



From the Spring 2021
Class of ENG 412

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

A Collection of Works from Quarantine

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was a very challenging time for many. Being forced to stay home changed the way society functioned and impacted everyone's daily lives. Even though this was a very difficult time, people found a way to persevere. Despite being under the dark cloud of a global pandemic, humanity was still able to look on the bright side. This book is a collection of stories from college students about how they managed to cope with the struggles of pandemic life. This book is about endurance and hope, and the resilience of young people in a time of hardship.

Chapter 1: Personal Essays

This section details the ways in which the perception of normality has changed due to the pandemic. Each piece will describe the collective experience of society and how this was different for each individual. From facing the new reality to figuring out new ways to learn through online schooling, each writer gives a glimpse into their world to learn how the pandemic impacted them. While many new challenges arose, we all learned to persevere in the midst of adversity and overcome these challenges to reach our goals.

The Panny Shoved Me Into Animated Television

By: Brianna Porter

The most upsetting thing about lockdown was that the libraries closed. I thought that I could beat the shut down. I had twelve books on hold, and I only had five new books I picked up two days before. Three of the five books I had were the subsequent books in three different series. It was looking grim. My little turquoise bookshelf suddenly looked dismal. I read over 100 books every year, and yet I only had maybe 30 books at home. I read too fast to regularly buy new books, meaning my shelf game is weak. 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 can't comprehend good writing in e-book form, and I can't read trashy books for too long or my brain might shrivel away to nothing.

That left television. I really didn't like watching TV, but I had to do something between the time I spent playing my Switch and doing online classes. Besides that, my brother had been getting on me to "up my numbers" in anime since sophomore year of college, so I said why not. 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 now I had nothing better to do. 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 start two videogames and watch television. I think I forgot watching television was new to me because it was such a regular pastime for everyone around me. Reading and cooking couldn't be my lockdown time spender, because I had built those into my life before outside was illegal. I shut down those thoughts with a quickness and tried to make my way to book TikTok.

It's been a year since this radical change and almost every animated show I've watched hit different. 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.
Rating: 7/10

Hunter x Hunter—

This is my favorite anime by far. 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.
Rating: 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.
Rating: 9/10 just for Zuko's redemption arc

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.
Rating: 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.
Rating: 9/10

She-Ra—

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.
Rating: 9/10

Haikyu!!—

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.

Rating: 10/10



Photo by Jorge Zapata on Unsplash

I've always used escapism to cope. Whether it be escaping from anxiety, stress, or just boredom. I've always done this through reading. This has always been an easy option for me until it wasn't. This is about how I found a new version of escapism to cope with the shutdowns from the pandemic.

COVID-19 Final Exams and Proctorio

By: Charlie Ortman

Once I was sent home from school due to the rise of COVID-19, my assignments for school became somewhat negligible due to decreased work loads. I didn't have any synchronous classes. Essentially, I had just one small assignment from each class per 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 all went quite well. Except for my biology final.

My biology final was on an evil software known as Proctorio. This was the reason it went so poorly, or I guess you could say my biology final 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. The other small problems I had run into with Proctorio happened in a classroom. Because of this, the professors and proctors were able to quickly help me.

At the time of the exam, I had an 83 percent in the class, but it was credit/no credit. I figured I had nothing to worry about. I studied a bit for the past few nights and was ready to get a passing grade in my general education biology class. This 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 makes you do before taking an exam. These "pre-checks" involved holding a mirror up to the camera and showing the entire room I was working in. Towards 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 went down. I was taken out of the test and Canvas believed that I had completed it, because I was automatically taken out of Proctorio due to its crash.

I frantically called the number for Proctorio support. No answer. I tried to get in touch with the Proctorio message boards. No answer there either. This was a huge issue, because if a problem like this happens, the student isn't in direct contact with the professor, just with some random person working for Proctorio. I emailed my professor. I asked my parents for some help, 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 wasn't sure if I would pass with several other assignments that needed to be graded along with a zero on the final exam. 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 as I stated before, I was never able to even view the exam as the system crashed prior

to me finishing the Proctorio “pre-checks.” This further complicated things, because I had to email her again to explain my situation in greater detail.

