

Generation

ZOOM



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Changing SCHOOL

When the virus first hit, college kids in the U.S. weren't feeling the effects. However, in the span of what felt like a week, everything changed and college campuses shut down nationwide. Students were sent home, and quarantines began.

CORONA COLLEGE

Gabriella Dobson

Everyone has been affected by the virus and time spent in quarantine. Some have experienced worse things than others. There are people dying all around us, even after a year. The virus can't be brushed aside or downplayed because it is deadly and it has ruined many people's lives. Let us take a step back and think about a type of demographic that has been destroyed, but not by death. This specific demographic is college students. Now, it may sound silly or ridiculous to want to understand how college students have been affected by this pandemic. Corona didn't just steal the social lives of college students, it stole their education.



Photo used with permission from UC Davis

The Beginning

As a Miami student, anyone can remember the day Crawford announced that everyone would be returning home. At the time, everyone expected it would be a pre-spring break and we would return after two or three weeks. The suspension of classes was a rippling effect from schools across Ohio, starting with Ohio State University. Students thought it was cause for celebration and there would be no school for several weeks. However, Miami shut down on a Wednesday and class resumed again Friday that same week online. It was the birth of Zoom University. Students were struggling that first week. From making travel plans to trying to move off-campus, to attending classes. There was a sigh of relief when spring break came along and forced everyone to take a break.

Social

College students went from partying every night and hanging with each other in their dorms and seeing their friends daily to total lockdown. The difference from 2019 to 2021 is astounding. Common areas in academic and residential buildings have seen

better days. Students living on campus are bound by all the rules of the pandemic. They are limited to the few people they bring into their rooms, they have to wear a mask traveling around their hall, and, at times, they have a curfew. One thing in favor of the pandemic is that there aren't as many people living in residential halls, but that is not favorable for the people that do live there. It is like living in a ghost town, seeing another person once in a blue moon. There are few places to socialize on campus since many things are either shut down or don't allow indoor seating. Some of the only social interactions people get are from their in-person classes, which is also limited because most people don't have any in-person classes. It also doesn't help that people are unable to congregate outside because of the cold weather. It is possible, once the weather warms and spring is here, that it will be like old times with students sitting out in the lawns together throwing a frisbee. As for now, the social scene at Miami University has also seen better days.

Education

Aside from all things social, the biggest effect on college students from the pandemic is the switch to online learning. Students went from sitting next to others in class and learning new things to barely paying attention behind a screen. It is harder to obtain information when looking at a screen all day. People don't participate or pay attention as much. It is 100% easier to get distracted when you are in class in your own home or room. If you don't have the fortune of being at college on or off campus, you are probably home where your family asks for your attention even while you are in class. If you do have the fortune of being at college, a lack of motivation leaves you still unable to grasp information in class. It seems pointless to pay attention to slides on a computer screen or to listen to a person inside a little box. And for all those students who don't have synchronous classes, they are juggling five to six asynchronous classes without guidance from their instructor. Office hours have never been more important.

Even after two full semesters of synchronous and asynchronous Zoom classes, students still feel that they are falling short. The problem can either lie with the student or the instructor but either way, online learning is not the same as in-person and should not be treated as such. For example, virtual group work outside of class is a very unrealistic way to get things done and only adds more stress to the students. Many students feel they are not getting the education they deserve or even what they are paying for. Some students have even taken a gap semester because of it. An online education is not the same as an in-person. By now, universities should have stopped treating it like such, but here we are still trying to teach ourselves a year later.

For the spring semester of 2021, some students were fortunate enough to resume in-person while others had to remain online. The majority is still synchronous and

asynchronous with a little sprinkle of in-person. It was a big transition and maybe a tougher one to manage all the different formations of classes. Imagine walking to an in-person class and then having another one online after, but still needing to complete work for an asynchronous class. Time students spend inside and outside of class has increased and it has become harder to maintain time management.

Next Fall Semester

With the increase of vaccinations in the United States, an announcement was made on behalf of Miami that in-person classes will resume like normal next semester. By the end of this semester, two sets of senior college students have gone through their final semester and been stripped of their college experience. It was stolen from them, but hopefully, there won't have to be a third set of swindled seniors. By next fall, it can be expected that a majority of our older population has had both doses of the vaccine. People are always thinking that college students are overreacting to the situation of the pandemic and its effects on them. However, just like any other situation, you need to put yourself in their shoes to truly imagine what it is like for them. Everybody is being affected by this pandemic, and everyone is being affected differently.

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Author Biography

My name is Gabriella Dobson and I am a junior at Miami University. I am currently majoring in Professional Writing and minoring in Criminology and General Business. What I learned during quarantine that impacted me the most was to appreciate what I have when I have it and that it can all be taken away in a split second. I predict that all pandemic restrictions will lift nationwide approximately around **10/15/2021**, but I believe normal life will begin resuming sometime around mid-July.

COVID-19 FINAL EXAMS AND PROCTORIO

Charlie Ortman

When I was sent home from school due to the rise of COVID-19, the decreased workloads made my assignments somewhat negligible. I didn't have any synchronous classes; instead I essentially just had one small assignment per class each week with a few exams mixed in. Everything had been smooth sailing, academically, since COVID-19 sent me home. I was ready to take my finals, be done with the semester and figure out what I would do for the summer. But, I was wrong. My finals went quite well...except my biology one.



Photo taken by Charlie Ortman

It was on an evil software known as Proctorio, which is the reason it went so poorly, or, I guess you could say, why it didn't go at all. I had run into some very minor problems with Proctorio in the past, but nothing could compare to what was about to happen. Past software problems happened in a classroom, where professors and proctors were able to quickly help me.

At the time of the exam, I had an 83 percent in the class, but I was taking it for credit/no credit, which meant I just needed to get above a 59 percent overall. I figured I had nothing to worry about. I studied a bit for a few nights and thought I'd get a passing grade in my general education biology class. It was my last final and I was ready to call it a semester.

I sat down at my desk and did the pre-checks that Proctorio requires before taking an exam. This involved holding a mirror up to the camera and showing the entire room I was working in. Toward the end of the pre-checks, the Proctorio system crashed. It wasn't a Miami University network issue, and it wasn't an issue with my WiFi; the

Proctorio network just went down. I was automatically taken out of Proctorio due to its crash, and Canvas believed that I had completed the exam.

I frantically called the number for Proctorio support. No answer. I tried to get in touch with the Proctorio message boards. No answer. This was a huge issue, since I wasn't in direct contact with the professor, but rather with some random person working for Proctorio. I emailed my professor and asked my parents for some advice, but they had no idea what I was talking about.

My professor did not respond until the next morning and said I would not be able to take the exam. Though the class was being taken credit/no credit, I still wasn't sure if I would pass. Several other assignments needed to be graded, and I wasn't sure if those coupled with a zero on the final exam would be enough to drop me down to no credit. My professor originally thought that I was kicked from the exam due to starting it too late and not having enough time to finish. But I was never even able to view the exam, since the system crashed before I even finished the Proctorio pre-checks. This further complicated the situation because I had to email her again and re-explain my situation in greater detail.

I got in touch with the Miami University Biology department chair, but he wasn't even able to give me reassurances. Though he was my professor's boss, he wasn't able to override her decision to give me a zero on the exam. The administration wasn't especially prepared for these setbacks, since this was the first time measures like Proctorio were ever put in place in this capacity. Online schooling and exams were a whole new frontier brought about by COVID-19. Had we not been in a pandemic, the biology exam would have been taken in person with pencil and paper and no possibility of a computer malfunction halting my exam. My professor remained adamant that I would not be allowed to take the exam, even with the department chair pleading with her to give me another shot.

I Luckily, this was the only final exam I had on Proctorio and my other professors made their exams without Proctorio. If more of my final exams were using the software, I may have run into several other problems like this. Because the biology final took place on the last day of exams, I had nothing else to occupy my mind. My professor was set on not allowing me to take the exam, and grades were due in a few days. I got very little sleep as I awaited the answer from my professor. I wasn't able to do anything fun to take my mind off of the situation either, as everything was closed in my town, including the basketball courts at the local park. After a few days of heart palpitations, my professor emailed me and said that I would pass the class by a very small margin. I needed a 60 percent and I received a 65.92 percent. If a few other assignments went differently, I could have ended up not getting credit for the class.

My Proctorio debacle turned out okay. But I'm sure that other students with similar problems were not as lucky. I haven't had to use Proctorio since this incident, but friends of mine still use it for their classes. COVID-19 has made everyone's lives more difficult, and Proctorio only made it harder. It's great to see that, since then, all of my professors have recognized the problems Proctorio can cause and use it less. If COVID-19 persists, hopefully Miami University and the rest of the academic world will find a better system for proctoring online exams.

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Author Biography

My name is Charlie Ortman. I'm from Northern New Jersey and I'm a junior at Miami University. My major is English: professional writing on the track of editing in professional contexts with a minor in Film Studies. The most impactful thing I've learned from quarantine is that there is a limit to what Amazon Prime, Netflix, and Hulu can offer. I think the national COVID restrictions will end **08/31/2021**.

A NEW WORLD. A NEW APPRECIATION.

Angela Weckle

I have this dream. Not every night, but some nights. It goes like this:

I'm on a boat out in the middle of a lake with the warmth of the sun on my skin and a breeze through my hair. Out in the middle of this massive stretch of water. Away from others. Away from this pandemic. Away from disease and death and loss... so much loss. Just me in the middle of this body of water separated from people, from the fear, from the world. This pandemic has brought much hardship and suffering to many. And I can't help but yearn for a different world. A world in the past. Or maybe a world in the future, where this pandemic is behind us.



Photo taken by Angela Weckle

Though that is not my current reality. It hasn't been since the pandemic; everything is virtual now. Classes are online. Meetings are online. People are online. All this meant less going out and seeing people and more sitting at my desk in my tiny room in my tiny apartment. Before the pandemic, it was so easy to see and meet and hang out with other people, new people, but now there is always a subconscious fear of catching or spreading the virus which keeps me more sheltered than I ever was before. Don't get me wrong, I like people. I have just always been more shy and introverted. At the start of my fall semester, I got hired to work at a grocery store. At times, it was one of the only things that brought me out of my apartment and around people. Suddenly, there was this set time in my week, every week, where I knew I had a reason to leave my little apartment and venture out into the world that we now live in.

My new routine was anything but normal to the life I had lived before, but that's usually how life is: ever-changing. It is incredible to me how easily I adjusted into my new way of living. Entering my junior year of college meant that I was off campus, not just in

terms of online classes but also no longer living in a dorm. It was a new experience to finally have a place of my own that was bigger than the four-by-four shoe box of a dorm room I had before. I had my own space, my own bedroom, and I was able to spend the newfound time inside to do things like discover new recipes, catch up on TV shows, and spend time with myself. It's incredible what time alone does. It made me discover a new side of myself and allowed me to appreciate time spent alone when time spent alone was what I was given.

Despite saying this, the pandemic also introduced me to three new people: my roommates. Living with others during this pandemic has saved me from feeling so lonely and alone during this time of isolation. They have been people that I can talk to and relate to through shared experiences, from the fear of the unknown related to this pandemic to more simple, mundane things such as how Zoom classes can get pretty boring.

This has allowed me to reflect on the time that I spend with others, the experiences that I have, and the life that I live. Though this pandemic has been incredibly difficult for many, it has given me the gift of time, which has helped me reflect on the time that is in front of me as well as the time that is behind me. I do not want to have regrets on the life that I lived and the person that I was. Therefore, I will focus on who I want to be, what I want to do, and the life that I want to look back on.

With the COVID-19 vaccine being a light at the end of the tunnel, it now seems possible for my dream to become a reality. My dream for a different world, a new world, seems possible. A world where possibilities of new experiences mixed with old experiences is on the horizon. Though this pandemic has changed my daily routine, my outlook on life, and the way I view my experiences, I am looking forward to a time where I will be able to take advantage of the things that I let myself pass on before and truly live my life without regret.

It has truly made an impact on how I view life, on the importance of making every second count, and on not letting life pass you by. I now have optimism for the future and can consider this experience a blessing in the way that it has taught me how I can handle ambiguity, the hurdles of the unknown, and the experiences that come along with this new world that we live in.

Moving forward, I am left with a mission to not let life pass me by. Even though it felt as though time stopped, or at least slowed, when this pandemic hit, life has never truly been that way. Time does not stop. People have experienced hardships and have still kept moving. People, such as first responders and educators, have stepped up. People

have kept living, kept working, and taking care of their families. And this has inspired me to know that time does not freeze even when life gets rough and neither should you. Moving forward, I will carry this message with me and know to keep moving forward through both the good times and the bad times, and to take action over the things that inspire me.

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Author Biography

Hi my name is Angela Weckle. I am a Junior Professional Writing Major with minors in Entrepreneurship and English Literature. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine was that freedom is on the other side of fear. The date I think national COVID restrictions will end is 01/01/2023.

