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Grocery Store Culture During the Pandemic

Prior to March 27, I took some entries from another journal in order to create this travelogue. I decided to focus on different grocery store environments as that is what my life revolved around for most of this time. There are differences in each state and each grocery store depending on the area. In Minnesota, I usually went grocery shopping every Friday around 5 pm (central). In South Carolina, I usually go grocery shopping with my dad at the Sam's in Easley around 12:30 pm (eastern) on Fridays. With my mom, I usually go to Aldi and Lidl at 11:30 (eastern) on Saturdays.

March 6, 2020 St. Paul, MN- My friend and I go to an Aldi's that's a 20 minute bus ride from Macalester because the prices are cheaper compared to the ones closer to the school. White people don't really shop here because of the area it's in and I guess they've got other places to be but it was a pretty normal grocery shopping day for us. No one is wearing masks, we got bread and juice. We also got rootbeer floats from the corner store with a group of like ten people.

March 10, 2020 St. Paul MN- There was a meeting among the professors about possibly going online. I don't think it's gonna happen??

March 11, 2020 St. Paul MN-PBR said some of us could just stay back home so I don't know what's going to happen. Also the week after Spring Break we are going to have off as well.

March 12, 2020 St. Paul, MN- My parents want me back home and I'm thinking of it. What would I do without ceramics? Or any of my other classes? I miss my parents but being back home sometimes stresses me out because I have to suppress a lot. I went to ceramics after the call and threw about ten things to destress but then I realized I'm not going to be able to trim them if the art building closes.

March 13, 2020 St. Paul, MN- It's the Friday before Spring Break and everything feels weird. In Ceramics, we left on a note of uncertainty- are we going to see each other after break? After class, Ammar and I went grocery shopping but this time Hassan took us in his car. Aldi's was crazy today I saw a whole bunch of people today and this white woman almost ran over me with her dumb little cart because she was in such a rush to get bread. There wasn't even any left! There was only one bag of potatoes and no meat. There were a lot of white people here today and it's crazy because they usually don't shop at this Aldi's. I'm wondering if they're also shopping at the Hispanic stores around here?? It didn't matter anyways because I just wanted half a gallon of milk. When I was in line this white man had a whole shopcart full of groceries and ten of

those items were olives! An older man behind me told me in Spanish to just cut in front of this guy but I just ended up waiting. I asked the cashier if it has always been this busy and she said it was actually the least busy they've been. No one was wearing a mask and there were only two cashiers and lines of at least ten people in each one. Social distancing was not in practice.

March 15 2020 St. Paul, MN- Naty and I made a tres leches cake today but we forgot the whipping cream so we went to the Whole Foods on Snelling. We went around 7 pm and there were still a few people shopping but it wasn't crazy full. There was one little sad-looking orange left on the produce displays. There were only three bags of sugar left. I found it kind of surprising to see Whole Foods kind of barren as well because it's Whole Foods! It was 7 pm but people were still stockpiling.

March 16 2020 St. Paul, MN- Students are going to have to leave campus so I talked to my parents today about going back home. It was embarrassing to talk about because I send my work study money back home, but now I have to ask for it back in order to go back. It usually covers the bills but I don't know what's gonna happen now but I guess I will deal with it later.

March 20, 2020 St. Paul, MN- There is a one way flight to Greenville that's around \$130 which is pretty cheap considering the time. Hassan is giving Ammar and I a ride on the 23rd so we have just been packing. We packed our non perishables for the summer and left some frozen stuff with Jennings and Hassan. The rest of the food we gave to either Jennings or the open pantry. I hated this part of packing up because I remember finally being in a food secure place when all this happened. Our lease starts June 1st so I am hoping that the food we saved will last us until the start of the school year.

March 21, 2020 St. Paul, MN- There are Macalester people that are infected! I feel more paranoid about going out around campus. I heard from several people that it was the tennis team and they threw a party last Sunday that infected a lot of people. I don't know if it's true but I don't know if I should leave anymore. My parents are old and my brother recently went through a surgery so they are vulnerable.

March 23 2020- At the Minneapolis airport there were only two people flying to La Guardia and around eight people flying to Charlotte. Ammar and I got seats to each other but there still weren't any masks around or really any enforced social distancing. I wrapped my scarf around my face during the entire trip. In Charlotte, there were six people on my connecting flight to Greenville. The flight attendant told us to sit anywhere. When I got home, I didn't hug my family just to be safe.

March 24 2020 Greenville, SC- I woke up today to find my dad in the house. It was weird because he usually works the morning shift at the factory. He told me they cut his and my mom's hours. He'd come back from Walmart and he cannot find any chicken. My mom came back around 10 pm that night.