I got in touch with the Miami University biology department chair on the phone, and even he was unable to give me any reassurances. Though he was my professor’s boss, he wouldn’t be able to override her decision of giving me a zero on the exam. The administration wasn’t especially prepared for setbacks like this, because this was the first time measures like Proctorio were ever put in place. Online schooling and exams was a whole new frontier brought about by COVID-19. Had we not been in a pandemic, this exam would have been taken in person on pencil and paper with 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 at it.

Whether it's odd or just lucky, this was the only final exam I had that was on Proctorio. It’s odd, because my other professors were able to make fair exams that didn’t utilize Proctorio. This situation was also lucky, because if more of my final exams had needed to be completed through Proctorio, I may have run into this problem more than just once.

Because the biology final took place on the last day of finals, I had nothing else to occupy my mind with. 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 this situation either as everything was closed in my town, even 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 to pass and I received a 65.92 percent. If a few other assignments had gone differently, I could have ended up not getting credit for the class.

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



Photo taken by Charlie Ortman

My story about Proctorio failing to work and the university not really doing much to help shows that the era of COVID-19 negatively impacted nearly every level of education. Though everything ended up going completely fine and I was still able to pass the class with a 0% on the final exam, that was pretty much just pure luck. The part of perseverance is more closely connected to my professors over the past two semesters not using Proctorio and focusing more on open note exams. The stress of Proctorio is still real for some students at Miami and other universities. Slowly but surely university administrators are seeing the extra stress that Proctorio puts on students.

The Day Everything Changed

By: Grace Driscoll

Time. One never realizes how precious it is until it's taken away from you. And time was stripped from the world by one simple phrase, one vicious virus: the coronavirus. COVID-19: this simple noun triggers many people. It's a word that needs no explanation. It goes without saying that the year 2020 will go down in history. Everyone has been affected by 2020 in a plethora of ways; it changed the way everyone lives. It affected every age group, from infants and their mothers, the elderly, and adolescents. As a college student, it turned my world upside down. We went from having the time of our lives, no curfew, no capacity limits in bars or restaurants, and in-person classes to it all being taken away in an instant. As soon as COVID hit, everything changed. The idea of COVID was thrown around like a fake story; it was ignored and laughed at. The idea that everything would shut down and we would be secluded from the world never crossed my mind.

It was March 13, 2020, and my friends and I decided to go out for brunch. It was nine of us girls, and we went to Patterson's Cafe. We sat at a big round table in the back corner of the restaurant. As we were all sitting there, we received an email from Miami University. It said something along the lines of we will be going home for two weeks. We cheered with joy, thinking it would just be a temporary break where we didn't have class. Oh boy, were we wrong. After brunch, we scurried back to Scott Hall, our dorm, got dressed, and went to go hangout with all of our friends. It was a beautiful, sunny day. We were sitting on a big couch in front of the Sigma Phi Epsilon house. Laughing, talking about how great this was going to be. Of course, we were sad that we would be apart, but we didn't think it would be for too long. As we were basking in the sun, goofing around, we didn't think that it would be our last day together as sophomores. A few days later (I believe the days have all combined since then), we were notified that we could not go back to campus. All of a sudden that laughter turned to tears and anger. I thought to myself, "WHY! This is so stupid, everything is going to fine."

Oh boy was I wrong. An amazing semester has been ruined. For as long as I could remember, I was always told "college is the best four years of your life." And just like that, something so precious was taken away. The strike of COVID-19 took more from me than I ever thought imaginable. It didn't just take away a semester of college. It took away time from people I love. I couldn't be with my friends or my extended family.