HOME IS

Emma Naille

Home is a Place (and a Pace)

Home has become a foreign, desolate place. To be home feels like exile. It feels unfamiliar and strange. It's a slow, uncomfortable pace of life. To be stuck inside these walls and to be forced to be still: to rest, to be nourished, to notice my surroundings. My house is no longer a place where I'm home--it has become the overlap of everywhere I used to go. It is a restaurant, where I try new foods and comment that the chicken could use a little more salt. It is my classroom, my study room, my office, and my gym. It serves all these new functions on top of the old ones. It has become hard to tell where home really is. It was Granville, but none of my mail goes there anymore. It was Oxford, but I was forced out in a mass exodus. Is it now Dublin, a place where my parents have roots, but I have none? It is all and none of these places exactly. If home can no longer be connected to a house or zip code, then, for me, it has become the world. The natural world. Home is starting to feel like the sun on my face and the flowers blooming—spring in a winter of discontent. Home is in the beauty of the light dappling through the canopy, the glory of a rushing river in the middle of a city. Home is identifying with the repeated refrains of nature. It is a return to slowness, to smelling the flippin' roses instead of rushing right by. Home is a place, and in quarantine, a leisurely pace.



Photo taken by Emma Naille

Home is People

Quarantine has made me quite the chef. Each meal presents an opportunity to excite, challenge, and delight me. And each shared meal, each gathering around the table, presents a point of connection and community. Community, a golden word in a time of extreme isolation. I realize over a few weeks that this time with my family, these seemingly months on end together, is something I will never get again. College students usually only spend a couple months at a time at home, and then they before going off to form their own families and plant their own roots. But in quarantine, my parents and my sister become the only face-to-(physical)-face connection I get. We eat together, we sit next to each other reading, we go on family walks. We watch movies together and laugh. We get on our Zoom calls, connecting to our peers, teammates and coworkers, all the while feeling the digital disconnect. We are acutely aware that it's not the same. All the same, I feel more connected to the country, the world, than I ever have before. This is a collectiveness of humanity that I have never experienced. In our suffering, we identify with each other. And in our shared joy, we find hope. I watch TikToks and feel inspired by people's creativity, I watch Some Good News with John Krasinski and feel grateful to live in a world where goodness persists in the face of hopelessness. I get on Marco Polo and FaceTime and feel hopeful for a future where I reunite with my friends. Home is a community, a people, where your sweatpantsed self is always welcome.

Home is a Story

I used to read books and watch movies to escape. But now I consider them a part of my life. I consider them my own experiences. I go to them to burrow myself in a story and feel held by it. I've watched movies that made tears trickle down my face, seriously consider adoption, confront my ignorance, and made me laugh. I've read books I've read many times before, revisited the soft, well-worn pages of stories from my library that a younger Emma loved. I feel filled up and buoyed by these good stories. I store and treasure them up in my heart. Part of me is embarrassed by the bravado, the cringe-worthy cliches and dramatic soliloquies of these young adult novels. But another part of me is delighted to rediscover the Emma that saw beauty and drama in life and was unashamed of it. They make me hope against hope, see light in darkness, lead me to love against hate and fear. And for the first time in a long time, I write. I throw my fears to the wind and lean into the inevitability that I will fall flat on my face. I repeat this mantra to myself: "It doesn't have to be good, it just has to be something." I push past my perfectionism and self-doubt and get words on paper, a miracle. In the midst of all these good stories, I study the biblical theme of exile. I see the themes of nature in scripture, I believe more than I have ever before that God will bring water in the wilderness and plant trees in the desert. I believe that He will bring life where there is none. Home is a story. The one that's already written, that's reflected and repeated in every story there is, and that we're telling with our lives all this time.

Home is Belonging

In this annoyingly unprecedented time, I've come to know a new definition of home. I was reading back over the dictionary definition of home and it was interesting to me that they use the word "permanently." Homes are almost never permanent. We attach this word to street addresses and familial relationships, but those are never lasting either. I think the real home, the true definition, is belonging. It's what I long for deep in my soul—connection, depth, authenticity, feeling special, love, life, and a sense of self. It is the opposite of abandonment. It's a gift we're given and a gift we give ourselves. It's in us and through us. It's a place of delight, safety and rest, where all our needs are met, not a place of perfection or productivity. It's being seen and known while also seeing and knowing. It's where we can hold the weight of our suffering and joy together, honoring them both. It's interwoven in all the places, people, and stories I feel I belong. And it's a gift I can give to others when I cultivate a space of love and character and creativity and soul, where people can come as they are and just be.

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Author Biography

My name is Emma Naille, and I'm majoring in English Creative Writing with minors in Interactive Media Studies and Digital Marketing. I am part of the class of 2022. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine was that I am capable of holding onto joy instead of bitterness in challenging times. I think national COVID restrictions will end on **12/1/2022**

Changing **HOBBIES**

We were stuck at home, ripped away from our college freedoms, navigating online classes, and getting impatient waiting for life to return to normal. We had to find something to do with all this newfound free time.

THEATRE IN THE PANDEMIC

Miranda Scharf

Of the many aspects of our life affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the world of theatre is one of keen interest to me. I have a BFA in Theatre Studies and throughout the pandemic, I have seen numerous friends and theatres struggle to adapt to the situation. I'm struck by how this is a familiar struggle to the theatre world. As one of our earliest artforms, theatre has confronted the dangerous spread of deadly diseases before. During the 16th and 17th century, English theatres were regularly ordered closed by the crown, due to regular outbreaks of the plague. Theatre companies of the age responded to this by taking the show on the road. They eventually established a routine of heading out of London to tour the English countryside and perform in numerous towns until it was possible to open the London theatres again.



Photo taken by Miranda Scharf

Today, the situation is quite different. In many ways, access to technology has made things much easier, but the option to simply travel to an area that's not affected by the pandemic is impossible. The practice of making recorded versions of theatrical performances available to a wide audience is not a new concept. It is possible to find original cast recordings of Broadway shows from, for example, the 1970s and even footage of Vaudeville performances from around the time film recording was invented. However, apart from the fundamentally different experience of live theatre as a medium, as opposed to a recording of a live performance, the ability for theatres to make this significant switch is a complex one. Not all theatre companies have the resources to film, upload, and pay the online-specific licensing fees involved in making a performance available online, instead of licensing associated with charging tickets for live theatre.

As with the rest of the world, the theatre world has had to treat COVID as a developing situation. Initially, they followed stay at home orders but that was hardly the end of it. A local theatre, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, started selling craft goods from their theatre designer and technicians. Costume designers made masks and other textile-based crafts, while scene designers and set builders made simple furniture pieces. For a while, this was one small way that the theatre could keep money coming in and have the ability to pay their employees.

The three largest theatre companies in Cincinnati worked together to create a fund to support local artists through donations. As the pandemic dragged on into the fall, the company began selling tickets to recorded broadcasts and radio plays. Originally, we were all asked to stay home. COVID testing was hard to get and there was uncertainty about the accuracy of initial tests. Over time, we gained a better understanding of how the virus works and spreads. We also had a chance to catch up on the demand for testing. That information had a huge impact on allowing some businesses to reopen with appropriate regulations in place. Through this, theatre companies were able to offer online representations of shows without a live audience. Now, as the weather warms and we have more people getting vaccinated each day, theatre companies have started offering outdoor performances. Cincinnati Shakespeare Company has a long summer tradition of offering free performances in parks throughout the city, and it's nice that this tradition, at least, can safely return as we move forward.

This gives a glimmer of hope for the future. In addition to the difficulties introduced by the pandemic to theatre artists, it's important to acknowledge how this was a double hit to the profession. While some theatre professionals are lucky enough to work in professional theatre full time, there are just as many who work day jobs. The stereotype that actors all work as waiters has some truth to it. Many theatre professionals do work in service industry jobs. Part of the reason for this is because those jobs have more flexible hours than a standard nine-to-five job, allowing performers to arrange their work schedules, generally, around auditions, rehearsals, and performances, while still making a steady income between shows. I've also seen a number of theatre professionals working in childcare as nannies. Though I won't go into detail about those professions, you can see how theatre artists were hit doubly hard by the pandemic.

The final element of this I want to explore is the other job I most often see theatre artists work in, which is teaching, whether they teach classes through a recreational studio, as part of an occupational or rehabilitation program, or through any stage of school. These theatre artists had to adapt to teaching online and encountering similar issues as professional theatre, like online licensing fees, while working with more limited academic budgets.

As we move forward with hope and ever-increasing numbers of people getting the vaccine, we have yet to see the full impact of the pandemic on how we go about our everyday lives and how individuals recover--in every sense of the word. One thing that's worth considering is the valuable contributions that the arts provide us, especially this past year, when consumption of all kinds of art and entertainment provided an incalculable service to us all. Therefore, some artists have come together to ensure that artists have a chance to keep putting their art out into the world. They are using "be an #artshero" to call on our politicians to include the arts proportionately in the government funding that is helping us all get back to normal economically and supporting the livelihoods of all job sectors. Similar to the incredible support for the arts during the depression that gave us the lively intersection of creativity for work like the Federal Theatre Project, funding at this time would save our artists and facilitate some amazing creations.

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Author Biography

My name is Miranda Scharf and I am a senior literature major and history minor. What I learned from quarantine is that while people are adaptable, you can't always make loved ones listen to reason. I believe national COVID restrictions will end by **10/31/2021**.

MUSIC DURING THE PANDEMIC

Parallels between COVID-19 and War through the lens of Taylor Swift's new album

Corie Mauer

The lyrical genius of Taylor Swift can not be ignored or denied. Many people know her as the country and pop princess that came in and out of relevance for the better half of this past decade. In 2020, this past summer, the world was practicing socially distancing to combat the highly contagious COVID-19 disease when Swift stunned the public with two new music albums. The first of those albums, *Folklore*, Swift's eighth studio album, was released in late July and received a Grammy for album of the year. Swift contributes the album's artistry to her time away from large crowds when her seventh studio album tour was canceled out of safety precautions.



Photo by Corie Mauer

Rolling Stone noted, "Folklore really feels like the debut album of a whole new Swift—her narrative scope has opened up. . ." She moved away from the mainstream pop and country genres and took on alternative styles such as indie and folk. The majority of the album consists of piano and acoustic guitar. The softer sound stands in stark contrast to past albums, where fast and upbeat tempos took center stage. Moreover, her previous albums placed an emphasis on the emotions of first love and heartbreak, whereas in *Folklore*, feelings of despair and hope are employed throughout the album. Standouts on the record include but are not limited to "Epiphany" and "This Is Me Trying." These songs stand alone in their own right and accentuate a unique take on rather complex and historic moments. Swift wrote the songs as an outsider, but still managed to delve deep into the trenches of the raw realities of those in the unwritten, but presumed time periods.

"Epiphany" is a hauntingly beautiful ballad that follows the plot of soldiers in war. In the first chorus Swift paints the scene, "Keep your helmet/Keep your life, son/Just a flesh

wound.” This line indicates that a man has been injured. However, it is not as specific as when the second chorus spells out, “Here’s your rifle/Crawling up the beaches now.” The wound having been sustained by a rifle shows that the injury was not perpetuated by your typical knife mishap in the kitchen. Beyond this, the mention of beaches can be referenced to when soldiers stormed the Normandy beaches during World War II. Finally, with conviction, Swift places weight on the gut-wrenching words, “With you, I serve/With you, I fall down” and “And some things you just can’t speak about.” These lyrics convey a level of despair due to the image of soldiers falling down. Additionally, the lyrics “And some things you just can’t speak about” directly disclose the trauma that soldiers experienced first hand. The trauma is so rooted that it is hard to put into words. On the other hand, the lyrics “But you dream of some epiphany/Just one single glimpse of relief” manifests the idea of hope. Ultimately, the hope of relief is what keeps the soldiers moving forward despite the pain they may inwardly feel.

The lyrics illustrate a literal battleground. Meanwhile, the state of the world during the pandemic was characteristically similar. Doctors, nurses, and grad students can be seen as warriors because they sacrificed their time and well-being to work day in and day out for the patients that were battling COVID-19. Hospitals can be seen as the battleground, as many patients died or suffered significantly there in a bed that wasn’t their own. To make matters worse, most of the patients that were in this condition had to fight for their lives without family or friends by their sides, a fate that countless soldiers face as well. Finally, the death rate skyrocketed in just a few months, in the same way that an army of men fatally fell down by means of a weapon. Through it all, hope was the source that fueled the flame of desire to keep people moving forward in both time periods. To this day, medical workers are doing everything they can to research and care for those in need despite the complexities of all illnesses, including COVID-19 and Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In both situations, each individual was met with challenges beyond their own control. Swift touches upon this idea in the song, “This is Me Trying.” The lyrics begin with, “I’ve been having a hard time adjusting.” This line can explain what many people endured during the pandemic. Businesses, schools, churches, recreational facilities, etc. closed temporarily or permanently. This meant that people were basically confined to their homes and had to find a way to make the circumstances work for the time being. For many individuals who have regular routines, this ultimatum came as a difficult task. It is not a simple procedure to just drop everything and switch it up quickly. Therefore, a lot of trial and error had to occur before a smooth transition to this lifestyle could occur.

Swift continues on with, “I just wanted you to know that this is me trying/At least I’m trying.” These lyrics convey the idea that despite the struggle, Swift has not given up

yet. She hasn't completely figured out how to cope with the new reality, but at least she is trying to. Swift is not alone in this battle. Every human in some kind of capacity was trying to cope, some in a healthy manner, some not. An individual could lay around on the couch all day drinking themselves silly and it would still be considered trying if it is the only thing keeping them alive.