March 27, 2020 Easley, SC- My dad grocery shops every Friday because he doesn't have work and he likes to buy oranges because a family member told him it was good against the virus. My brother usually drives my dad around but he's been staying in since they closed schools. I drive my dad to the Sam's in Easley and he tells me to put on gloves and a mask. This is the first time I do any of these things and I see how serious this is for him. He gets his oranges and we check for chicken or any other kind of meat but there still isn't anything. Only older people are wearing masks. Vague social distancing is in place. It's ok though because my mom has always stocked up on food for harder times. I think we still have chicken from last year.

March 28, 2020 Greenville, SC- My mom grocery shops every Saturday to get greens like cilantro, celery, etc. We got to the Aldi's near Cherrydale Point and it was spilling with people. No masks except a Hispanic couple behind us in the checkout line. My mom likes to compare prices with the Lidl at Wade Hampton so we went there as well. It was less full but we still could not find chicken. There weren't any people wearing masks but there were stricter social distancing guidelines here.

April 1, 2020 Greenville SC- My mom wanted to go to the thrift store near the house. She sends clothes back to Ecuador to family members. I also look for coats here because clothes here are so much cheaper than in Minnesota. We are the only ones wearing masks and gloves but there's about four people here anyways. I passed by the Goodwill in the plaza near the White Horse Walmart and it had closed the day before. I'm kind of surprised because the Miracle Hill thrift store was still open.

April 3, 2020 Easley, SC- We went to Sam's again and my dad bought yogurt because he heard on the news that it helps. A lot more people are wearing masks and it's not as full as last week but there is no toilet paper or chicken yet. There was a guy disinfecting the handles of carts this time as well.

April 4, 2020 Greenville, SC- We went to Aldi's and the workers are wearing masks, there's a little tape on the floor indicating "6 feet apart" and there's the plastic wall separating the cashier and the customer. The line was so so long! We wrapped around an aisle. It seemed like everyone was wearing a mask, customers and workers. At Lidl, there were significantly less people but there were little stickers on the floor indicating 6 feet. I didn't really focus on a lot of the people since we were just in and out, but I noticed none of the workers were wearing masks. Aldi was

definitely taking the most precautions. We found everything except the whole chicken so my mom decided to just buy the chicken legs. We passed by the Miracle Hill thrift store and it was closed.

April 5, 2020 Greenville, SC- It was Palm Sunday and the neighborhood church was giving away palms to put on our door. My parents search up Sunday Mass on youtube and we just sit in the living room while it plays. It was still too early for me so I was falling in and out of sleep. We got a call from my aunt in Ecuador that an uncle died. She doesn't know how to tell my grandmother. I am worried for her.

April 8, 2020 Greenville, SC-I'm starting to feel like I used to feel in high school and it's making me sick because I thought I got over it. I feel anxious and sad all the time. Today we had to present in Ceramics and I feel like I could have done more but I didn't.

April 10, 2020 Easley, SC- All these white people that aren't wearing masks are making me so mad my dad and mom have to go to work and they still can't make an effort to cover their mouths when they cough. This white woman coughed at Sam's so my dad and I went the other way. I think this was the shortest grocery trip yet. I've also noticed more people don't follow the rules at this location. Easley is more rural and the white people that grocery shop here are more conservative? We went to La Unica on the way because we were looking for these yellow beans my mom likes but didn't end up buying anything because the prices were too high. My mom later told me that the Hispanic stores were raising the prices because it was the same at El Paso and El Rey.

April 11, 2020 Greenville, SC- Went to Aldi's and we finally found a whole chicken. There weren't a lot of people here today. People were wearing their masks and there was a person outside disinfecting the carts like at Sam's. We didn't go to Lidl today but I applied for jobs to help out. My dad applied for unemployment but I don't think he will qualify. He is working two days a week if anything at all. We had hot dogs today and I felt like I was ten again. We were eating a lot of hot dogs, canned tuna, and eggs with rice around that time as well.

April 17, 2020 Easley, SC- Realized this pandemic does not scare me as much as it does other people because I feel like I've always lived in this sort of uncertainty, financial and emotional. I guess when I went to college I started to forget about those times. My parents always teetered on the edge of everything and it wasn't until I was able to work that I felt that we were digging ourselves out. We went to Sam's and got oranges again and this family behind us in the checkout line was too close to us. A worker came up after us and disinfecting the area. I think we just go grocery shopping to get out of the house at this point. Sam's definitely is taking the least precautions out of the three stores we frequent.

