

Grammy's Electronic Kitchen Table

By: Diana Flynn

The howling laughter flooding my childhood bedroom drowns out the incessant clicking of my keyboard as I close in on the last of my homework for the day. The voice of my father overpowering his brothers and sisters as they discuss how they're coping with working from home increases with every step I take down the stairs. I'm greeted with smiling faces and waves from eight different Zoom windows. My Aunt Ellen sits at her newly refurbished white granite countertops screaming "Go Eagles," the same greeting she always uses for me. I see my fifteen-year-old cousin Annie having her late-night snack of Oreos. My Grandmother's face glows in the Floridian sunset. My Uncle John, a Boston police officer, currently in self-isolation from my cousins, laughs with me about the room service he's getting to his bedroom door from his wife, and my cousins Allyson and Brittany run by the screen screaming "I'll be back!" on their way to shower after a 12-hour shift at Beth Israel Hospital. Normally, we only do this "hangout" activity at family parties, which might take place once every two months or so. But now, these laughter-filled, hour-long Zooms are a weekly occurrence.

People who know the "Flynn Family" see that we're a tight-knit group of thirty-seven. Straight out of West Roxbury, the five Flynn brothers and the laugh-riot, crazy two middle sisters have an unbreakable bond, bossed around by a 5-foot Italian lady and fathered by an Irish man from Charlestown. As a child who's grown up in this family, I've learned what it means to be loved by so many- and by many I mean thirteen aunts and uncles and twenty-three cousins. With thirty-six people available to bond with, ranging in age from five-year-old Jack to eighty-one-year-old Grammy, we've all developed our own individual relationships that are reinforced when we come together at the monthly birthday parties. But, during a time like Corona, it seems

like we feel more connected despite being physically distanced in our own houses, spanning from Norwell, Massachusetts all the way home to West Roxbury, and down the east coast to Naples, Florida.

All the voices start to become one, with everyone talking over each other. But that's nothing new; it's just as if we were sitting around the kitchen table at Grammy's having late afternoon tea on a random summer evening. As my thoughts begin to drift, I think about the time before we all sat in little three-inch boxes on computer screens. Family birthday parties would be the highlight of my months. The laughter of my uncles filling the house after Ellen tells her monthly stories from her job at the courthouse, the sound of a Wiffle ball being sent deep into the woods by twenty-two-year-old Robert followed by the "wows!" and high pitched "oh my goshs!" of the seven kids under the age of ten, and the smell of lasagna wafting through hallways, were all signs of a successful Flynn Family party. But on Zoom, instead of having our own individual conversations, now we're all sharing the same conversation. So we're bonded together as a whole, sharing bits about our days, from discussing how Allyson and Brittany are coping at the hospital and offering them support to celebrating big milestones like 18th birthdays by singing and watching candles being blown out.

Daily text chains among the adults, and Snapchat groups for the grandchildren, have allowed us to share daily updates and memories, but the parties were our time to truly be together. However, now, it's surprisingly easier for us to meet as a whole group even more. Our schedules have slowed: there are no more Saturdays packed from 9am-5pm with basketball, soccer, and hockey games; no more business trips; no more driving to friends' houses after school, picking up relatives at colleges across New England, and no more "I'm too busy." If we

could, we'd spend every day playing backyard games, drinking tea, and reminiscing around the table, but life was getting too busy for the thirty-seven of us.

After an hour or two, the Zoom call begins to die down as the younger kids go to play, some of the older kids return to homework, and the adults retreat to bed. I can barely make out the voices as everyone repeats "miss you all" "be safe" and "can't wait to see you again" before logging out. "Can't wait to see you again" truly resonates with me. Do they mean "see" me again on Zoom, or are they optimistically thinking about the summer BBQs in the future? But then I remember that it doesn't matter. The connection we share isn't about the hello hugs, and celebratory high fives at home plate, or the passing of lasagna at Grammy's table; it's about our interest in hearing about even the mundane aspects of each other's days, the laughter over who made the most trips to the fridge, and the reminiscing on a lifetime of memories. Although I might not feel the splashes of summer pool parties any time soon, the weekly laughter on Zoom is a pretty great substitute.