Ultimately, COVID-19 changed the way society functions. Taylor Swift chose to transfer her time of adjusting into a new era of her career. This is important because it directly shows the impact the pandemic had on her. Folklore is a representation of the good, the bad, and the ugly of this moment in time, while also bringing light to history. War has raged in the past, but people kept moving forward. If there was a glimmer of hope then, then there is now. The pandemic will not be the end of the universe as we all know it.

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Author Biography

My name is Corie Mauer. I am a junior professional writing major, minoring in Digital Marketing and Creative Writing. The most impactful lesson that I learned during quarantine is that peace can be found in the midst of chaos.

No date was submitted for predicting the end of national COVID restrictions

SOCIAL MEDIA DURING A PANDEMIC

Molly McNarava

A Creative Outlet

In a world that stopped moving due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok kept us dancing. It also inspired us to bake fresh bread, make whipped coffee, fill our kitchen tables with nachos and place a whole block of feta cheese in the oven for pasta. We tie-dyed our clothes, bleached and cut our hair, binge-watched Tiger King and painted geometric shapes on our walls. We even watched Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical. During a time of uncertainty where we were stuck at home, TikTok sparked our ingenuity and acted as our creative outlet.

The whole world got behind TikTok and was able to share authentic experiences that they were having during COVID-19. Residents of Italy were sharing beautiful videos of people harmonizing and singing out of their apartment windows, and it gave people hope. When other countries were able to get COVID-19 under control and start seeing each other again, the whole world was able to share in that and see what the future can hold. Now in 2021, as we're still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok is still the leading app globally in the Apple App Store with n more growth projected for years to come (Airnow 2021). TikTok has been more than just another social media app; it has been there for its users living through the pandemic.

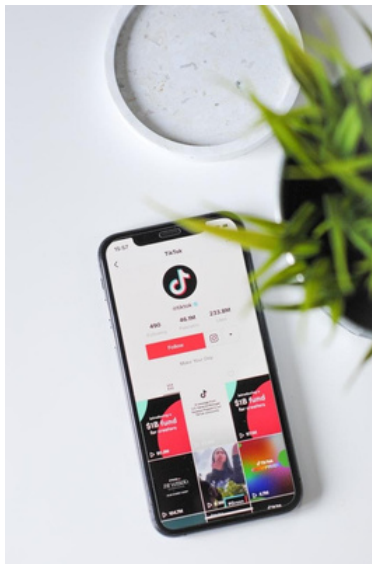


Photo taken byhelloimnik on Unsplash

A Space for Activism

In addition to the fun and light-hearted trends that TikTok bestowed upon us, it also became a place for activism. From the presidential election of 2020, to sustainability

efforts, to Black Lives Matter and more, TikTok helped light a political fire for users, most notably Generation Z (Gen Z). Even *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical* was created to raise money for The Actors Fund to help actors and actresses in musicals who have been out of work for so long without live audiences. The musical ended up raising \$2 million. During the pandemic, TikTok became a place for people to hear new perspectives, take in news, and learn about social and political issues. This led to actual action being taken and it exposed us to different perspectives without the filters of Instagram and the character limits of Twitter.

One statistic notes that 26 percent of TikTok users attended a Black Lives Matter protest as of July, compared to only 13 percent of non-TikTok users. For Gen Z specifically, 57 percent said that TikTok helps them stay up to date on the news (Hosie 2020). Being an active member of society is becoming part of this generation's DNA and TikTok is helping to solidify that.

One of the movements on TikTok is the body positivity movement. Many TikTok users have gathered a large following on their platforms by spreading messages about confidence and self-love. Some of the most popular body-positive TikTokers are Sienna Mae Gomez, Remi Bader, Brittani Lancaster, Brooklynne Webb, and music artist Lizzo. All have well over one million followers. Because a large part of TikTok's audience is younger users in their pre-teens and developing ideas about themselves, it's empowering and encouraging to see such a large movement based around acceptance of all body types.

A COVID-19 Information Hub

The downtime caused by the pandemic certainly contributed to the rise of TikTok usage. It wasn't just the new trend; it also contained important information since actual health information was shared on TikTok by medical professionals or patients with COVID-19 who were documenting their journey with the disease. Less than 1 percent of the medical information shared on TikTok was misleading or false (Ostrovsky 2020).

In addition to TikTok creators using their platforms to share information, TikTok itself partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) at the very beginning of the pandemic in order to curb the spread of misinformation. They had members from WHO answer questions, dispel myths, and even do live streams for TikTok users (Hutchinson 2020).

Medical professionals are able to garner credibility with their TikTok audiences by sharing the important COVID information through the vehicle of TikTok trends. The latest medical trend, as of March 2021, surrounds myths, misconceptions, and

misinformation about the vaccines. Health officials are coming together to make TikToks that explain the vaccine and encourage people who are skeptics to get the injection.

A Social Media Anomaly

Social media platforms haven't had the best reputations. Instagram is known for lowering self-esteem and only showing the best parts of life. Facebook has been under fire recently for having an immense amount of misinformation about world news and politics. LinkedIn has become a place to "one-up" each other and only share the good news. But TikTok isn't in those categories. It is known for being more authentic, especially since their algorithm makes it possible for anyone to "go viral," not just influencers.

When asked about Tik Tok, 57 percent of people have a positive sentiment toward it, whereas, only 27 percent had a positive sentiment when asked about social media overall (Molla 2021). Whether the negativity on the other platforms drove users to TikTok, or TikTok just genuinely gives users a more authentic experience, this social media platform has mostly positive sentiments attached.

This year was hard for everyone in different ways. The social media platforms and influencers who neglected to recognize that further built on their image of only showing the filtered sides of life. Most people, especially after living through a pandemic, a recession, social injustice, and more, just want to be able to authentically relate to others. Platforms like TikTok give people an outlet to be creative, active, informed, and maybe a little self-deprecating, and platforms like those are the ones that will be here to stay long after the pandemic is gone.

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Author Biography

My name is Molly McNarama and I am a Marketing and Professional Writing double-major. Quarantine forcing exclusively small-group gatherings taught me that quality really is better than quantity. According to the NY Times, herd immunity could be reached as early as August, so I think restrictions may be lifted on **1/1/2022**.

READING SAVED MY SANITY

Marie Duke

It's been over a year since the world shut down. In 2020, I was afraid to quickly stop in the grocery store, let alone socialize with my friends. Gatherings, large and small, became taboo, and remembering what people's faces looked like underneath masks was quickly becoming a challenge. Leaving all of my friends at school in the middle of the semester was difficult, but not being able to see the people I usually visited while at home was heartbreaking. I felt cut off from the world; despite still having classes and assignments, I went from constantly being surrounded by people to seeing no one outside of my family for three months. As an introvert, I figured this was a lucky break. Not seeing people meant not having to deal with social anxiety, leaving the house, or even getting dressed. And I did okay with it all—for about a week. That was how long it took for me to start feeling lonely, isolated, and depressed. I had built such a strong community for myself at school, and to have it so suddenly ripped away from me was terrifying.

I really struggled with staying in contact with people. I have never been a fan of video chatting (ask me how I feel about it after a year of Zoom classes; hint: bad) and the idea of having to set up FaceTime calls just to see my friends was like something from a horror movie to me. But I found a way to cope with this anxiety—just don't do it! So I lost contact with most of the people I had been talking to everyday. The ease of chatting with friends in a dorm common area didn't translate to scheduling video chats. I didn't really realize it at the time, but I now see that in my retreat from the world, I turned to books.



Photo by Marie Duke

I have always loved reading, but for the past few years, school got in the way of me actually sitting down to read books that I enjoy. With the all-encompassing nothingness surrounding me in the middle of quarantine, I finally had the time to fall back in love with reading. Looking back on those months of lockdown, it's clear that reading saved my sanity. While I read mostly because I had nothing better to do, I found that the unexpected escape and socialization I gained from re-entering the world of books was what I really needed at the time.

Reading as a Pastime

Reading has always been my go-to pastime. In college, it became more difficult to pick up books; when I wasn't reading for class, all I wanted to do was turn off my brain, often resulting in a late-night Netflix binge. That changed when my classes went online. I now spent all day staring at my screen, watching video-lectures, and trying to understand my new Canvas modules. I didn't want to fill my free time with more long hours spent staring at my laptop or television, but there weren't many other options. My classes were almost entirely asynchronous, so aside from turning in my assignments, I didn't have anything to do during the day. I couldn't work because my place of employment was closed, but my family still worked all day. I couldn't go hang out with my friends or go shopping just for fun, and you can only go on so many walks while avoiding human contact before it gets boring. Because of this, I took to my room, where my stocked bookshelves awaited. When spring break hit just two weeks after I got home from school, I really only stopped reading to eat meals. There was just nothing better to do.

Reading as Escapism

Anyone who lived through the pandemic knows why I wanted an escape. It was so much easier to sit down with a book and read about a fictional character's problems than to think about the craziness happening in the real world. The books I gravitated to most during the pandemic were all fantasy. Reading fantasy books set in made-up countries with magic and monsters was a lot more fun to think about than the reality of the pandemic. If the plot got too intense, or the characters were frustrating me, I could just close the book and set it to the side. The consequences of a book were much less dire than those of the events in the real world, and getting caught up in fictional drama and politics was much easier than dealing with the tragedies occurring around me. When I found myself getting too caught up in a scroll through Twitter, or crying over the loss of someone I had never met, I turned to the comfort and escape my book offered.

Reading as Socialization

In the end, the most important thing that reading did for me was rebuild my friendships. As weird as it may sound, reading has almost always been at the center of

my socialization skills. During the pandemic, this became ten times more true. Because I was reading so much, I started talking to a few of my friends from high school who I knew had read some of the books I was getting into, such as Leigh Bardugo's Grishaverse novels and the Shadowhunter Chronicles by Cassandra Clare. We started a group chat during that first month of quarantine that we still chat in every day, a year later. Books rekindled the friendships that had dimmed due to the distance college put between us. My college roommate also took notice of the distance I was creating between us. Luckily, she was more than willing to force me into weekly FaceTime calls. To make sure I didn't back out of the calls in a moment of panic, we started a sort of two-person book club to discuss what we were reading. We read books together, despite being states apart, and spent hours on those calls. Not only did it help to make sure I actually had some form of face-to-face (or face-to-screen) contact when I couldn't physically be with my friends, but it ultimately brought the two of us a lot closer.

When the world shut down, I did too. But despite wanting nothing more than to separate myself from everything and everyone around me, I somehow managed to hold on to something that grounded me.

I will forever be grateful to books for saving my sanity.

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Author Biography

My name is Marie Duke, I'm a junior at Miami University studying Professional Writing and Interactive Media Studies. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic has not been easy, but it has taught me a lot about myself and life in general. The most impactful thing I've learned in the past year is to appreciate time spent with the people I care about. Knowing that the last time I've seen a lot of my friends in-person was over a year ago is difficult to process. I think lockdown restrictions could lift by **08/01/2021**, and I look forward to having the chance to see people without worrying too much.

PANDEMIC FITNESS

Sam Mittenhall

We all know the pandemic was a difficult time. People stressed about job security, making ends meet, and everything in between. Luckily, my biggest issues were not on that scale. I focused on learning as much as I could on eating well, working out, and staying mentally healthy. There is no true one-size-fits-all formula to maintain all three and work or go to school. However, with the information below, it is not difficult to get in shape and find out what works for you.



Photo by Sam Mittenhall

A study by Obesity found that over 27 percent of respondents gained weight during the pandemic. Being stuck inside caused weight gain for so many people despite healthier eating when takeout and fast food became less available due to restaurant closures. Food can be a coping mechanism during times of stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Gym closures could have also been a cause for the population's weight gain. Monitoring food intake and calories is a great way for someone to keep control of weight along with a healthy amount of exercise every day. The pandemic has caused many people to pick up hobbies like cooking, since everyone spends more time at home now. COVID-19 has led people to turn to local/microlocal food sources and stray away from formerly popular foreign ingredients, as those have become more expensive. People are relying more on home-cooked meals as restaurants remain closed. Because of the stress of the pandemic, comfort foods have risen in popularity and most likely will be here to stay for a while. Home growing food has also become more popular as people realize the financial benefits of homegrown foods. Eating food used to be a social activity, but COVID-19 changed that. Before COVID-19 people in the United

States ate half their meals outside of the home. It seems that home cooking may be a form of therapy, especially with loved ones. The economic impact of COVID-19 has caused food bank demands to skyrocket. Despite increased demand for food and decreased in spendable income, experts say there is no need to fear a food shortage because three billion dollars has been declared to be spent to help farmers and harvesters during COVID-19.

The gym closures due to the pandemic have caused people to become creative with how they exercise. There are many inexpensive gym items that can make working out easy, fun, and safe. Golf and Tennis are great ways to get socially distanced exercise. Swimming is also safe, as long as the pool is socially distanced. If you can't make it to these spots, be creative with movement. Walk up and downstairs, do lunges and jump around the house. Workout with friends using virtual services like Zoom. An immediate positive of exercise is reduced anxiety, which is especially important during a pandemic where anxiety levels are constantly rising.

