

Topic: My Grubstreet Article

[What Did the Pandemic Teach Chefs About Accessibility](#)

Questions/Flow/Notes:

Arc of lockdown =

1. FLOOD of people into the home/digital space = took away a lot of our resources
 - Access to things that ill and disabled people have relied on for autonomy and independence, quality of life:
 - i. Groceries: delivery food systems overwhelmed
 - ii. Takeout: For immune-compromised people, takeout was now not safe so that was off the table
 - iii. Healthcare industry ran into supply chain issues: pharmacies were hitting prescription caps as more people called in **90-day quantities**, people with Lupus couldn't get their **HYDROXY-CHLORE-O-QUEEN** because the former president wrongly touted its efficacy against Covid and ignorant people started buying and stocking it, some of the top pharmaceutical companies for immune support saw a huge growth in their buyer's market so people who relied on their supplements who *need them* for immune support – people who have compromised immune systems -- couldn't find them...
 - Living with a *chronic* illness or a disability often feels like a house of cards to me. Take an essential card away, it crumbles. They take a lot of work to rebuild.

PLUS, EMOTIONAL ASPECT: Our loved ones flooded into this space, the shock:

- Fear of unknown medical crisis
 - Loss of control over what you want to do and now can't
 - Loss of access to public space for work or social time...
 - I interviewed several ill and disabled people at the top of the pandemic, and there was definitely sympathy for the world joining us here, but also very much awareness that even our loved ones were not making the connection that many of us already live variations of what the pandemic lockdown proved to be for the general population.
2. Flood of resources: **WHAT WE HAVEN'T HAD** – access to workspaces, doctors (telemedicine), schools, all the theatre and art, famous people doing cooking classes and music classes for free, and the emotional support resources because everyone realized *how hard it is to establish your universe at home*.
 - When it comes to culture, this leveled up everything.
 - i. Art world not just streaming shows but doing very creative concerts

- ii. Masterpiece theatre is sponsored by Viking and they started a whole virtual travel channel
 - iii. The NY Times “At Home” section which ran this last year and ended in print last weekend.
 - **Chefs - early in the pandemic, wrote about family meals:** Before the pandemic, family meals were BBQ or roasted chicken or comfort food like that. Now you can get whole fish or suckling pig or the equivalent of a holiday meal... any time.
 - **Cocktails being delivered...** can we keep that?
 - **Chefs doing tutorials on their IG or printing reheat messages...**
3. **Now... those things are going...**
- Telemedicine is ending
 - NY Times ended At Home section in print this last weekend
 - I point out in the article some restaurants that have stopped delivering
 - I’m getting a lot of pitches from publicists about travel and a return to normal and how we’re going into the roaring twenties ...
 - Jobs in media – writing and podcasting, but I’m hearing this from friends in other industries -- are going back into the office when they’ve proved they can be remote.
4. We’ve seen incredible creativity this last year, and perseverance... and yet I wonder what people have really learned about the world they want to live in? The world they want to create?

Do creativity, and community, and grit, and compassion, and collaboration, etc. only exist when we’re in crisis mode?

PURCHASING POWER:

- One side – disability = average of \$1200 a month, especially for young people. One thing I didn’t specify in the article that speaks to the overall difficulty disabled people face outside of pandemic life is that many people who suffered under unemployment this year got that **\$600 a week extra federal funding... disabled people did not get that.** And **disabled adults who are dependents on their family members did not get the stimulus checks, either.** So this population is regularly under-supported, got pushed back further during the pandemic, and didn’t receive the financial support the rest of the population did. But that’s another wing of this...
- Even with this... disabled people dine out. I have an open survey on my site for disabled people and a wheelchair user with PTSD who is fully employed marked that they dine out

1-3 times a month but if restaurants were more accessible to them they'd dine out 5-10 times a month... that's big for their local restaurants...

- I'm self-employed and I spend more on dining out than I do on any other pleasure in my life... But especially as **someone who also cooks** incredibly well and when there's access to incredible ingredients I can get in my home and recipes if I need them... for both take out and dine in... the experience has to be worth my physical energy or the repercussion of pain it will definitely cause me... and it can't take too much work... and right now most restaurants are too much work when it comes to accessibility issues...

Hospitality outside of the home/in the restaurant:

1. In-house dining: Big accessible things that no one does: QR coded menus, accessible menus for allergies and in braille, not only wheelchair-wide spaces but also consider the general height of tables and chairs for wheelchair users and those with varying other disabilities — and generally just have staff trained to welcome different kinds of dining styles...
2. **Reservation systems** = I don't know how many times I mark things in the notes of reservation systems, and it doesn't make it to a server. They don't know I have Celiac, or I request a quiet table and don't get one. High top / low top. Etc.
3. **COMMUNICATION IN GENERAL:** We saw this level up during the pandemic. So many chefs I spoke with talked about communication being key so that their customers understand they'll be safe, well fed, taken care of, etc. That shouldn't be something that happens in only crisis times, right? **And it should always target the people who need safety most.**
 - a. Sites can update menus better. MARK MENUS better in general. There are so many varying disabilities = food issues. Mark menus.
 - b. I'm starting to see restaurant websites marking that the websites strive for accessibility and want to be told if they're not accessible... but they still don't say anything about their dining rooms. If you have accessibility features, that should be just as clear on your website as the pretty pictures and stories.