The day after we found out about our two-week "vacation," I had to go say goodbye to someone who meant the world to me: my grandmother. She passed away from Acute Leukemia, an absolutely dreadful disease to watch someone suffer through. We drove more than ten hours to New Jersey to be submerged in

a crazy world. When we arrived, we went straight to the hospital. Upon arrival, the hospitals were already enforcing protocols. We had to get our temperature checked and were asked a series of questions regarding our whereabouts and why we were there. We took the elevator up and walked into silent sniffles and heartbreak. There she was laying, practically lifeless. Next to her was my grandfather, who refused to leave her side and let go of her hand. Each cousin went in and said our goodbyes and left my father and his sister and spouses to stay with her. Us cousins went back to my aunt's house, ordered dinner, and sat around waiting for the call that she passed. But it never came. It was days; she held on for days.

After she peacefully passed then came the funeral. We were the last funeral before everything closed down. When we were in New Jersey, another email came through saying that our classes would be switching to virtual for the rest of the semester and if we were in the dorms, which I was at the time, our stuff had to be moved out by a certain date. Unfortunately, I would not be home in time to move my stuff out and everything I had was back at school. Nicely enough, my best friend drove up to Miami and gathered some of my belongings while I was out east grieving. All of the sudden it hit me; this was real. COVID-19 had come and was not going to leave any time soon.

As time slowly passed, we had to adapt to a new way of learning. It changed from in-person classes to completely online, virtual learning. It was a difficult transition to basically teach yourself everything. It hasn't just been an adjustment for us students, but for the professors as well. Many had to reconstruct their whole lesson plans to create an online-friendly curriculum. It has been a challenge to say the least. I feel we do not receive the education we did as before. It has become more of a "teach yourself and apply" experience. There have been some professors that have been absolutely incredible and work extremely hard with their students. It has been a struggle and a learning process, but as time passes, we learn better each day.

Here we are, one year later, and COVID is still here. We went from a shut down to a mask mandate and a major loss of time. As college students, we lost half of a semester of memories, laughs, and fun. But the seniors, they lost their last semester of college with their friends who grew to be their family. They lost the most precious moments to bond with their classmates one last time. To make matters even worse, they lost their graduation. Their one final time to all be together. Instead, they were sent off into the world without a formal goodbye. For the seniors, they left, got jobs, and never looked back. But for the rest of us Miami students, we were unsure of what going to college would like. Now, being back, everything is different. But at least we are back. I am not sure if anything will ever go back to normal, but I am truly grateful for the time that I have now.



Public domain photo

The pandemic was full of hardships and heartache. Through this pain, I have come to realize that family is the best support system one can ask for. Through thick and thin it's the ones you love that help you see the light at the end of the tunnel.

How Celebrations Have Changed

By: 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 from 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, too. 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 squarely focused.

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

Graduations

The first notable celebration that my family had following the onset of the pandemic was a few short months after quarantine began for my brother's graduation in May. He was graduating high school, which I had done two years prior to 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 it was looking like my brother was going to miss out on all of the recognition I had received two years earlier. Since academics aren't something he particularly enjoys, his graduation was a big deal for him and my family, and I felt guilty that I had gotten to celebrate mine in a bigger way than we were planning to do for his.

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

Before the ceremony, I had prepared a video for my family and I to watch of memories that my brother had collected from his four years in high school. We sat in our living room and watched as a small family of five, reminiscing over the past few years. It felt so intimate to reflect on those moments with my family, and 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 filed into my dad's Honda 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 two years earlier.

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.

And after the presentation was over, fireworks filled the night sky. I remember being in awe as I took in the song of “Celebration” 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 was my birthday. I was turning 20, and for months, my family and I had been making jokes about entering into my soon-to-be “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 if you ask 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, and my friends planned to have a Netflix Party 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 all of them, even if it was over a Zoom call. We never did get to watching a movie—we had a lot of catching up to do—but it was so 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. That seems a little weird to say even now, because going to the store or a coffee shop are mundane, everyday tasks, and graduations and birthdays 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 again.

Others shared in my appreciation of the small things, too. During those summer

weeks, I wrote an article 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 experiencing 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. So, to me, 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.

So 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 take-away from something so devastating.





Photos taken by Hannah Clarke

During times of globalized trauma, I think it was important for us to find ways to feel connection, even in times of such distance. Many of us desperately needed some way to feel joy, and celebrations are the best way we know how to do so. Although they might have looked dramatically different than before, celebrations during the pandemic persevered, inspiring and encouraging all of us to do the same.