Although exercise is important, be wary of the health and safety of yourself and those around you. A few minutes of exercise per day is proven to increase and improve your brain function. Be careful in gyms, as germs thrive there thanks to the increased temperature inside. Germs can remain on surfaces for hours, which can make the gym a dangerous place to go. It is important to have hospital-grade sanitizer when working out. If you are worried about getting sick, working out online is an option.

Focusing on working out can help mend the anxiety caused by COVID-19.

It is very easy to lose discipline, especially if you are working out alone. Online plans and free fitness apps can keep you motivated and on track. Social media workout videos are a great way to learn different ways to work out with items in your home, such as doing sliders with hand towels. "Make a date with exercise," schedule a time to work out, and stick to it. One good workout is a HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) workout.

It is important to stay both mentally and physically fit during a pandemic. Limiting exposure to social media can also help your mental health. Educate yourself on mental health using verified sources and trusted websites.

Never be afraid to reach out, protect, and hold on to your social connections as best you can. Try to refrain from using alcohol and tobacco, as they may be used as a crutch/coping mechanism. Look and try to make a positive impact in your community; this can help boost your mental wellbeing. The mental side of fitness should be acknowledged and respected just as much as the physical side. American culture is heading in the direction of being more individualized, but the pandemic has allowed

us to catch up with family members and reconnect. It is important for our mental health to know we are not alone.

Start each morning with a clear mind. This can help boost your mood and start your day on a positive note. Having a strict schedule is vital to your mental well-being in a time when it is easy to slack off because of excessive free time. Trying new hobbies is another great way to boost your mental well-being. These do not have to be physical workouts. Try out cooking or another hobby that you previously haven't had the time for. Put time aside every day to spend with family.

Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which helps you stay mentally healthy. This is important during a pandemic. Aerobic exercise is a great way to keep your brain healthy while we are forced to be indoors more than usual. Exercises do not need to be intense. Walking and/or cycling will have positive effects. Analyze the stress in your life and try to target it. By putting the stress on the table and realizing where it is coming from, it will be easier to target and try to eliminate that stress. This will improve your mental well-being. A great way to remain healthy mentally is to practice yoga. Yoga helps center the mind and will decrease stress and anxiety as well as improve physical fitness.

Limiting anxiety medications may help with your mental wellbeing. Although using medications to assist in falling asleep may be beneficial in the short term, this can cause reliance on those medications. Plus, natural sleep is always more beneficial to your health.

It is vital to stay connected to your social circles during this pandemic. Many people feel alone when they are stuck inside, so do not be afraid to reach out to friends and family. Be aware of your internet use. Try to figure out how much time you spend online, and minimize it as much as you can. There are countless links between excessive internet/social media use and declining mental health.

It might feel like rocket science, but it is not. Getting in shape during the pandemic will carry over to your future fitness. Be smart about the types of food you are eating and the amount you are consuming. Go on a run or pick up a kettlebell once and while. Close your eyes and just focus on your breathing or space out your time so you can listen to your favorite podcast. Staying mentally and physically fit does not have to be a challenge.

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Author Biography

My name is Sam Mittenthal, I am a senior majoring in content strategy-based professional writing with a minor in general business. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine is the value of family. It is something I think we as college students take for granted on a daily basis. I think national COVID restrictions will end on **6/30/2021**.

THE PANNY SHOVED ME INTO ANIME

Brianna Porter

The most upsetting part of lockdown was when libraries closed. I thought that I could beat the shutdown. I had 12 books on hold, and I only had five new books that I had picked up two days before. Three of the five books I had were the subsequent books in three different series. My little turquoise bookshelf suddenly looked dismal. I read over a hundred books every year, yet I only had about 30 books at home. I read too fast to regularly buy new books. The library is more cost-efficient. I never regretted that choice until I was facing two months without anything to read.

Reduced to rereading books I'd already reread at least twice, I needed other options. E-books were a hard no. My brain won't comprehend good writing in electronic form, and I can't read trashy books for too long or my brain will shrivel away to nothing.



Photo by Jorge Zapata on Unsplash

That left TV, even though I wasn't particularly interested in it. I wasn't thrilled about the option, but I had to do something between the time I spent playing my Switch and doing online classes. Besides, my brother had been getting on me to "up my numbers" in anime since sophomore year of college, so I figured I should be more proactive about that. He already recommended *Violet Evergarden*, *Your lie in April*, and *The Seven Deadly Sins*, and I enjoyed them. I figured I could find more on my own since I had nothing but time.

For a while, I worried that TV was my lockdown "thing." People were gardening and

making bread and learning to knit, and all I had done was started two videogames and watched TV. So fast, I had forgotten that watching anything regularly was new to me. Reading and cooking couldn't be my lockdown time spender because I had built those into my life before the world shut down. I had to stop comparing myself to everyone else and maybe find my way to BookTok.

It's been a year since this radical change, and I've liked almost every animated show I've watched. I still have an ongoing list of anime and cartoons to try. The pandemic has been soul-crushing and the worst way to finish my undergraduate career, but at least it gave me this. My brother would have gotten me here eventually, even though his main goal was to make me cry. My numbers aren't high enough for him yet, but I'm getting there.

This part of my pandemic experience has shown me that there's something for everyone. After thinking about it, I understand that most of the cartoons and animes I watch are another version of YA fantasy novels, my genre of choice. With that, here are some reviews of shows from the bookworm who thought she didn't like television.

Adventure Time

A good show, despite there not being any plot until maybe season four or five and being three seasons too long. For people who want to watch a boy running around and fighting petty crime with his talking dog, this is the show for you. If you want to watch a banging musical episode, watch Season 3, Episode 7. It also happens to be the best episode.

7/10

Hunter x Hunter

This is my favorite anime by far. It's a show about a little boy following in the professional footsteps of his deadbeat father. Whether he follows in his deadbeat footsteps are yet to be seen. Gon is a silly little angel baby with maybe two thoughts floating around in his head. Killua could in fact kill me where I stand, but I still adore him. Watch this for a beautiful friendship and frequent, unnecessary murder.

10/10

Avatar: the Last Airbender

For the unaware, this is about a twelve-year-old saving the world from the weakest element trying to rule the world. Aang doesn't need to be a pacifist, but he is anyway and I kind of love that for him. Sokka pulls the baddest chicks with no effort. Maybe Aang wouldn't have been attacked so much if Katara stopped announcing his presence everywhere they went. I said what I said.

9/10 just for Zuko's redemption arc

Erased

It's both so cute, and yet so sad. That little girl cried over breakfast and I will never forgive them for that. This one is about a thirty-year-old man traveling back in time to when he was 10, so he can stop a tragedy from happening in the present and further tragedy happening in the past. Imagine a grown man's vocabulary coming out of a ten-year-old mouth, and that's thirty percent of the show. The ending was. . . a choice. Still good though.

9/10

Phineas and Ferb

Is there any plot? No. Does Ferb say one line per episode and still manage to be a top-tier character? Yes. And does all the music bump? Absolutely.

8/10 for no plot

Blood of Zeus

There's only one season out right now, but you best believe I will be impatiently waiting for the other four. The untold story of yet another of Zeus' bastard children. Heron loves his mom and nothing else in the world, and I am here for it. I'm looking forward to a redemption arc and bromance between bastard sons.

9/10

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power

This was my first show with a magical princess transformation and I am completely in love with it. A girl realizes that she grew up under the control of an evil empire and her friend is mad that she "left without her." The power of friendship is so strong and it's beautiful.

9/10

Haikyuu!!

I didn't think I would like this, and then I remembered that I like sports. This is about a boy who loves volleyball so much, and yet he doesn't know how to play. He can only go fast and jump high. Enter the angry setter who wishes he could play the entire game of volleyball by himself, and you have a show. All the characters are so good, there are no bad traits in this show.

10/10

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Author Biography

My name is Brianna Porter. I am a senior Professional and Creative Writing double major. Something the pandemic and being under lockdown taught me was not to compare my stress, progress, or anything else to anyone else. We all move at different paces and that's okay. I think nationwide lockdown restrictions will be lifted on **08/01/2021** even though I doubt everyone will be vaccinated in this dumpster can fire of a country.

Changing

LIFE

March of 2020 never ended.

Statewide and nationwide lockdowns began to take effect in the following months. Our lives were being limited even more when all we craved was the everyday life we took for granted before the virus.

THE ILLUSION OF TIME

Zoe Kelley

I used to joke around that 2020 was actually four years long. Year one was January to Mid-March. Year two was the rest of March and April. Year three was May to August. Year four was August to December.



Photo taken by Jon Tyson on Unsplash

January-Mid March

A new decade. I was headed to the airport to board my flight for my 3-week study abroad trip to Florence, Italy. All I could think about was how good it felt to start the new decade off in a foreign country. 2020 really felt like it was going to be my year.

It wasn't until I touched down at O'Hare International Airport on my return flight that I began to notice this COVID-19 thing was more serious than I thought. Passengers coming from China were sent to different rooms in the airport for health screenings. I was pretty sick at this point and began to panic that I had contracted the virus in Italy.

The first week back at school and there's already a scare that students contracted the virus before they came back to school. I began to think maybe I did get the virus in Italy when news begins to spread that things are really bad there.

The semester progresses as normal and then we hear of cases in Washington. Then, things begin to spiral. All of a sudden, my professors are talking about rumors of closing campus and having online classes. Cases began to spread like wildfire in the US. I couldn't wrap my head around what was happening. Little did I know that the worst

had yet to come.

March

On March 10th, I was walking back from class with my friend when we got an email that neither of us could have anticipated. President Crawford wrote that we were going to be sent home and classes would be online effective immediately. I knew that there had been talk of this, but I didn't realize it would be happening that abruptly. I remember being extremely scared. I never thought things would get bad enough that our entire lives would be completely changed.

March went on to be the longest month of my life. My birthday is March 14th; any other year, I'd be happy that March felt a little longer than normal. This was different though. My mom is a doctor, so the atmosphere in my house was very somber. She was having regular meetings with the hospital about the state of the country and what our futures held. My dad is a professor at Miami, so he was trying to figure out how to make his classes online and still keep his students engaged. My older sister was a senior at the time, so we were both trying to figure out how to balance our class schedules and share the kitchen table for our work. Every day started to look the exact same, and it was hard to feel connected to reality.

It honestly felt like we were in a real Groundhog Day situation. Every morning, I would wake up at 9 a.m., make a cup of coffee and put it in the fridge so I could have it iced, and then take a shower. After showering, I'd finish making my coffee, eat some breakfast, and then get started on my schoolwork that I would spend the rest of the day doing.

Doing the same thing everyday, acting like everything is normal, was extremely disorienting. To me, March felt like it was a year long. I know I'm not alone in this thought either. My family, friends, and classmates were all talking about how time seemed to stop. From March to August, nothing felt real.

May-August

In May, I eventually made my way back to work but there was still a lot of uncertainty if this was even safe and what the protocols were to ensure we stayed COVID-free. I didn't see any of my friends. It felt like the outside COVID world was constantly changing, while everything stayed the same inside my family bubble. This hugely contributed to the feelings of disorientation in relation to time.

Since I was staying home, I had a bunch of extra time in my days when I wasn't working or doing schoolwork. I'm a generally busy person, so having a bunch of free time all of a

sudden was a foreign feeling. There was a lot of pressure to fill all of the extra time we had with something productive. Whether it be picking up a new hobby, taking extra classes, or working out a lot, it felt unacceptable to take the extra time to relax or process everything that was going on. Everyday I felt myself asking: "What have I accomplished today?" It was exhausting to see people learning how to cook, working out more, or learning a new instrument on my social media. It made me feel like I wasn't doing enough.

From May to August, it really felt like there was no hope or end in sight. I thought that I was going to be stuck in a time warp forever. Still to this day, a lot of things don't feel real. When you spend a lot of your days inside behind a screen, you stop paying attention to what day it is and what's going on around you. It really is hard to imagine that there will be a time when things are "normal" again.

March 2021

It's really hard to fathom how we've made it a year into this nightmare. I never anticipated that COVID-19 would last this long. I remember over the summer talking about how things would be normal by the fall semester and we could put this entire thing behind us. I feel like I've really been desensitized to the whole situation. We've surpassed half a million deaths. So many lives have been disrupted, yet here I am, acting like everything we have experienced is just a slight blip in my life.

From what I have seen up to now, it seems like COVID-19 is going to be around for a lot longer than anyone initially thought. It will probably look more like the flu where we will have to get vaccinated each year to help prevent our chances of getting it. Life without masks and social distances will eventually come back. It might not be for a while, but there is at least some hope now.

I really do think that the pandemic and how much it made reality feel off is going to have a long-term impact on all of us. I truly can't comprehend how we got here or how it's already a year later. I'm not sure if reflecting on this time will bring different feelings when life does look more normal but for right now, I really think just moving on and forward is the best thing to do.

There have also been quite a few conspiracy theories about 2020 and how we were in a different dimension. All over TikTok and Twitter, I have seen users talking about how the ball dropped a minute late and how we somehow managed to shift into a different dimension back in March and are now living the "real 2020." With how this past year went, I'd believe anything is possible at this point.