April 18, 2020 Greenville, SC- Went to Aldi's and everything was stocked, people were still following the social distancing precautions but there were a few people who still were not wearing masks. There are now little tape arrows on the floor as well. We did not go to Lidl.

April 19,2020 Greenville, SC- The company doesn't want my dad to file for unemployment so they're scheduling him to work 4 days a week with minimum hours.

April 22, 2020 Greenville, SC- My aunt was telling my dad about how another family member got the virus and she told them to go to Santa Elena instead because they'd have a better chance there. She's a doctor in Guayaquil and everytime she goes home she has to disinfect herself and she can't get close to my grandmother. I'm thinking about everything my grandmother has been through and how I haven't seen her in a couple of years. I looked up how much it would be to cremate someone in SC. If I save up my work study money for the next two years it would be enough to cover for both of my parents.

April 23, 2020 Greenville, SC- I got an email from Breakthrough and they're unsure if the material is gonna go online or if we are going to continue as planned. I'm stressed because I need to know in order to book a flight back to Minneapolis. I don't really want to go back but I need a job in order to pay for the lease and to send back to my parents. I haven't heard back from any of the jobs I've applied to so I probably have a better chance in Minnesota. Also the pay is double the one in SC. I feel really bad because I told Ammar I'd be back over the summer but I'm putting my family and I first. I think it would be better to stay for at least a portion of the summer to save on rent and help out with my family here. I promised a lot of people I'd be back over the summer but honestly how can I know what's going to happen??

April 24, 2020 Greenville, SC- We went to the cemetery today to visit my grandfather. No Sam's today.

April 25, 2020 Greenville, SC- We went to Tomato Vine, near Travelers Rest and only a handful of people were wearing masks. I don't really like Tomato Vine because this white man owns the store and doesn't treat the Hispanic workers well (which is ironic because his wife is Mexican). I asked my mom why she still shops here and she told me prices are fairly low. She was surprised to see that some prices had risen (the broccoli, the potatoes, the bread) but I don't know if it's the pandemic or not. I noticed that a lot of older people shop here but only a few are wearing masks and gloves. All of the workers stocking the produce are wearing gloves and masks. There were only two white workers at the cash register with no mask but with gloves on. I'm wondering if he's always had white women work the cash register?? After that we went to Aldi's and I was surprised to see a lot of customers not wearing masks. Even some of the workers were not

wearing masks either but the clear panels were still up and they were still disinfecting the carts. A lot of people weren't obeying the little arrows on the ground. Some woman in the checkout line got mad at us and told us to move up even though we were following the 6 feet apart precaution. We did not move up, but only because I acted like I didn't know what she was saying when my mom asked me to translate. We went to Lidl and people were also not taking precautions. I think it's less surprising than Tomato Vine since the people that usually shop here are younger like mid 20-30s.

August 27, 2020 Greenville, SC- I had ordered tax return transcripts for my mom and dad a while back for Financial Aid and just realized they never came in the mail. I tried to order them by mail again but the IRS wasn't processing any more requests. I hate this process so much because it's such a hassle and today I was really frustrated with everything. I ended up getting my dad's transcript online ONLY because he had a working cell phone. In order to access these transcripts, you have to register on the site and you have to have access to a working cell phone and an email address and a bunch of other things my mom did not have. If you don't have access to any of these things, you have to order an activation code through the mail which wasn't possible because the IRS wasn't processing anymore requests! I feel like I'm screwed over either way and I know I could have it way worse but I already hate this process so much and now things that weren't that easily accessible before were inaccessible now.

April 30 2020, Greenville, SC-I got an interview at the Chipotle on Woodruff next week but no car. I think I'll skateboard to work. I also got approved for extra aid for my ticket back to Minnesota.

May 1, 2020 Easley, SC- I ended up using part of the aid to pay the bills so I guess I'll book a one way ticket once Breakthrough let's me know what's next. I woke up stressed thinking about it because I just don't know what's gonna happen to this job. My mom went with us to Sam's. It was crazy to see how lax people were about precautions. I only saw three people wearing masks and following the social distancing rules. There were still workers disinfecting the carts and the cash registers but that was about it. There is meat but just very little of it. My parents and I split up in order to get the groceries done faster. When we were driving back, we noticed that there were a lot of people outside. There was even a group of cyclists out on the road. The nice weather has made people think it's ok to go outside.

May 2, 2020 Greenville, SC- I guess I haven't really been paying attention to the news because Greenville is opening back up on Monday which is kind of ridiculous. My mom wanted to go to Tomato Vine again to get beets. There were only a couple of older people wearing masks, but the majority were not even wearing gloves. All of the Hispanic workers were wearing masks and gloves. A lady recognized one of the workers from somewhere and started talking to her like

right up to her face. The customer was not wearing a mask. I hate Tomato Vine so much. I can't wait to make enough money to buy it off the owner. I wandered towards the cash registers and see that only white women are working the cash registers- no masks and no gloves. Do they ever do any of the heavy lifting? The restocking? The heavy work around this dumb grocery store???

