

Michelle Hancock 0:01

Welcome to the She Lives Podcast, a show for women who are seeking encouragement and inspiration in everyday living. While our lives have changed, our desire to stay connected to each other remains the same. Learn from empowering women on living a happier life. Yes, it's possible even during a global pandemic. Take a break from the chaos. Let's work together to find joy in a world that feels like it's on pause. My name is Michelle Hancock and I'm your host. Remember if you love this podcast, please take a moment to rate review and share with others community is so important. Thank you and enjoy the show. Thank you for joining us. Today's show is an important show. Every show is important really, but I'm very excited to hear from my dear friend Mandy Thomas. I've been following her journey on Facebook. She has decided to go to New York and she's going to tell a little bit more about her experience. She's fighting COVID-19 on the front lines. And we're also going to talk about, you know, some things that we can do to support our health care. I just really wanted to pick your brain I don't really have a whole lot prepared. It was just on a whim I messaged you on Facebook. I said, Hey, can I pick your brain? I'd really love to hear what's going on over there. So hi, Mandy. Thank you for taking time. I know you're probably mentally and physically exhausted right now. But can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you're doing right now?

Mandy Thomas 1:29

Oh, yes. You got it right with the mental and physical exhaustion. I have been here a week now. Um, and they put me on night shift. So, I'm actually fixing to go in for my shift. But this is this is so eye opening because I came from Texas where you know they don't have near as many cases now. Dallas, there are tons of cases. Dallas but they are not to this extreme. The streets are empty unless you have military clothes and or scrubs on or you are homeless.

Michelle Hancock 2:13

You were walking around yesterday, and I saw your pictures that looked like a scene from a movie or something.

Mandy Thomas 2:18

It was! I've been to New York one other time about 15 years ago. And it was constant. They call this the city that never sleeps. And I saw that to be true 15 years ago, now is the city that sleeps all day. I was able to go sightseeing from the car, and there's no one on the streets. Time Square is empty, except for there might be 50 people total on all the streets down there. And we saw a few sightseers here and there. Most of them are nurses and crnas or doctors or respiratory therapists that can appeared to help that have not been to the city before. Since there's no vacationers anymore up here.

Michelle Hancock 3:07

Tell everybody what you're doing and what you did in Texas, like talk about your medical experience. And I also want to find out what drove you to make the decision to leave your family and go to New York City.

Mandy Thomas 3:19

I've been a nurse since 2002 and then I transitioned from normal nursing and I'm now a crna. Some people call it nurse and ethicist. Some people call it a nurse anesthisiologist. I do anesthesia day to day whether it's in the or for various surgeries or I also do epidurals and C sections for labor and delivery. But here, since there are no elective cases being done in Texas right now, you know, we were I was sitting at home except for my call shifts for labor and delivery. Hurry. So decided that I wasn't going to be you know, helping people on a day to day basis there. I asked them if I could take a leave of absence to come up here where I knew that they needed help. And being a crna we are very versatile. There are some crnas up here that are working as ICU nurses. They have me in a role where I'm doing respiratory therapy for patients. I'm checking the ventilators and the C paps and the bipap 's and whatever breathing apparatus these patients are on. They've really made us very versatile. There's quite a few crnas that have that have done the same thing that and answered the call for help that New York had and we've left our families and we've come up here. I'm doing a three-week stint here and then I will go back to Texas to quarantine for two weeks. There are some people that are doing four weeks. There are some people doing six weeks. Some are doing eight weeks. I actually have several friends up here I have an ICU nurse or an ER nurse that is here in the city helping. I have an OR nurse that is working as a floor nurse here. And then a crna friend of mine is also here with me.

Michelle Hancock 5:25

Tell me about when you first arrived to your first day of work. How was that? Were you nervous? What did you expect? Was it different and then also has New York been very welcoming? What is what is their attitude and moral?

Mandy Thomas

New York has been so welcoming people thank you on the streets if you're in scrubs say thank you every day on the streets.