All joking aside, I can't wait for the day that life is back to normal: when 24 hours actually feels like 24 hours and we can all collectively cope with the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. We all have plenty of experiences to tell our future kids and grandkids when they start learning about 2020 in their history classes, but I'm not sure how I'm going to handle it if I ever find out they made an APUSH DBQ about it. The pandemic has been a pretty traumatic experience for all of us and we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel with the success of the vaccines. There is a lot to mourn and grieve, and I think we all now have a new understanding of how precious time can be.

Here's to hoping time will return back to normal.

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Author Biography

My name is Zoe Kelley. I am a junior marketing and professional writing double-major, with a literature minor. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine was that empathy can go a long way. We all collectively have experienced something really traumatic with the pandemic, and being empathetic towards others can really make or break a situation. I think national COVID restrictions will end on **09/01/2021** (entirely too early, putting us right where we started).

THE NEW NORMAL

Katie Thompson

Being Content With the Novelty

It's funny how fast things can change when we're least expecting it. In March of 2020, no one expected our two week "corona-cation" to turn into months upon months of isolation. I remember the very first day things shut down, and how everyone was actually excited about it. Classes over Zoom seemed exciting. We didn't have to walk to class, we could be on our phones, and we didn't really have to pay attention because it was just Zoom, right? We were still on campus with our friends, only now our schedules seemed too good to be true. This was all fine and well for about two days, before campus shut down. Suddenly it didn't seem so fun anymore. Now, we were being shipped back home to finish the semester. It became a mad dash to pack up our rooms and say goodbye to our friends because suddenly we didn't know how long it would be until we'd see them again.



Photo taken from engin akyurt on Unsplash

Even then, the novelty of this new world we found ourselves in was still fresh. No one wanted to be home and isolated, but in those first few weeks, the abrupt shift in the way we lived our lives wasn't entirely unpleasant. I saw more of my family in that time than I had in a long while. Everyone was stuck at home, so we had to find new ways to fill our time together. We went on family walks. We had movie nights. My mom and I started finding new recipes to experiment with every week. My brother and I started going on runs together, something he's been trying to get me to do for years, and my dad and I started having game nights. It was strange, and it wasn't what anyone wanted to be doing, but at first it wasn't bad. Even with school still happening virtually, most professors understood that this was uncharted territory for everyone, so they took it easy on us. In a way, it was almost exactly like that quick two week break we all thought we were going to have, just not in the way we expected.

At that point, Zoom had yet to lose its novelty either. We had all used Facetime to stay connected with friends at one point or another, but having organized Zoom hangouts was something entirely new to most of us. My friends from home, who I didn't normally keep in such close contact with, started having regular Zoom nights, where we would spend hours just talking or playing online games together. I did the same with my friends from school that I was now separated from, and in the beginning it was fun. This technology seemed like a massive gift that allowed us all to still be together, even when we were apart. We used Netflix Party to watch movies together on a regular basis, and everyone was so focused on finding ways to pass the time and not lose contact that for a time it seemed like everyone was closer than ever. But that was the beginning, and the novelty didn't last forever.

When the Novelty Wears Off

Just when it seemed like everyone was finally falling into a new routine in this strange world, things began to fall apart. After weeks of being forced to rely solely on technology to communicate and connect with the outside world, it stopped seeming like enough. What began as regular lengthy Zoom meetings with the important people in my life turned into infrequent, brief sessions. Everyone was sick of being glued to a screen all the time, and Zoom fatigue was hitting us all *hard*. So, things began to fizzle. There's only so many nights you can spend watching Netflix movies on a laptop. After a while, no one wanted to get together for that anymore either. Technology that initially seemed like a haven now felt like a crutch, and we were all tired of limping. However, in my experience, it wasn't even just the new things that started to lose their appeal. Even methods of communication that I had always relied on—like text and Snapchat—seemed only to remind me of the fact that, at the end of the day, I was alone in my room and not with the people I wanted to be with.

This is where the reality of our situation really began to settle in. With everyone pulling back from our technological support systems, it became all too easy to truly feel the effects of isolation. We were tired, we were lonely, and we were all just a little bit sick of spending so much time with our families. Worst of all was the sense of helplessness that began to set in. This was only supposed to be a short term thing. What had happened to that? At what point had it started to feel like this was our new reality, and it might never go away? As sophomores entering our junior year of college, my friends and I faced the additional hurdle of realizing that most of our summer internship plans had completely fallen through. The world still hadn't quite figured out how to function through a pandemic, so we were stuck in a state of limbo right at the point in our lives when we should've been finally figuring things out. Instead of celebrating becoming

upperclassmen and settling into jobs that would help us determine our futures, we were left feeling bitter and out of control as our lives threatened to pass us by. It wasn't fun anymore. It was scary.

Settling Into the New Reality

By the time summer ended and the fall semester began, it seemed we had all reached a sort of plateau. Being back at school was strange; it had been so long since we had had anything that really felt normal, and even the familiar havens of our college campuses weren't the same. There were no more big sports games, no more large group gatherings, no more tables overflowing with people at the dining halls, and much smaller amounts of people walking around on campus. There was still no escaping the Zoom classroom, but at least we were back with our friends again. It wasn't the same, but it was better.

The hardest part at this point, for me, was figuring out how I was supposed to act in this new normal. I was surrounded by my friends, but I was extremely limited in how and when I could see them. I was back on campus, but I was still mostly confined to my apartment with Zoom classes. I could go to my job and work in person again, but everything was separated by plexiglass and masks and almost no one came into the café anymore. The intense technology fatigue had mostly worn off, but now I had to figure out how to reconnect with the people I had lost touch with. It was better, but it still wasn't good.

Later, the most jarring realization came: I was used to this now. I had stopped saying things like "when COVID is over" or "after this all goes away." Instead, I had become almost resigned to the fact that this was just how the world was now. I would watch old movies with people at parties and catch myself wondering why no one was wearing a mask. Every time I went anywhere I would find myself counting to make sure there weren't more than ten people. It had become a habit to keep a mask in my car, backpack, purse, and bedroom, so I would always have one on hand when I needed it. Now, I think back on things I used to do before the pandemic and wonder how that was ever normal. Even the concept of leaving my apartment to go to an in-person class has started to seem foreign to me. I never wanted this to be my normal. No one did. But somehow along the way, it seemed to happen anyway. In some ways, things are good, but I don't know if it'll ever be what it used to.

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Author Biography

My name is Katie Thompson, and I am a junior Professional Writing and Psychology double major. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine is not to take time with my loved ones for granted. You never know when life can get in the way of seeing the people you love, and quarantine taught me to appreciate all the time that I have. If I had to guess when I think national COVID restrictions will end, I would probably say around **08/15/2021**.

FOG AND LIGHTS

Jenny Robinson

A fog covers the room. Suffocating and thick. The drone of a professor over a buffering Zoom call explains something about grammar or Bolsheviks or philosophical theorists. It doesn't matter. They sit under their covers, blanket pulled tight around their shoulders, hair pulled back in a tight, greasy bun. They can't remember the last time they bathed, but the thought of standing under a too-hot shower with too-hard water makes their brain squirm in the worst way.

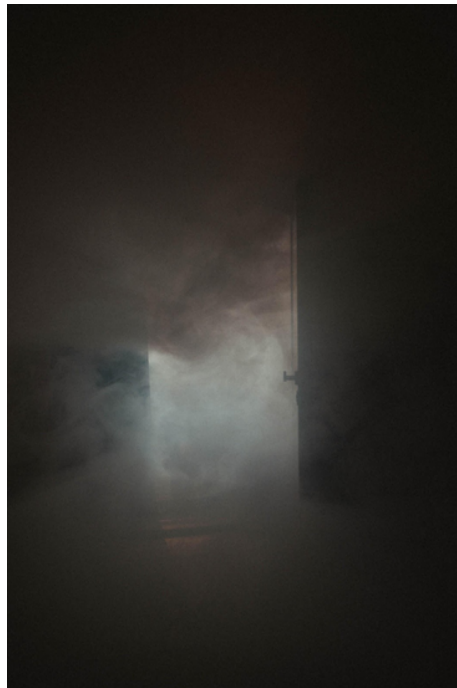


Photo from Kilian Seiler on Unsplash

Through the thin walls, the sound of their roommates' own Zoom classes filter in, joining the ever-present din and the stifling fog in their brain. Once it would have annoyed them, made it difficult to concentrate, and maybe it still does on some level. But the fog numbed it, numbed everything really. The fog that hangs like a thick wall of smoke in the air at all times, burning like ash every time they breathe. The fog that gums up the gears of their mind, sinking into the folds of their brain in a way that they're sure will leave nebulous stains on the squishy pink cortexes and synapses. The fog that their parents talk about in hushed whispers in the kitchen 673 miles away, thinking a mere mention of it would infect their younger sisters too.

The professor's monotonous lecture voice changes for the end of class signing off, and they quickly end the call and close their computer. Sinking further into the safety of the covers, they contemplate dropping out for the thirtieth time that day. If they weren't so

close to getting their degree, they probably would. Their sister did last semester. Sometimes she would call them to complain about working minimum wage full-time. She would say that people over thirty don't know how to wear masks right, and grown men throw temper tantrums when they're not allowed into the store without one, and how when she takes her break, her friends' Snapchat stories are full of maskless pictures at big parties she wasn't invited to.

They're probably all nursing and business majors, they would think but never tell their sister. They would also never tell her that going out to the grocery store made them forget about germ theory entirely as their brain filled with Victorian notions of miasma. Or that they faked coughing violently when someone stood too close in line behind them.

They pull a pillow close to their chest, burying their face into a pillowcase that probably needed to be washed. As they close their eyes, the fog descends even more, burying them, suffocating like dirt in a grave filling their lungs. It is strange; numbness was never so full, so frustrating, so overwhelming as it is now.

Amidst the miasma of fog, a looming red light floats, clearing a path through the numbness, making their heart race and their breathing quicken and their throat close. Wheezing breaths pass their chapped lips, and burning tears stream down their face. They bury their wet face into their mountain of pillows, muffling their heaving and sobbing in hopes that they won't be heard by their roommates who are still in too-loud Zoom calls in the apartment with too-thin walls. In their mind, their mother's voice echoes. *Calm down and stop crying. You're making a scene. You're just doing this for attention.*

Yeah mom, they think, *Having a panic attack alone is for attention.*

They wish for the floating red light to shift away and for the fog to settle back down over their bed, enveloping them once again in its numbing embrace. Perhaps that is not the healthiest of wants, and perhaps that should be cause for worry, but feeling everything at once is much worse than feeling nothing at all.

A few minutes and several dry heaves later, the glowing red light retreats to the corner of the room, dimming and blurring as the fog rushes in to fill the empty space. They lay there, numb once again, face still wet and beginning to tighten, lips swollen, eyes reddened, eyelashes saturated and clumped. Through the wall, they can hear their roommates now talking, their Zoom classes presumably over.

They can hear one complaining about having to stay in this weekend, about not being able to go to bars anymore, about how her mental state is so frayed because she can't get blackout drunk and wake up with some random frat guy anymore. How COVID is really dampening her life. The other roommate agrees, saying that she thinks she is developing depression from being inside for so long.

Maybe she was. But her room doesn't have the fog.

Their third roommate is in her own room, a room that is steeped in the same fog, tinted with her own color. In the far end of the common room, their dark grey fog mixes and intertwines with their roommate's pastel blue fog. At night, sometimes, when neither of them could sleep, they would sit by the TV with the lights off, their fogs mingling into something ashen as they shared their numbness, their overwhelming influx of assignments, how their fog clouded the computer screen and they couldn't bring themselves to wipe it away.

Their roommate would second their sentiments, saying that her 30 milligrams of Zoloft had stopped working when the pandemic choked society, that her psychiatrist was closed until spring semester. She suggested one night that they go to a psychiatrist, whenever the offices opened back. A global pandemic is a pretty good reason to start SSRIs, after all.

They said maybe, the glowing red light beginning to emerge at the mere thought of calling for an appointment, at the thought of going to a doctor at all. Their heart sped up, their nails digging small crescent moons into their palm. *You're not having a panic attack just thinking of a phone call*, they scold themselves.

Maybe, they said again. And maybe they would.

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Author Biography

My name is Jenny Robinson, and I'm a junior Professional and Creative Writing double major with a minor in History. During quarantine this past year, I think the most important thing that I learned is how to be comfortable with myself. With less social and academic constraints, I was forced to sit with myself a lot, and it helped fuel my personal growth in a way that I really enjoy. I definitely feel more of myself and more comfortable with who I am now after being forced to do that self-reflection during quarantine. If I had to choose a specific date for national COVID restrictions to be lifted completely, I would probably choose sometime in late August. Specifically, **08/20/2021**. There will probably be incremental lifts on restrictions before that, but I feel that will be when everything is lifted.

AN INTROVERT DURING THE PANDEMIC

Emma Kazmaier

In March 2020, the world seemed to shut down. COVID-19 made its way to the United States and caused schools and businesses to close until further notice. My generation had never seen anything like this. To me, it felt like a weird dream or as if we were living in an alternate reality. It was a strange experience and something I never thought would happen in my lifetime. As a result of the pandemic, we were forced to stay home for months to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This impacted me so much more than I thought it would.