How Pandemic Life Became the New Normal

By: Katie Thompson

Being Content With the Novelty

It's funny how fast things can change when we're least expecting it. In March 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, and then campus shut down. Suddenly, it didn't seem so fun anymore, because 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 we didn't know how long it would be until we'd see them again.

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. 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 for the most part. 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. I had already used FaceTime to stay connected with friends at one point or another, but having organized Zoom hangouts was something entirely new to me. 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 everything was finally falling into a new routine in this strange world we were suddenly thrust into, things began to fall apart. After weeks upon 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. I was sick of being glued to a screen all the time, and Zoom fatigue was hitting me hard. So, things began to fizzle. There's only so many nights you can spend watching Netflix movies on a laptop, so after a while, no one wanted to get together for that anymore either. Technology that had initially seemed like a haven now seemed 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 was when 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. Because 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. Most of us had jobs lined up in the city, but Chicago was completely shut down. One of my friends was lucky enough to have his job transferred to remote work, but for the rest of us the companies we were supposed to work for closed their summer internships entirely. 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 that 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.

For me, the hardest part at this point 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 cafe 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, it was jarring to realize that I was used to this. 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. Everytime 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 that 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.



Photo by Engin Akyurt on Unsplash

My piece talked a lot about the struggles I faced during this pandemic. Adjusting to a change as massive as the one we all faced due to COVID wasn't easy. However, as time went on and I came to terms with the fact that this is just how life was now, I realized that my struggles may have made me stronger. This pandemic taught me to always appreciate the good moments in life, and to take everything one day at a time. Life is too short to waste it worrying about things we can't change.

Essential Worker

By: 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 travelled six hours from my residence hall in Oxford to my former 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, there was no denying she was right. Our family needed the money, and so did my student loans.

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 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 that 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 the excess of their items as well. Most purchases I rang up totaled around \$400 to \$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 commonplace, and it took resilience on the part of 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 per day face-to-face.

One day, however, my manager handed me a face mask and said, “Hey, you need to wear this now.”

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 that 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 had 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% in the first two quarters 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.

Evidently, 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 that 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, but many of us didn't meet the required hours to be considered “full-time” workers. Thus, benefits like health insurance were 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 that 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.



Photo by @nicotitto on Unsplash

My piece represents the struggles of all workers during the pandemic and the need to persevere for the sake of others. The rapid nature of workplace changes and their effect on my coworkers all gave us opportunities to adapt and succeed in a time of worldwide turmoil.

Chapter 2: Op-eds and Analysis

Looking back years from now, many people will remember the pandemic as the mask wearing social distancing era. While this was out of the norm, the biggest standout for many people will be the everyday things that were taken for granted prior to the pandemic. Whether this is music, a church service, or social media platforms, the pandemic changed what our everyday routine looked like in much bigger ways than wearing masks. These pieces will provide insight on what this looked like for our writers.

The Lessons We Learn from Dogs: Pandemic Edition

By: 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 are the species that has 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. Specifically, there are a plethora of lessons that we can take from our furry friends themselves.

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 particularly true about our loved ones—the people we love spending time with the most who we have had to physically distance ourselves from for over a year. We feel this isolation and longing 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 another 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 of countless days that we used to spend at work or in class away from our dogs have transformed into the hours and days that we spend with them. They feel more connected to us than ever. When this pandemic ends, they will long for the days when they could spend every second with us. They will 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 we can learn from our dogs in this sense is to take advantage of this time, and seek the companionship we desire through them. We should cuddle up with them during our lunch breaks while we still have the chance to. We should appreciate the chance to take a quick break from work as they bark at us to let them outside. We should recognize the value of the companionship we share with our dogs, even if we 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 in good shape, 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. Instead, we are putting more effort into making sure we can simply get by as we confront new challenges, such as Zoom fatigue and isolation.