Mandy Thomas 5:48

There's one crna that is up here with the army and people are trying to buy her food every day and thanking them there's a high military presence now. Coming into the hospitals helping us well. But what as soon as I set foot in the hospital, it's very, it's scary, even for me with as many years experiences I have, and I've been through SARS and swine flu and H1N1 and all those, none of those actually even fazed me, this one scares me because it spreads so rapidly. You don't even know you have it until you start seeing symptoms. And by the time you start seeing symptoms, you've already spread it to others. I do not go anywhere without a mask on I don't leave my hotel room or the respiratory therapy room that we do our charting. I don't leave those two places without a mask on. And that's how most people are. There are some brave souls that walk around with no mask on, but I have no idea why they're doing that.

Michelle Hancock 6:55

There's a lot of denial out there and what would you say to the people that this is all fake and maybe we're overreacting and we need to just open up!

Mandy Thomas 7:05

I was one of those before I came up here.

I really thought that everyone was overreacting that it was just another flu. Um, it didn't faze me and then as soon as I got here and walked into the hospital and saw that every single person in the hospital has this, and there are young people and old people dying and it's they're fine one minute and then they die a few minutes later and there's nothing that you can do to help them.

I have completely come around to we are not overreacting to this. This is far worse than what the media is even portraying because the hospitals are keeping it under wraps, how bad it is inside their walls and this what they should do for patient confidentiality. But it is far worse than what I expected. It is not Political at all. No one there's no way to blame anyone for this happening. The only way you can help prevent the spread of it is stay home.

Stay home unless you have to. If you have to get out wear a mask. Don't throw that mask in the on the ground. Don't throw your gloves on the ground. Use your hand sanitizer wash your hands. You know hand sanitizer is not going to be effective if you use it 50,000 times and you never walk. If you have comorbidities like asthma, you know COPD, emphysema, heart failure, anything that you have to do that could threaten your health don't go out. It doesn't matter. The war is the end, you know Walmart Kroger, grocery stores are a breeding ground for viruses. It has always been like that that has not changed. So if you're going to go to the grocery store, it should be one person and you should Take your hand sanitizer f-t6 usually should stay six foot away from people. You know, wear your mask and wash your hands. That's what you should do. And I understand that having all the economy shut down drastically is, is really cramped our style, but it's for the good of everyone. This is not going to stop if we if we reopen everything today and the streets are full again. It's going to start peeking again, our decline that we're seeing in the number of new cases, that decline has nothing to do with the people that already have it. It's a decline in new cases. So, the people who were sick before that decline are still sick, they are still dying. You can then decline does not mean you cannot get it that means that it is still there, but the social distancing and the shutdown of the economy is working people have learned how to wash their hands and The face masks are necessary. But there are a few things that you know could safely be done. It needs to be a slow reopen of the economy, not a you know less open everything up. I'm really sad to see that gyms are going to start opening back up. Very sad to see that.

Michelle Hancock 10:22

I used to work at a gym and that's a breeding ground for germs. I know that just from being sick all the time.

Mandy Thomas 10:29

It is. It was very sad to see that Texas was going to make that decision to reopen things like the gym. Those are not needed. Go outside and run. You know if you need exercise, go outside and exercise but stay six foot away from someone and wear your mask.

Michelle Hancock 10:43

What are you doing right now to take care of your body? What are your shifts? How many hours are you working? And how do you even fathom to like calm down and take care of yourself right now? I'm trying to figure that out for you.

Mandy Thomas 10:59

I left a lot of my feelings at home, I'm mentally prepared for this. I knew it was going to be a disaster area. It is, you know, it's not as bad as I mentally prepare, but it was still worse than what I actually expected. If that makes sense. I'm taking my vitamins, my vitamin C, my vitamin D, zinc, I'm staying hydrated. I'm watching my nutrition because I'm working 12-hour night shifts. And if anyone's ever done night shifts and then come off of them for years and then gone back that takes a toll itself on the body. So um, I feel like nutrition, my vitamin supplementation, and hydration are my biggest defense against this plus, you know, I make sure that I get enough sleep every day. Because I'm doing, I'm doing six on 6 12-hour shifts in a row and I have one day off, which was yesterday, and then I'm doing six more in one day off. I'll do that for three weeks and then I will come home and quarantine at my house with no one there. quarantine is different from social distancing; people keep on getting these terms mixed up. Quarantine means your doors are shut. You do not leave your house period. If you need groceries, someone brings them they put them on their porch, and they walk away. That is what quarantine actually is. Some people are isolating electively, that means you stay at home you go out when you have to. Then, social distancing is just you're staying six foot away from other people. You're not intentionally going around people in close proximities. I'm seeing especially on social media, people are interchanging these terms. If you have symptoms, if you have a fever, if you have a cough, if you have any of the symptoms, you need to quarantine, that means no one is with you unless they also have symptoms. I will be quarantining for 14 days with no one else in my home. No one allowed to be there. People will bring me what I need and they will put it on the porch and then will walk away.