I consider myself to be an introvert: someone who feels energized by spending time by themselves because social situations are often draining. As an introvert, I enjoy spending time alone reading, writing, watching TV, and playing the piano. Doing these things allows me to relax and recharge after being immersed in an extroverted society. So when the pandemic hit and we all had to stay home, I was okay with it at first because I enjoy being at home. I went back to my hometown from Miami and stayed with my family while doing school online. I liked this because I missed my family and was happy I got to see them every day. I was really glad to have an excuse to stay home and not feel forced to socialize.



Photo by Emma Kazmaier

During the many months of quarantine, I watched multiple TV shows and movies and even downloaded TikTok, which I had been opposed to before. Society had already been very digital, but I feel like the pandemic intensified this. Any social interaction I had was with either my family, who I was living with, or friends and extended family over Zoom and FaceTime. In a way, I enjoyed this at first because it sometimes gave me an excuse not to have to go out and socialize. I could just stay at home and spend time by myself and relax.

However, after a month or two of quarantining, I was ready to get out of the house. The days seemed to merge together as one long day that wouldn't end. I was getting tired of being with my family all the time and I wanted to see my friends again in person. I didn't realize how much the pandemic and quarantine would impact me. Knowing I'm an introvert, I thought I would be fine being stuck at home for so long. I was for a while, but it got to the point where I needed to get out and do something. I began to get really bored and was tired of doing the same thing every day, only leaving the house to take many walks with my family outside. I was tired of being at home and wanted to go somewhere else and see other people. Doing schoolwork and hanging out at home every day was getting really old, even for a person who loves a routine. While I still felt like an introvert, I longed to see my friends and family in person. I didn't realize how much I would miss people until I couldn't see them anymore. Being stuck at home for so long made me realize how many things I took for granted and made me see that maybe there is such a thing as too much time alone.

Although introverts may like time to themselves, they also need to get out and see people. I've heard people say that quarantine tended to be easier for introverts. While that may be true, I still think the pandemic has been difficult for everyone. Even those who enjoy spending time alone can't be alone forever. I realized that, as an introvert, even I don't want too much time alone, because it can get lonely or even boring after a while.

Even though we're beginning to go out and see people in person again, I still find myself sometimes reverting to my introverted ways of wanting to spend some time alone. Having been able to stay at home for so long, a part of me longs for a time when I had an excuse to just stay at home. This didn't surprise me because not even a pandemic could change who I am as a person. I still do enjoy time to myself and take advantage of it when I can. However, I do appreciate seeing my friends and going places again because it doesn't make it seem like I'm living the same day over and over again. Going out and seeing people makes my time to myself seem more valuable because it's not something I'm doing constantly. In a similar way, I also feel like spending so much time isolated from others makes me appreciate the people I have in my life and the

friendships I have. The pandemic has made me appreciate a balance between alone time and socializing. I've learned that as an introvert I still need both.

I think the pandemic shows that introverts aren't always anti-social, they just need some time to themselves to recharge before seeing people again. There's a stereotype that introverts always want to be alone, but that isn't true. Although it can be argued that extroverts have been impacted more from quarantine and isolation, introverts still struggled as well. I think time spent with people and time spent alone needs to be balanced in a way that benefits a person the most. Everyone is different, and as an introvert, a lot of alone time might be best for me. Although, quarantine may have been a little too long.

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Author Biography

My name is Emma Kazmaier and I am a junior majoring in Strategic Communication and Professional Writing. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine is that I shouldn't take spending time with friends and family for granted. Not being able to see family and friends in person for months was very difficult and I missed them a lot. Since we're now beginning to be able to see more people in person again, I truly appreciate the time I have with them. My prediction for the date that all pandemic restrictions will lift nationwide is **11/01/2021**.

THE LESSONS WE LEARN FROM DOGS

Bailey Miller

It is easy to feel as though humans are the only living creatures being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. After all, we as people have experienced the most drastic changes because of it; our lives have been turned upside down. However, we rarely take into account the way our experiences with the pandemic have influenced the fluffy, loving species many of us share our homes with—dogs! Although there are innumerable ways in which the pandemic has brought negativity into our lives, there are many positives we can take from it as well. This chapter focuses specifically on the positive lessons we can take from our furry friends themselves.



Photo by Bailey Miller

Turning Isolation into Connection

For most of us, the pandemic has been especially difficult because of the isolation we have felt from others. This is especially true about our loved ones whom we have had to physically distance from for over a year. We feel this isolation and desire for connection with strangers, too! We miss seeing the barista's smile at our local coffee shop. We long for the day when we can interact with a new classmate without worrying about potential exposure to the virus. We grasp for any sliver of interaction with others that we can get.

With that being said, dogs have not felt the same way. In fact, their lives have progressed in an inverse direction—from isolation to connection. The countless hours and days that we used to spend at work or in class away from our dogs have transformed into the ones spent with them. They feel more connected to us than ever.

When this pandemic ends, they will miss those days when they spent every second with us. They may feel as though they took this time for granted, just as we have felt about the time we lived in normalcy before the pandemic. Their experience has been the direct opposite of ours.

The lesson you can learn from your dog in this sense is to take advantage of this time and seek the companionship you desire through them. Cuddle up with them during your lunch break while you still have the chance to. Appreciate the chance to take a quick break from work as they bark at you to let them outside. Recognize the value of the companionship that you and your dog share, even if you do not feel that sense of companionship with anyone else right now. It may help to feel a bit more grounded in the disjointed world we are living in.

Encouraging Good Habits

We are living in a time when it is extremely difficult to practice good habits. Currently, many of us do not have a structure in our lives to hold us accountable for the things that we need to do to keep ourselves healthy, both physically and mentally. We have recognized that there is a difference between getting ready for a day full of in-person activities and a day sitting on Zoom calls wearing a nice top and sweatpants. This recognition has led to many of us putting less effort into ourselves and more effort into simply getting by with the new challenges of Zoom fatigue and isolation.

Dogs encourage us to nurture good habits that can help to keep us energized and positive. Dogs need exercise, and many of us have taken our dogs on countless walks throughout quarantines and lockdowns, helping us exercise as well. The act of owning a dog, therefore, has helped us keep our bodies healthy and in-shape. Dogs thrive on routine, just as many people do. They wake up around the same time every morning, eat a certain number of times throughout the day, need to go outside to do their business a certain amount of time after eating, and so on. Owning a dog thus provides a routine for those who feel as though they do not have one since everything has shifted to a more flexible, online format. They keep us from sleeping in too late or sitting in desk chairs all day. Dogs also *love* food, so I'm sure they are happy that the pandemic has fostered the new habit of every meal being at home; it means more food scraps for them!

The lesson we can learn here is that dogs provide us countless opportunities to better ourselves during a time when it may seem hopeless to. They encourage us to do this simply by being who they are and needing what they need, making them an effortless resource for self-care. Next time you are feeling as though you are falling into a state of pandemic fatigue, try taking a step back and look to your dog for companionship.

Moving Away from Materialism

The pandemic has caused financial stress for many people. The strength of this effect cannot be diminished by a simple “money can’t buy happiness” cliché. However, this does not mean that we cannot find a bit of light in the darkness.

In normal times, many dogs are spoiled with treats and toys, sometimes even on a daily basis. While there are many people that are fortunate enough to still have the disposable income that allows them to continue this into the pandemic, there are many who can’t afford to do the same. Those dogs are still happy without extra toys and treats because they thrive on the companionship they have with their owners. Dogs do not need to be spoiled with expensive gifts to be happy.

There are also more dogs than ever being adopted from shelters. Although these dogs were likely adopted for a variety of reasons, think about how many dog owners would have bought a purebred dog if they had the money for it (it is a fairly expensive feat) instead of adopting. Those shelter dogs would not have the wonderful homes they have now or be able to spend so much time with their new, loving owners.

The lesson dogs teach us here is that we do not need extra money or gifts to enjoy ourselves during the pandemic (or ever!). Money is important to think about, and it does affect factors like our stress levels, but it is not the only path to happiness. Dogs will love you no matter how many treats or toys you give them, and that is a sentiment that we can all take into our lives, even after the pandemic ends.

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Author Biography

My name is Bailey Miller, and I'm a sophomore at Miami University majoring in Psychology and Professional Writing with a minor in Statistical Methods. The most impactful lesson I learned from quarantine is the power of resilience. This time period was difficult for everyone, but pushing through it and remaining positive has been so rewarding. Although I'm not too sure, I think national COVID restrictions will end on **08/01/2021**.

COVID CHRONICLES

Sydney Mason

March 7th, 2020

Mom came to Oxford today. Surprisingly enough, we had a really good time. I took her to Brick, and she drank her very first Trashcan—I even think she enjoyed it.

I feel good knowing that she got to meet my friends and see me have some fun. I know she worries about me after losing dad.

I'm finally finding my footing again. This year is looking up.



Photo by Sydney Mason

March 10th, 2020

Miami announces a two-week suspension of all in-person classes

When I woke up this morning, it felt like any other normal day. I walked to class with Emily, and we talked about our date party on Friday.

When we got to class, our professor mentioned the possibility of suspending in-person classes for a bit, just until the coronavirus stuff blew over. None of my other professors even mentioned it.

As the day progressed, I saw more on the news about local schools suspending in-person classes. All of the group chats I'm in started blowing up, but we all agreed that there was no way they could send us home. Besides, doing classes online doesn't even make sense.

Apparently, we were wrong, though, because Miami announced the suspension of all face-to-face instruction, effective immediately.

A lot of people are excited about this, but I don't think they realize that we don't get this time in college back.

March 12th, 2020

Miami University cancels all in-person classes for the rest of the semester and tells students to return home

Today sucked.

Miami announced that all in-person classes were cancelled for the rest of the semester.

I can't figure out why they didn't at least wait to see. I mean it's only been two days since the first announcement. How do they know things won't be better by April?

March 13th, 2020

President Trump declares a national state of emergency

I can't figure out why everyone seems to be in such a rush to get out of here.

March 15th, 2020

All bars and restaurants are forced to close

Even the RAs have gone home. I don't know if anyone has been supervising our dorm for the past week. There's literally no rules; it feels like we're in limbo. Students have been openly drinking in the common areas as if it's normal.

March 17th, 2020

Stimulus package is proposed

I finally said goodbye to Oxford today. It was hard to drive away, not knowing when I'd get to return. It's a weird feeling knowing a chapter of my life is coming to an end. Living with all of my friends has been the only good thing about this year, and now I'm losing that too.

March 22nd, 2020

Governor DeWine issues a stay at home order for all non-essential workers

I've been home for almost a week, and so far all I've done is read books and watch an absurd amount of movies with Spencer. It helps that we're both always avoiding mom—strength in numbers or whatever.

I've come to the conclusion that my GPA is screwed. I simply don't know how I'm supposed to adapt to online learning, as if any of this is normal. One of my professors still hasn't said anything to us since school got canceled two weeks ago.

March 26th, 2020

The Senate passes the CARES Act

Mom and I got into it today. I should have seen it coming with the way tensions were rising between us. She broke my glasses and I cried with Spencer for a while. He bought *Mario Party 8* on the Switch to cheer me up, and we played for the rest of the night, just like when we were kids. It helped.

April 6th, 2020

Taylor turned 25 today, her first birthday without dad. Seems kinda fitting that it was in the middle of a pandemic. I made fillet and potatoes for dinner, the way dad used to make it, but I overcooked the meat and ended up making myself even more upset.

April 10th, 2020

I started a workout challenge today. I was partially motivated by the fact that I'm going stir crazy, but I was mostly inspired by TikTok. Why not I guess.

May 15th, 2020

Outdoor dining at bars and restaurants is permitted and salons can reopen

I took my last final today. I'm glad to be done with online school, but it feels like I didn't really learn much. Hopefully, things will be normal again by the fall. Miami claims we'll resume in-person instruction by then, but who knows.

June 10th, 2020

Many businesses across Ohio are permitted to reopen

I drove to Dayton to meet Amanda and Jordan for some shopping. I hadn't seen them in a while and it was nice to catch up. Everyone in the mall was acting like things were back to normal, but a few stores required masks upon entry. It was kinda weird.

June 19th, 2020

Casinos, amusement parks, water parks, and outdoor theaters permitted to reopen

I met up with some Miami friends at OSU today and we went to a bar for the first time since leaving Oxford. It felt strange to be out, but the bar didn't seem concerned about social distancing and everyone was walking around without masks. It seems like things are looking up.

July 23rd, 2021

Statewide mandate requires masks to be worn in public spaces across Ohio

Someone sent Tiffany and me tequila shots while we were out at lunch today. We were thrown off at first but turns out it was her fourth-grade teacher's husband. Small world.

July 27th, 2021

Miami announces that all classes will be remote in the fall until September 21

I completed my third workout challenge of quarantine. I don't know what it is about working out at home, but I kind of love it. I've never been so fit in my life.

July 31st, 2021

The sale of liquor is banned in all Ohio establishments after 10pm

Apparently, the coronavirus only comes out to play after 10 p.m. At least that's what Governor DeWine seems to think. Stupid.