Even so, dogs encourage us to nurture some good habits that can help to keep us energized and positive. Dogs need exercise, and as many of us have taken our dogs on countless walks throughout quarantines and lockdowns, we have gotten to 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 our 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. The next time we are feeling as though we are falling into a state of pandemic fatigue, we should be sure to take a step back and evaluate the many ways our dogs may be able to help us, just by being our dogs.

Moving Away from Materialism

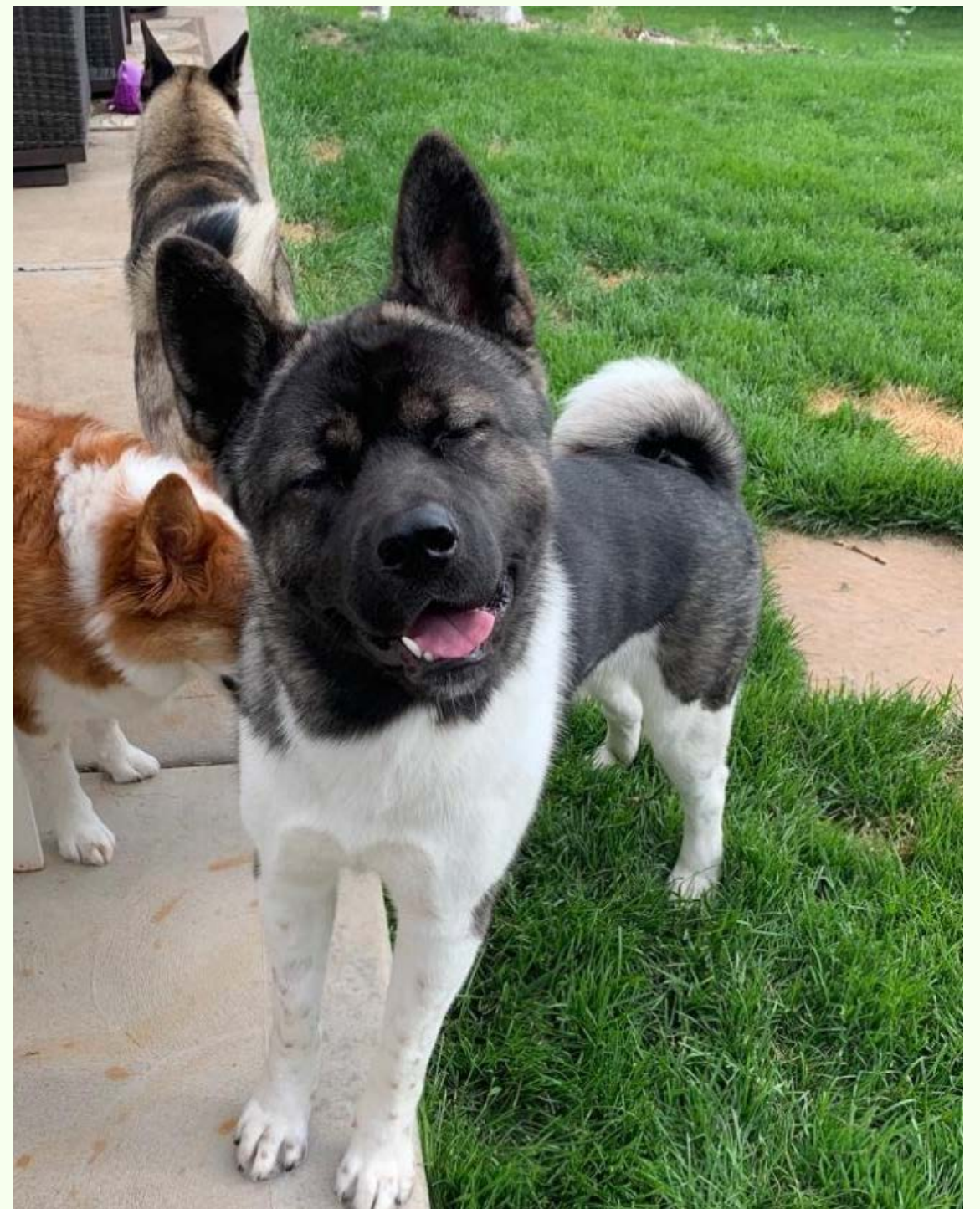
It is no secret that the pandemic has caused financial stress for many people. The strength of this effect, of course, cannot be diminished by a simple "money can't buy happiness" cliché. However, this does not mean that we cannot find a bit of light amongst the darkness that this financial stress can bring.