Michelle Hancock 13:32

How are you able to stay connected with your family right now? Are you facetimeing your daughter and your mom Mom and Dad?

Mandy Thomas 13:41

I do. I have a seven-year-old daughter that is with my parents and I electively sent her to my parents when all this broke out because that is the safest place for her. They live on 550 acres in the middle of Central Texas. This is just another day for them. They waited their whole life for this opportunity.

Michelle Hancock 14:06

I know a few people like that, and I'm like, God bless you. They are all laughing at us now.

Mandy Thomas 14:11

Yes! So she's been down there. We FaceTime at least once every day. I've already finished face to calming her today. And then she likes to see the streets of New York. I have been facetimeing her on the drive to work, when the person that came with me will drive us to work where I can FaceTime her and she can see the city. And at the same time, I say so my mom and my dad and they get to see a little bit of the city to my 20 Well, now 22 year old son today is my son's birthday is in the army and they are locked on base at this point. I call him and FaceTime him as well when I can. He's a little busier so it's harder to catch him but he'll call me late at night. knockin, can I can chit chat with him.

Michelle Hancock 15:04

What do you think this experience will teach your family?

Mandy Thomas 15:07

Yeah, I hope it shows them that you know as, as a society if we if we're able to help someone we should. You know I have a unique set of skills, being a nurse for so long and then transitioning to transitioning to anesthesia. I have a set of skills that is useful here. And so, I talked to my family before I came, and they understood that my son refers to this as a mommy deployment. He is with the military and he does not get to choose when he deploys or where he deploys, but he knew that I could help, and he sees this as a voluntary deployment. My daughter refers to my job is mommy's a saver. She knows that I'm coming here and being away from her and she cries sometimes. She has moods that are up and down and she wants me back home. But she understands that mommy is saving lives being here. I'm offering a reprieve for the staff who has been fighting this since January without any sleep or support or, you know, before it even got really, really bad up here.

One of the reasons it got really bad is because no one knew what we needed to be doing. They didn't know what everyone needed to be wearing and face shields and, you know, things like that to help prevent this. There are so many health care providers that have gotten sick and some have died. And they have to carry their sorrow with them after losing a coworker because they don't have any downtime to grieve. So, after this is over, PTSD is going to be real and it's going to be really bad up here for Health care providers, because they haven't had the downtime yet for it to sink in. And just the little bit that I've seen faces right before they die and I will never get that image out of my face or out of my mind because I'm one of the last views they had. That will haunt that will haunt me for a while. We want to save lives. We do. A we came to help our health care providers here. We came to we answered the call to give them a reprieve to let them have some downtime.

Michelle Hancock 17:45

That's amazing. And what are you? I mean, I know these patients are just terrified and you're they can't have their family visit, right?

Mandy Thomas 17:56

It's just them. There are no

visitation unless you're in labor. Okay, well or you're a pediatric patient. Otherwise there are no there's no visitation, there's some hospitals that are doing one healthy person, but that person has to remain in the room. And that person has to have the proper PPE on as well.

Michelle Hancock 18:16

It's just heartbreaking.

Mandy Thomas

It really is.

Michelle Hancock

That's great that you were able to put the emotions aside for this brief time so you can focus on your patients and the other staff members and just being a support for everyone. And what an amazing thing for you to do. I mean, not many of us can say we can do something like that. But what are some things that maybe we could do to help you guys to help? Just anything. Sometimes it feels like you can be so helpless in this situation, are there certain things that you would recommend us doing?