August 6th, 2020

Today would have marked dad's 66th birthday. I planned to drive to Pennsylvania to visit his grave, but I woke up this morning to find all four of my tires slashed. As if the day didn't suck already. Mom ended up driving me. It was really nice to go and talk to him, at least in spirit.

August 12th, 2020

I moved into my first house on campus. I know I lived away from home for the past two years, but this feels different. I think mom felt it too; she cried when she left.

September 21st, 2020

Miami resumes in-person and hybrid classes

I got to be in a classroom today for the first time since March. It was weird though; we all had to sit with at least two desks between us and wear our masks, obviously. We had a few people call in through Zoom which made the dynamic even more bizarre.

October 15th, 2020

People traveling from border states are asked to quarantine for 14 days

My professor commutes from Indiana, which means that I got to attend a total of four in-person classes before having to switch back to online.

On the bright side, I found out that I've lost 30 pounds since quarantine started, so that's dope.

December 4th, 2020

End of finals week for fall semester at Miami

I finished my finals week from hell. I'd say I'm bummed that all my classes are online again next semester, but at this point, I'm honestly not sure I remember how to be an in-person student.

February 11th, 2021

Governor DeWine lifts 10 p.m. curfew

Today felt like a national holiday, the way people celebrated the end of our curfew. With bars going back to regular hours again, it's definitely starting to feel like we might see an end to all this craziness soon.

March 24th, 2021

I called to schedule my vaccine today. They didn't have anything in the area until April, but at least I got it scheduled. I can't wait for this mess to be over.

April 6th, 2021

I got vaccinated today. It feels kind of surreal to think that this chapter of my life is finally coming to a close. Things are looking up.

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Author Biography

My name is Sydney Mason and I am a junior at Miami University, where I am double majoring in Professional Writing and Marketing. Quarantine taught me a lot, but the most impactful lesson I learned was the importance of living life in the present and surrounding yourself with people you love. I realized that I often spend too much time focusing on the future and I end up missing what's happening right in front of me. Being present with the ones I love has helped me find happiness in the little things and has gotten me through the pandemic. Although things are looking up, I still think COVID is going to be around for a while, and, at the earliest, I predict that restrictions will lift around the two year mark: **03/01/2022**

A COVID-FREE CHRISTMAS

Emily Hickman

It all started with a break up. My boyfriend and I, having survived the COVID-19 pandemic quarantining together for four months with his family, finally broke up. It was mid-September, meaning I was screwed. I hadn't planned on the break up—I was going to spend the holidays with him and his family in Columbus. Now, I was stuck at school, across the country from my family with no idea where I would go for Christmas.

I knew I didn't want to go home, but that was about it. My father is immunocompromised, one of the reasons I stayed in Ohio with my boyfriend when the pandemic hit instead of going home to my parents in Idaho. I was terrified of transmitting COVID-19 to him from planes I had traveled on to get home. Not knowing what to do, I called my big sister to fix everything.

"Hey, kid! What's up?"

"I am officially homeless for the holidays. Carter and I broke up, and I have no idea what to do about Christmas now."

"Come here!"



Photo by Emily Hickman

My sister lives in Sacramento, California, which may sound like a dream Christmas vacation, but I had a few reservations.

"I don't know, dude; you know how I don't love Christmas. Maybe I can just stay at school and celebrate in my apartment alone."

She almost bit my head off.

"NO WAY! No sister of mine is spending Christmas in some crappy college-town apartment. It's too depressing."

Knowing she wouldn't give up until I gave in, I decided to skip the song and dance and just give her the answer she wanted.

"Fine."

"Yay! Text me when you want to fly out and back and I'll book tickets!"

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I love my sister, but this trip wasn't as exciting to me as it was to her. Once Santa lost his shine, Christmas followed soon after. My only memories of Christmas are wrapped in chaos— yelling over broken ornaments, complaints about tree sap getting on the furniture, and bickering over what kind of cookies to make. My sister likes sugar. I like chocolate chip. Why we couldn't just make both I never understood. All of the fighting and crying left a bad taste in my mouth for the holiday as a whole, leading to moaning and groaning for most of December.

Now, I was voluntarily spending ten days with my sister. I didn't know why, but I felt like this year would be different. I had survived a global pandemic, a break up, and over half of college. Maybe I could take on the festive beast that was my sister.

I packed my bags the night before, crossing my fingers that it would be under the 50 lb. weight limit as I shoveled half my closet into the biggest suitcase I owned.

The flight out was uneventful. I had packed 49.5 lb. of clothing, some of my best work, and had a short layover in Denver. My butt was sore getting off the plane and I limped toward baggage claim, texting my sister as I weaved between people from my flight.

Just landed. Headed to baggage claim.

Almost there, meet you by door 4.

When I walked out, my sister looked disgusted.

"You look homeless."

"I was flying literally all day. I was not trying to win a fashion award."

"Yeah, but you can still be comfy and cute. Like me."

"You look like the rich mom that pours vodka in her coffee before PTA meetings."

"Thank you!"

"That wasn't a compliment."

My sister's boyfriend, Kyle, was playing chauffeur and laughed at my comment, making me instantly like him. My sister rolled her eyes, a smile creeping up on her face. We went and got In-N-Out (overrated), and I saw her apartment for the first time. It was a cute one bedroom, close to downtown Sacramento and perfect for her. I spent the first night on an air mattress that took up her entire living room, dreaming of the So-Cal vacay she had promised me.

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I spent the next few days in Sacramento, exploring the city with my sister. We spent a lot of time shopping and eating, like any good vacation. On December 23 (my family calls it Christmas Eve Eve), Kyle, my sister, and I all piled into Kyle's SUV to head to LA. It was a long drive, so I settled in, organizing my Spotify library and cleaning out my phone's camera roll to pass the time. When we finally made it to Newport Beach, it felt unreal.

Kyle and my sister had rented a gorgeous house that was a five-minute walk from downtown Newport and a one-minute walk to the beach. We had a patio that looked toward the ocean and I got my own room with a real bed! We unloaded the car, pulling out suitcases, duffle bags, and box after box of wrapped presents. My sister also insisted on lugging a pathetic four-foot tree with us for the holidays, so we had to set that up too. She forgot to bring ornaments so we hung our stockings on the branches, hoping the bowing plastic branches would hold the weight of our knitted socks.

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As with any vacation, we spent most of our time enjoying the surrounding sights. Almost every day was a new mini road trip, giving me a chance to discover southern California. We walked around downtown LA, watched the sun set over the Santa Monica Pier, and went hiking on some nearby trails. Days we stayed in Newport were spent tanning on the beach, enjoying the simplicity of vacation life. We had no responsibilities or deadlines to stress over. I never wanted to leave.

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"They call it the Newport Bubble," my sister explained to me one night on the beach. We had found a lifeguard stand earlier that day and came back after dark to sit on it and enjoy the ocean sounds.

"Why? Because everyone who lives here is rich and doesn't have the concerns of normal people?"

"Kind of, yeah. People just don't care here. Everyone is laid back and just does their own thing. That's why it's so nice to vacation here: you can feel like that for a little bit."

She was right. Something about Newport made it easy to forget we were in a pandemic. There was no tape signaling six feet on the sidewalks, no doors littered with signs to wear a mask, and honestly very few masks in sight at all. It was as if COVID never touched Newport, and I loved it. I was so tired of seeing reminders of our new normal everywhere I turned, but here, there was none. Because most of our activities were outside, I also only had to wear a mask walking between destinations. On the beach and on our patio, the two most frequently visited spots of this vacation, I could be socially distanced and breathe freely.

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We spent four days in Newport and drove back to Sacramento on December 27. I flew home on December 30. A COVID scare at the Dallas-Fort Worth Air Traffic Control Center led to a five-hour-long airport shutdown, which led to me missing my connecting flight. I called my sister, sobbing in the airport terminal after the gate agent said there was nothing she could do to help me. My sister spent 20 minutes on hold with the airline, trying to get some information while I panicked about how I was going to get back home.

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As with any retelling, I did make it back home to Ohio the next day, safe and sound. The trip with my sister made me realize how valuable our connection is. When we were younger, we were never close, and my Christmas hatred seemed to further our divide. Now that we've both grown up and moved out of our parents' house, we're getting closer again. She is my first contact for all things college related, and I get to hear all about her latest life drama. I'm glad I was able to see my sister over Christmas because it made me realize that she's a different person than I knew her as, and so am I. We can finally spend Christmas together without the conflict, which is all either of us really ever wanted.

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Author Biography

My name is Emily Hickman and I am a junior Professional Writing and Journalism student. COVID-19 taught me to take action sooner, rather than later because you never know when the entire world will go into lockdown. I'm thinking national restrictions will lift on **01/05/2022**.

HOW CELEBRATIONS HAVE CHANGED

Hannah Clarke

Celebration. It seems almost oxymoronic to place that word in a book about the pandemic, and you'd be absolutely right if you were to assert that there has been little to celebrate in the era of COVID-19. Jobs have been lost, relationships have become distanced, and most importantly, lives have been taken by this virus. It seems like the joy and happiness that come with celebrations are far from the events we have been experiencing.

But, as the year has gone by, I've noticed that celebrations have continued, albeit in different forms than before. Notably, how and why we celebrate has shifted dramatically. Celebrations aren't the big, extravagant events we used to see them as. In a world wrecked by a pandemic, celebrations are small, distant, and focused.

No one is celebrating the pandemic, but we are celebrating in spite of it.



Photo by Hannah Clarke

Graduations

The first notable celebration that my family had was my brother's graduation in May, a few short months after quarantine began. He was graduating high school, which I had done two years before him. I kept thinking back to my own graduation and comparing it to how his was looking in light of the pandemic. I felt like I had gotten so much attention between getting to walk across a stage with a packed auditorium to receive my diploma and getting to have a graduation party with all of my friends and family. I felt terrible that my brother was going to miss out on all of the recognition I had

received. Since academics aren't something he particularly enjoys, his graduation was a big deal for him and my family, and I felt guilty that he wouldn't be able to celebrate in a big way like I had.

Ultimately, his high school opted to have their graduation ceremony at the drive-in, where students and their families (only allowed one car each) would watch videos of each student walking across the 'stage' and moving their tassel to the left.

Before the ceremony, I prepared a video for my family to watch my brother's memories of his four years in high school. The five of us sat in our living room and watched the video, reminiscing over the past few years. It felt so intimate to reflect on those moments with my family. I still go back and watch the video sometimes to recreate that feeling.

Then, since we were only allowed one car, my parents, brother, grandma, and I piled into my dad's Honda Pilot and drove to the drive-in together. When we got there, we were all excited to watch my brother on the big screen. I don't think we ever discussed how excited we were to watch me walk across the stage when I graduated. As such a normal practice, no one really thought anything of it. But watching my brother—even if it was for ten seconds at most—on the big screen at a drive-in theater? That was something worth getting excited about.

We enjoyed watching each student and listening to the cars in the lot honk their horns as a symbolic congratulations after each video.

After the presentation was over, fireworks filled the night sky. I remember being in awe as I took in the song of "Celebration" by Kool & The Gang playing over the speakers, saw the fireworks light up the darkness, and watched my brother laugh as he jokingly lit a cigar for the first time in his life. It wasn't the celebration we planned on, but it was way more sentimental than any of us could have ever imagined it would be.

Birthdays

Shortly after his graduation was my birthday. I was turning 20, and for months my family and I had been making jokes about entering into my "roaring 20s". By the time the day actually rolled around though, it was far from roaring. It was more like a faint whisper, actually. But it was a fun day nonetheless.

I'm not one for birthdays to begin with, so a faint whisper is perfect for me. Instead of spending money on a nice dinner and going out with friends like I had planned, my family and I ordered in Chinese food (no contact delivery, of course) and my friends planned to have a Teleparty call later that night.

To be honest, it was amazing. I love Chinese food, and it's normally so difficult to get all of my old high school friends together at once, so it was exciting to get to meet up with everyone, even if it was over a video call. We never did get to watching a movie—we had a lot of catching up to do—but it was enjoyable regardless. Sometimes a faint whisper of a party is more than enough to remind you of what really matters.

And Everything In-Between

Throughout that entire summer, I felt the same joy and excitement from going to the grocery store or getting coffee as I did during that graduation ceremony or my Zoom birthday call. It seems a little weird to say even now, since the two former events are mundane, everyday tasks and the two latter are typically more extravagant and exciting, but during a pandemic, you learn to celebrate the little things, like getting out of the house for the first time in five days or finally being able to order your go-to Starbucks drink.

Others shared in my appreciation of the small things too. During those summer weeks I wrote an article for Odyssey, an on-campus publication, where I asked college students what they missed most about life before the pandemic. Most answers were along the lines of “having study dates with my friends,” “going to the dining hall alone and leaving with a group of friends,” or “being able to participate in classes or extracurriculars.” I’m sure if I had asked those same students before the pandemic hit what their favorite part about college was, their answers would be much different than what they gave after their lives turned upside down. The pandemic has a way of bringing us back to the basics and reminding us of what’s truly important.

And what’s truly important isn’t extravagant parties or fancy dinners; what’s important is spending time with loved ones, enjoying the time we do have, and celebrating the small things.

