been reports of people setting fire to their homes through the judicious use of alcohol based spray near naked flames such as in the kitchen.
7. At the supermarket I sanitized the handle of the shopping trolley.
8. I sanitized our hands after leaving the taxi. (other people had been in there)
9. I sanitize every box, bottle or item bought into the house.

**Masks**

As we know “coughs and sneezes spread diseases” so masks are important. Despite the macho posturing of so-called pepper’s who shout on social media that masks are useless unless they are the full NBC kit (got off eBay for 20 quid mate!) when I see an expert on TV, in a mask, telling me masks are useless, I will continue to wear a mask. I don’t want people coughing or sneezing on me.

The reasons for masks (despite what the naysayers would have us believe.)

1. If people are coughing, sneezing and spitting it offers some direct protection to your nose and mouth.
2. Regardless of the efficiency debate wearing a mask has a psychological benefit in that you feel like you are doing something.
3. If you are yourself infected it protects people around you and is a visible sign so people might give you a wide berth – which is also a good thing.
4. In China you would not be allowed to enter supermarkets, trains, taxi’s, your own community, for example, if you are not wearing a mask – it was a government instruction not a request.
5. Having the mask on is a physical reminder to not to touch your face or eyes.

*The small stuff*

Regardless of the efficiency of the various masks whether you have a N95, a blue surgical mask or have to use an airline style eye mask as an American friend of mind did, you need to follow the correct routine.

1. When returning home keep the mask on until you have finished all your returning tasks. Such as taking your coat off, cleaning the dog’s feet, disinfecting your shoe soles and so on.
2. Have hand sanitizer gel/spray on a shelf near the door, use it as you go in and out like in a hospital. Make it a habit.
3. Wash your hands before removing the mask.
4. Do not spray the mask with alcohol or other disinfectant as it makes the mask useless.
5. If used for a long period of time discard the mask – but if you only have one or a couple ­- a used mask is better than none.
6. We hang ours up to “dry” on little adhesive hooks near the door and our stash of masks and hand sanitizer. Not just dropped on a table etc.
7. Check out the types of masks that are comfortable for you to use before you need to. The first type we had were the ones with the ear loops. For some reason one of my ears was faulty and didn’t work so well on one side of my head. The elastic loop kept slipping off. So we managed to buy some masks with elastic that went on my head and behind my neck. Small stuff detail.

**Transport**

During lock down all the public transport stopped running, buses, and taxis both public and DiDi (like Uber). Our local supermarket is around 15 minutes by taxi so much too far to go by foot, (unless we were really desperate). The supermarkets remained open as you can see from my videos. Roads were being closed and or blocked. The trains and Metro continued to run on a scaled down schedule

1. Have your own alternative transport other than a car.
2. People with electric bikes/motor bikes were free to travel in Hangzhou. My friend got to the supermarket regularly.
3. We have got push bikes – so we could have got there if things got worse and we were still allowed out.

*The small stuff*

1. If using public transport still maintain your routines, stay away from people as much as possible
2. Remember other people have used the space you are in before you. Have disinfected wipes if you are inhabiting that space for a long time – such a trains or planes.
3. Sanitize hands regularly.
4. On planes remember the air is recycled, keep your mask on.
5. On planes do not accept the food, you have to remove your mask to eat.
6. Have one of those non-disposable straws to sip, (water/milk – whatever you can buy in the departure lounge,) through under your mask with the minimum exposure.

**Passport/ID**

Make sure you have a passport (if you are an American many of you do not) or other valid and acceptable ID. Authorities will need to see this when/if checkpoints are being set up.

The small stuff

1. Have multiple copies of your Passport/ID in as many places as possible, paper copies, photos/scans on your phones/computers, email copies to yourself so they will be saved on the servers and can be accessed.
2. In a virus/epidemic scenario do not let other people handle your ID, if they do cleanse it or leave it for the recommended time for the virus to die. Some research suggest that the virus can live for up to 9 days on some surfaces. Normal disinfectant will kill it.

**Money.**

China is practically a cashless society. We can pay for most things via the apps on our phones. WeChat and Alipay are they two main platforms. These apps are attached to our bank accounts. On WeChat we can book train tickets and taxis, top-up my phone, order food in, buy from supermarkets and other retailers which will get delivered next day (sometimes the same day) all via my phone. I can’t remember the last time I had cash in my pocket.

According to CNN China's central bank is taking steps to deep clean and even destroy its cash out of fears that the new coronavirus can survive on the surface of money and potentially spread.

The small stuff.

1. If you can join an e-money scheme like ours here in China so you don’t have to handle cash and can use your phone to pay.
2. Makes sure your debit/credit card is contactless (but also have one of those wallets that shield your card – I do)
3. If you handle cash – follow your sanitary routines.
4. If you have to work and handle cash wear gloves.

**Health and personal.**

During a long period of lock down its easy to become stir crazy as there is little to do other than watch Cat videos on YouTube all day. At the beginning I sort of fell into a zombified trance. I had no enthusiasm to do anything, this was probably a psychological reaction to the news of the virus spread, the rising infections and deaths. The hubbub of fake news, racism, statistics, real news, advice and counter advice becomes a bombardment on one’s senses and mental health. One’s stress levels are raised and usually I am quite creative and can fill my time writing, painting, reading and so on. Not going out and being isolated from one’s family and friends also has its own impact. You have to shake it off and become positive, construct and most of all do not panic.