Mandy Thomas 18:52

Really... staying home, even if they open up the economy and open all the stores, don't rush out. Don't if you are feeling sick, if you are showing symptoms stay at home the best. The best place for any of us is a home right now unless you're an essential worker. Wash your hands, wear a face mask. This is not going away quickly. It is not going away. When they when the economy is still around. So we can continue this.

Michelle Hancock 19:27

Yeah, the hardest part? Well, one of the hardest things for me to grasp is that, you know, everybody keeps saying, well, I can't wait for things to get back to normal. I don't really think are normal from what we used to know before this is going to come back. I think it's going to be different. And I don't know what that future looks like. And I know that stressing out a lot of people, a lot of businesses but at the end of the day, I do think we need to see the big picture and save more lives. That's really what we're doing by staying home and I know it doesn't sound heroic. And I know A lot of us have these firstworldproblems where we're not allowed to go do this or get our hair cut. And I mean, we're human. We gripe about these things. But I think just hearing stories like from you kind of reiterate that we are doing the right thing and we're staying home and helping you out in the long term. So I appreciate you sharing your insight, any other takeaways or anything else you would like us to know about your experience?

Mandy Thomas 20:27

No, New York is still a beautiful city. And I hope to come back after this is all over and they recover. But all the commercials that you're seeing on TV that says "stay at home" that's your part. My part as an essential provider is to go into to help people on the front lines and put myself at risk. Your part is to stay at home because if you get sick, you're going to end up you know, hopefully you just stay at home and recover. But if you get sick enough and end up in the

hospital, that's just one more person that we're, you know already at our at our end that we're that we're taking care of. If you can stay at home, if you can wash your hands, use your hand sanitizer, you know, help others by doing that. That's the takeaway from this is just do your part and stay at home. And that's hard. So people don't want to hear that. But please, we're begging as, as nurses and respiratory therapists, crnas and doctors, EMTs police officers, paramedics. All of us are begging you to stay at home, even when they open up the economy stay at home unless you have to.

Michelle Hancock 21:51

Yeah, and I think it's just that simple realization that that's what we have to do until we're we have more information about this fire. Some more research and cures vaccines, whatever that is, I'm not a I'm not a scientific person. But I think you're right. I think we just need to do what we can to help and support you guys. So I appreciate you coming on. I know you're exhausted. I know you're tired and you have a lot of things going on in New York. But for you to come on and talk to us and share your story is very amazing. I commend you for making a huge decision to just go to New York for a few weeks and fight one of the scariest viruses that we've known in our lifetime anyways. But yeah, I just wanted to I wanted to pick your brain and I'm so appreciative of you and I can't wait for you to come back. And you you can quarantine and rest your brain for a little bit. But that's really that's that's really it. I thank you so much. And if I guess if anybody wants to know more about you, you don't really have a social media channel or anything but you have a personal page and I haven't been and enjoying all of your updates and posts, but and I share them with everyone. And I'm like, oh, look what Mandy's doing. I'm so proud of you! Mandy and I go way back. We used to be neighbors together. And we had our babies around the same time. And I remember you were juggling motherhood, nursing school, and all sorts of things. And so, to see your growth, and you make a decision like this is just amazing and honorable, and I appreciate you so much. So thank you so much!

Mandy Thomas 23:28

Well, thank you and Scarlett has already called for us to have a play date soon.

Michelle Hancock 23:32

Oh, I know... When this is all done for sure. It's an awful time. But like I said, Thank you so much. And that's all I got, guys.

Mandy Thomas 23:43

All right. Thank you and anyone who wants to follow me, you can. I'm sure my mom page is not hard to find. It's under Mandy Thomas. You can send me a message, do whatever you need.

Michelle Hancock 23:56

We will include your link on the website if you guys want to follow her personal journey or your professional journey rather both because you do have one day off. You got one! I'm surprised you got out I would have been like so tired just staying in bed all day, but you got to go explore New York.

Mandy Thomas 24:12

I needed to see it and next Monday we're going to see Central Park and see some more old churches and Empire State Building and stuff like that with our mask on our hand sanitizer and most of this is done from the car on the car.

Michelle Hancock 24:33

Okay, I like that. Okay, well, we'll look forward to that post on next month. Okay, we'll take care of yourself. Okay. All right.

Mandy Thomas

Thank you. All right. Thank you. Bye.

Closing 24:44

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