So, sure, it may not seem like there is anything to celebrate when everything around us has been so heavily impacted by the pandemic. But even if the world seems to slow down, time stays the same, and people will still graduate, get older, and live through all those small, slow moments in life. It seems even more important to take time to celebrate what we do have left, and I’m sure most people living through this time period can say the same. At the end of the day, we’ve all come to realize that just going out to get coffee is something to celebrate.

Even though celebrations look a lot different right now, it’s important to recognize that in some ways they’re even better because we’ve all learned to appreciate the most important aspects of those events, while eliminating all of the unnecessary parts. We’ve learned to celebrate everyday things because *life is something worth celebrating*

and that's the most beautiful takeaway from something so devastating.

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Author Biography

My name is Hannah Clarke, and I am a third-year student at Miami University studying Public Health and Professional Writing. The most impactful thing that I learned during quarantine was how to better care for my mental health—with everything going on in the world and a shift to online-learning, things got pretty stressful quickly. It was important for me to learn when to take a break, reach out to others, and check in with myself to ensure that I was staying as mentally health-conscious as I was physically. I predict that the pandemic restrictions will end nationwide toward the end of the summer, **08/01/2021**.

DRIVE-IN CHURCH: THE NEW NORMAL?

Mady Wilson

Christmas looked different for us all this past year and not just because we couldn't gather together, but because some of us did anyway. I am a Christian from a moderately-sized city in southeast Ohio. My town does not have a lot of diversity or open mindedness, but it does have an abundance of churches. I frequently laugh to myself when I pass nine different denominations just to get to Kroger. I've always wondered just how many churches I'm surrounded by whose presences are unknown to me. A quick Google search has proved that there are almost fifty churches in my town. Since the start of COVID-19, I've been actively looking for those churches to see if there are cars in the parking lot, with or without people in them.

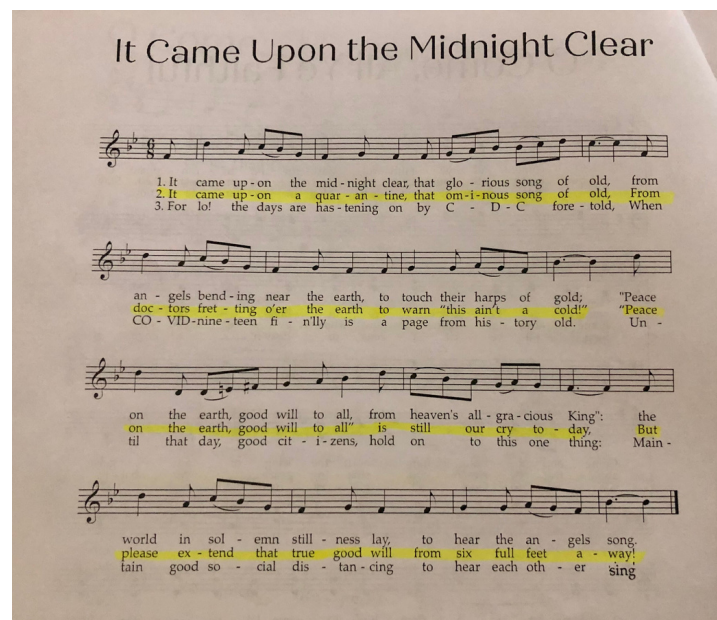


Photo by Mady Wilson

My own church, one that I like to think is very liberal, had been holding drive-in church services since the end of the lockdown in May and moved to recorded online services when it was too cold for our pastor to stand outdoors. Drive-in church is simple enough and it was a technique used in the 1950s to curb the lack of church facilities and the new resentment toward dress clothes. It's just like a drive-in movie: a car pulls into the parking lot, tunes their radio to the frequency of the microphone the pastor will be using, and rolls down their windows or blasts the A/C for personal comfort. It was a major emotional boost to be around my congregation without worrying about catching or spreading COVID-19.

We all knew that Christmas was going to be more lonely and subdued than other years. But one dark December night we gathered once again in our church parking lot, with our own hot chocolate in hand, and we rolled down a window or two to sing Christmas carols together. We even sang “updated” carols full of satirical lyrics poking fun at COVID. It was probably a pretty weird sight, but it was the safest way to keep our traditions alive (and keep all in attendance safe).

Driving around in my town, I witnessed the celebration change between Christian denominations. I was shocked at the number of churches that had resumed in-person church services at the end of summer, and I was even more fearful for the churches that had held a crowded Christmas Eve service before the ten-person gathering limit had lifted.

Throughout the pandemic there has been a question of priorities and—what people were willing to sacrifice in order to get back to their normal. When religion was non-negotiable, some churches took the most destructive path.

You may have heard about Solid Rock Church, the megachurch in Monroe, Ohio that returned to in-person church services in early April. Pastor Lawrence Bishop II spoke of the hypocrisy that society had against churches while there were other crowded public spaces in the city. On Sunday April 5, 2020 Bishop told his congregation “But I say the scripture that says forsake not to assemble yourselves together more so when you see the end approaching, if we don’t see the end approaching now, if this is not the beginning of the end then I don’t know what is” (Callahan 2020). And like other naïve officials and citizens, he believed that “Easter Sunday, Amen, this thing will all be done and over with” and that “God was in control” (2020).

In July, 236 people (60% of the congregation) got COVID-19 after an Oregon church held services during lockdown. The Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Union County held services in defiance of Oregon’s stay-at-home order. These experiences aren’t unique, many places of worship have been connected with super-spreader events. So why do churches continue to open their doors?

Like almost everything in our country, religion has become increasingly polarized. Conservative Christians can often be found in the right or far right wing, potentially using Christianity as justification for ignorance at best and insurrection at worst. Unfortunately, the belief in the threat of COVID-19 was heavily swayed by political parties. Places like Pennsylvania saw pandemic protests as early as last April. Protesters at the Capitol building in Harrisburg used the phrase “Jesus is my vaccine” on signs and wore old Tea Party (Don’t Tread On Me) garb and flags. Protests like these

were organized by right wing groups adding God into the mix.

Christian distrust in the scientific community and governmental authorities was not something new brought on by the pandemic; it is part of a vast history of associating physical sickness with spiritual strength. This idea has been around for a millennium and first attacked Jewish people. When Christianity was a very young religion, Christians sought to separate themselves from Jews as much as possible, labeling them impure and refusing medical attention from Jewish doctors. We see the same attitude now when some members of the far right seek to separate themselves from all liberal ideas, including vaccination

Today, a lot of people are getting the vaccine, but a lot of people aren't. The belief that Christians should put their hope in Christ rather than vaccines is still strong and I don't think it will end anytime soon. Unlike COVID carols, the 2020 song "Jesus is my Vaccine," by Paddy Goodwin and the Holy Ghosts will be a reminder of the ridiculous lengths people would go to prove their attitude towards the pandemic. And the overall COVID-19 cases that sprung from untimely church services will be a reminder of the wrong kind of priorities.

Sometimes it's not a lack of believing in the virus. Some religious rituals encourage the faithful to be in the physical presence of the minister. Others believe that in order to "love thy neighbor," they must be in churches to be with people. Many people were longing for a greater sense of community built in congregations. And there was a consensus that online church services did not provide the same connection. I definitely missed being with my friends and family that go to my church, but I knew seeing their face through a car window was better than seeing their face through window visits at the hospital.

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Author Biography

Hi, I'm Mady! I am a junior English Lit & Professional Writing double major with a Social Justice Studies minor. The most valuable lesson I learned from quarantine is that not being able to see your family for months on end does not cause them to love you any less. I think COVID restrictions will stick around til after the first semester of next year; we don't know what's going to happen once face-to-face classes resume on every education level. My guess is around the holidays: **11/01/2021**

THE MARKETPLACE MERCENARY

Kevin Goss

When the first shutdowns happened in mid-March, I was suddenly whisked away from the dynamic freedom of college life and plopped back into the unremarkable mundanity of life back home. I traveled six hours from my residence hall in Oxford to my childhood bedroom and had only a few days to adjust before my mom hit me with an absolutely dreadful reminder—I needed a job. While these weren't exactly words I was excited to hear, she was right. Our family needed the money, and so did my student loans.



Photo by @nicotito on upsplash

My brother and I applied at several different grocery stores in the area, as they were some of the only places open during the first stages of the pandemic. We both accepted offers to be cashiers, albeit at different stores. It looked as though we would be spending a lot of time at home together already, so splitting up for work seemed like a good idea. Before I started working, news and online media gave off the impression that grocery store employees played an integral part in ensuring America's continued success during the pandemic. Television advertisements frequently showcased them (somewhat laughably) next to soldiers and doctors, calling them "essential workers" and "frontline heroes" during this time of unprecedented crisis. But after my first few shifts I began to feel less like a hero—and more like a mercenary.

To start, I was certainly not treated like a hero. In the early stages, nearly every customer yelled or cursed at me. I had worked in customer service before, but this store's shoppers were an entirely new level of nasty. While inspiring commercials praised me for my noble efforts, patrons hurled expletive-laden tirades my way. The frustration of customers was only compounded by the fact that record numbers of

people were coming into the store. The store's manager told me he had never seen the store as busy as it was in the 40 years he had worked there. This abundance was not only of the shoppers, but of their transactions as well. Most purchases I rang up totaled around \$400-\$600 on average, and customers often used multiple carts. I had never seen groceries purchased en masse like this, and learning a new cash register system made things even harder on me. Customers grew more and more impatient, and one of my female coworkers was even physically shoved by a grown man after she "bagged his groceries wrong." Transgressions such as these became somewhat common, and it took resilience from my fellow employees to power through and provide this service for people.

It's strange to think about now, but the workplace conditions and expectations were in a much different place in late March compared to later in the year. For example, there was a solid four-week period where I didn't wear a mask to work—in fact, no one did. Wearing face coverings had yet to become common practice in America, and no one was really sure how we should be dealing with the virus. I applied an ungodly amount of hand sanitizer those first few weeks, believing that would be the deciding factor between my illness and my health, but would then greet at least 100 customers a day face-to-face. One day, however, my manager handed me a face mask and said, "Hey, you need to wear this now," and I replied, "Okay," and wore a mask during my shifts from then on. If only the rest of the country had been that easy to convince. . . .

Eventually, I discovered employees at the store where my brother was working were receiving an extra \$2.00 an hour for what they called "hero pay." It turns out his company was represented by a labor union who negotiated the extra wage increase. Because of this and other perks that made his workplace more attractive to me, I gave into my newfound mercenary nature and sent in an application. I got hired, and enjoyed benefits like longer and more frequent breaks. Very nice! Or at least, it was nice for about four days until my new corporation decided to end our "hero pay" in mid-May of 2020 because apparently that's when the global plague ended. Who knew it ended so soon? I can't blame my employer for this, however. Times were tough, and they are only the fifth largest retailer in the entire world. Their profits went up 90 percent in the first half of 2020, so it really seems as though they were strapped for cash. This would explain why our ever-so-essential workers were being paid minimum wage.

As one can tell, it seems our labor union isn't exactly powerful enough to resist the rulings of a Fortune 500 company. Around June, these same corporate overlords also decided too many people were working in our store, so they continually cut our hours in half. This meant that not only were my coworkers and I earning significantly less money, many of us didn't meet the required hours to be considered "full-time" workers.

Thus, benefits like health insurance are stripped away. While I am fortunate enough to be covered by my parents' insurance, many of my older (and more vulnerable) coworkers worried for the safety of themselves and their loved ones.

My experience working during the pandemic opened my eyes to the hardships workers often face at the hands of their employers and the disrespectful nature many people choose to carry around with them. If there is one lesson I have taken away from my time spent in the year 2020, it's that greed and disrespect are viruses all their own. Those who make a conscious effort to be kind and compassionate are a cure to this worldwide ailment.

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Author Biography

My name is Kevin Goss and I am a junior Professional Writing major. During the pandemic, I learned to take fewer things for granted. I predict that all COVID restrictions will lift on **09/01/2021**.

EDITOR'S NOTE: APRIL 2021

Brianna Porter, Sydney Mason, Emily Hickman

Dear Reader,

As of April 2021, COVID-19 is still a huge part of everyone's lives. Mask mandates are still in place, but those who have been fully vaccinated will soon be able to go maskless in small gatherings. Our college, Miami University, is resuming in-person classes in the fall of 2021 (next semester) after over a year of being online. It's going to be a welcome relief for everyone.

Vaccinations have been available for everyone over 18 in the state of Ohio since early April. Millions nationwide are getting doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, a promising light at the end of this very long tunnel.

We, the editors, wanted to put together a book reflecting the experiences of our generation during this pandemic to create a connection that spans farther than our classroom. We have all felt the panic of a faulty internet connection during online exams or felt out-of-place doing college from our childhood bedrooms. This was a hard year for everyone, but it also created a unique bond in the shared experiences of quarantine and lockdowns.

And so, we thank you for reading about our experiences. It's been a hard year for everyone and it's been cathartic to write it all down and share it with you. Thank you to the writers who contributed, to Dr. Tim Lockridge, who oversaw our progress, and to everyone who continues to stay safe during this pandemic. This time will not be soon forgotten.

Best,
The Editors