Some white little man walks into the store and my mom says it's Papucho (the owner). He looks so much shorter and pinker than I remembered him but he isn't wearing a mask either. When we are driving over to Aldi's, I ask my mom if she saw that the cashiers are white and she said that yeah, Papucho has always been blatantly racist and unfair. She told me she's never really liked him since she fired one of her friends just for being pregnant. He's known for hiring solely Hispanic women. That's kinda sus to me. I cannot stand this man. When we get to Aldi's, a lot less people are wearing masks but the usual things are still happening- there is a worker disinfecting the carts, there's the little glass panel separating cashiers and customers, and there are still little arrows on the floor. When we went to Lidl, there were not as many people but still, a lot of them were not wearing masks. This time though, I noticed that all of the workers had masks and gloves on. There was a sign telling us that no more than 100 people were permitted inside at a time before we went in as well.

So far from what I've seen, the degree of precautions taken is both grocery store and region specific. Easley and Traveler's Rest (where Tomato Vine is) are a lot more rural than both the Greenville and Wade Hampton Area. Tomato Vine had no precautions implemented from what I could see. Sam's was the second laxest store- they were only disinfecting carts and cash registers but that's about it. Wade Hampton is close to the "city" but still on the outskirts, which probably influenced Lidl's precautions taken- the social distancing, masked workers, and the "no more than 100 people permitted" sign but the lack of enforcement. I guess it also depends on the store because Lidl and Aldi are European. Aldi took the most precaution of all (and enforced it) and was most near the city as well. They were disinfecting carts, workers wore masks and gloves, they put little arrows on the floor, put up plastic barriers, and had stickers on the floor indicating 6 feet.

May 7, 2020 Greenville, SC- My dad wanted me to drive him to Lidl because he has been looking for lady fingers since the pandemic has started and they only sell the kind he likes here. A lot more people aren't wearing masks now but the workers still are. There is still a sign telling us that no more than 100 people can't go in but there is no indication of how many people are inside. Anyways, on our ride there and back home we saw a ton of people out and about in groups. This nice weather seems to be tricking people. I just get kind of mad when I see people like that around because I have to go home and listen to the news in Ecuador. Also my dad is super paranoid so I think that is rubbing off on me as well. I've been applying to jobs and have been using his cell phone as a contact number and I learned that night that I actually have been getting offers- it's just my dad denying them for me. We got in an argument because he really doesn't want me to work- he won't really say it but I know he's scared. I just really need a job

because I need to pay for my dumb little apartment in Minnesota because it's just cheaper to live off campus but I don't want to tell my parents about any of it because I don't wanna worry them more. I just need to work I just can't stay without a job any longer because I have college to pay and right now typing this I feel sick to my stomach thinking about the mandatory Health Insurance fee when I'm on Medicaid in South Carolina but every time I ask about it I get told there's nothing they can do about it and every year it's 2,000 dollars I just don't have. I'm just thinking of all this and I can't even tell my parents because how can I tell them about my stupid fees and my stupid debt when they have to watch the news and see corpses on the streets in Guayaquil. I just feel fucked over and I'm just so tired I wish I didn't have to work but I have to. I have to. I just have to because my parents gave me the world and I bought into this shitty dream of college and the longer I stay in the house the more I realize how frail and made-up everything is. And I know it isn't just about me but being stuck in the house I just feel so alone because I just can't tell my parents about stuff that will just worry them more.

May 8, 2020 Greenville, SC- The tornadoes messed up our roof so there are leaks everywhere. We do not have enough money to fix it. I really need a job. When I was taking a nap, I heard some noise up in the attic so I guess some animals got in through the holes again. I hope the roof doesn't collapse on us.

May 9, 2020 Greenville, SC-I got an email back from this restaurant downtown and got an interview Monday. I think if I work full-time until I go back to Minnesota, I will be able to get by for the semester. I'm really hoping it's more delivery/ food prep based rather than dine in because I wouldn't want to bring the virus back home. My mom and I went to Tomato Vine first today and only four people were wearing masks (aside from us) out of what seemed 30 people in this tiny store. Two of the workers passed by with masks on and then there was an older couple wearing masks as well. When we went to Aldi and Lidl, there were significantly less people wearing masks and most of those who were wearing masks were older people. I'm kind of worried about people forgetting about the precautions we need to take because of my parents.