I am not a great believer in the bog roll prep. There was panic buying in Hong Kong when people thought that supplies that came from China would run out. As many people point out, half the world doesn’t use toilet paper. Soap and water is good enough. In the spirit of full disclosure, during normal times I use toilet tissue, but I always wash myself afterwards. I have done this for well over 40 years since reading a book by Jack Kerouac where one of the characters was doing the same. Missing the tissue stage would be no big deal for me. (If I am out, I always carry moist tissue.)

1. Staying in might impact upon your levels of Vitamin D. Vit. D is good for your immune system which needs vitamin D to fight off invading bacteria and viruses.
2. You need direct sunlight for your body to make Vit. D – Sunlight through a window does not work. So get out of your bunker if you can, get some sunshine, sunshine!
3. You can get Vit. D from some food stuffs – do your research.]
4. There was a run on Vit. C in China.
5. Exercise is important. Sitting on one’s fat arse all day is unhealthy and demoralising. Get out if possible. Otherwise maintain an exercise regime in the home.
6. Have things to do. Books, games, hobbies.

*The small stuff*

What if? These are things that have crossed my mind.

1. You need a dentist?
2. You have a health problem and you need to visit a hospital – but the hospitals are full of virus patients? Do your research to find out, if you can, what would happen given this scenario.
3. Drop the kindle app on your phone. Its free. Every day Kindle does a “Deals of the Day” offer. Three or four books are for sale for 0.99p each. You can start building a library now.
4. Do something positive that makes you feel like you are in control. For example, that’s why I started filming my experiences. It gave me something to do and something new to learn when I had to edit the film. It fills a few hours every day. Also writing things like this which I can post on Facebook and on my blog. It’s therapeutic and it gives me a sense of being useful. Keep a journal.
5. Haircuts. I need a hair cut – a mundane thing but my last hair cut was the beginning of January - my wife is threatening to use our fluffy cat’s clippers she uses on its hairy bum!
6. Women have specific personal needs my wife managed to find what she needed locally in the only pharmacy that was open before we managed to get to the supermarket again.

**Food**

1. Snacks. Lots of snacks. The only shelves sold out in the supermarket were the snacks shelves. Buy more than you think you need.
2. Booze. Buy more than you think you need – from personal experience. It doesn’t last as long as you think it will, even with rationing.

*The small stuff*

1. We did manage to order veggies and fruit in – but it was more expensive than normal. We made sure we washed all the packaging and the fruit and vegetables.
2. Although I have a stash of tea bags I bring back with me from the UK, I am drinking more cups of tea during lock in that usual. I usual bring back more than 365 teabags back to China, which allows for at least one cup of tea a day – as I am not in China for 365 days of the year. My stash is going down alarmingly because we are well into the academic year which ends for me in June when I will get back to the UK. Buy more tea bags or your favourite beverage.
3. Coffee. I can buy coffee but am drinking more than usual as I am stuck in all day.
4. We haven’t been ordering takeaway or ready made food to be delivered – you don’t know who coughed over it last.
5. You have to make sure any meat you purchase is cooked very well to kill any viruses.

**Pets**

In Wuhan pets have been dying. Not from the virus, they cannot get it. But because their owners have been taken ill and have been taken to hospital or kept in hospital, or died and the pets have been forgotten in the mayhem of it all. Some pets have been tended for by kind hearted volunteers from pet rescues and neighbours.

1. What are your arrangements for your pets should the SHTF for you personally?
2. Do you have enough food, supplies and medicines for your pets?

The small stuff

1. If you take your dog out for a walk and if your cat is a free roaming outdoors/indoors cat. Disinfect their feet every time you/they re-enter your home. People spit and cough and the virus can last a reasonably long time on other surfaces.
2. If cleaners and so on are disinfecting your area or using bleach, as ours do in the lifts, pick your dog up (if you can – I have a Jack Russell) to protect their feet.
3. Watch out for your dog scavenging food off the floor. (You should do this anyway)
4. Find out which vets might be available to you – we had to take our dog for a rabies injection as it was due but not at our usual vet as he was closed and didn’t have the license to give the injection. Fortunately, the lock down eased the day before the due date so we were able to leave the community and take a taxi.

Why should we sweat the small stuff?

Sweating the small stuff, focusing on the details is what will keep you alive in these situations, while Bog Rolls and Beans are important – they are indicative of focusing on the Big Stuff. The stuff you all like to chat about online – and there is nothing wrong with that.

Here in China, because of the nature of the Government, there has not been a panic. People have followed instructions to stay in, wear masks, and follow the required routines. The small stuff. I worry that in the West things would be different. People think about themselves more than their community or society. If it wasn’t for the selfless work of countless doctors, nurses, medics, ancillary workers, the police and other emergency services, the army and community security guys, the delivery guys, the shop keepers and supermarket employees who have worked through this, bus drivers, taxi drivers, metro and train employees, the volunteers taking food to ill people, feeding pets, driving nurses and doctors to work in locked down areas, down to the rubbish collectors and the army of cleaners disinfecting and cleaning our community everyday we would never have made it this far.