In normal times, many dogs are spoiled with treats and toys, sometimes even on a daily basis. While many people are fortunate enough to still have the disposable income that allows them to do this, there are many who are not. Even so, those dogs are still happy without all those extra toys and treats. They thrive on the companionship they have with their owners, and they likely don't even notice a decrease in new treats and toys that they used to receive. Dogs do not need to be spoiled with expensive gifts to be happy.

Even further, there are 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 instead of adopting. Those shelter dogs would not have the wonderful homes they have now, being able to spend countless hours of countless days with their new, loving owners.

The lesson dogs teach us here is that we do not need extra money or extra gifts to enjoy ourselves during the pandemic, or ever for that matter. 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 us no matter how many treats or toys we give them, and that is a sentiment that we can all take into account in our lives.



Photos taken by Bailey Miller

When the pandemic first started, I desperately struggled to find something to help me push through the many struggles that it brought. I very quickly turned to my 6 dogs as my primary source of support during my long months at home. Having them to play with, take walks with, and cuddle every night truly inspired me to push through and persevere through everything I was going through, along with everything the world was going through. I hope this piece inspires people to do the same with their dogs (and other pets!) during any hard times they may be going through.

Music During the Pandemic: An Analysis of the Parallels Between COVID-19 and War Through the Lens of Taylor Swift's New Album

By: Corie Maurer

The lyrical genius of Taylor Swift cannot be ignored nor denied. Many people know her as the country-pop princess that has come in and out of relevance for the better half of this past decade. In the summer of 2020, when the world was socially distancing to combat the highly contagious disease, COVID-19, Swift stunned the public with two new music albums. The first of those albums is known as *Folklore*, Swift's eighth studio album. The piece of work was released in late July. It received a Grammy for Album of the Year. Swift attributes her artistry to her time away from large crowds, due to her seventh studio album tour being canceled for safety precautions. Some of the songs reflect the experience of many people during times of war and the pandemic. 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 moments in history. Swift wrote the songs as an outsider but still managed to delve deep into the trenches of the raw realities of those in the presumed time periods.

Rolling Stone magazine noted that, "*Folklore* really feels like the debut album of a whole new Swift— her narrative scope has opened up...." She moved away from mainstream pop and country genres and took on alternative styles such as indie and folk. The majority of the album is piano and acoustic guitar oriented. The softer sound stands in stark contrast to past albums where fast and upbeat tempos were center stage. 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.

"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 2. 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 discloses the trauma that soldiers experienced first hand. The trauma is so deeply ingrained 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. In a similar vein, 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 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.

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 the experience that many people endured during the pandemic. Several businesses, schools, churches, recreational facilities, etc. closed temporarily or permanently. This meant that people were basically told to stay in their own homes and 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, regardless of if it was in a healthy manner or 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 course of the way society functions. Taylor Swift chose to use 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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Photo taken by Corie Maurer

This album gave me peace in the midst of the chaos all around me. The soft sound of many of the tracks on the album reflected the somber mood that many people, including myself, experienced. It was a breath of fresh air. I will always look back and remember how each lyric seemingly broke my heart and put it back together all at once.

Corona College

By: Gabriella Dobson

Everyone has been affected by the spread of the virus and the time spent in the pandemic. Some have experienced worse things than others. There are people dying all around us an entire year after what was supposed to have been a few weeks to flatten the curve. The virus cannot 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 demographic that has been destroyed, but not by death: college students. Now, it may sound silly or ridiculous to want to understand how college students have been affected by this pandemic. COVID-19 didn't just steal the social lives of college students; it stole their education.

The Beginning

As a Miami student, anyone can remember the day President 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 to three weeks. The termination of classes was a rippling effect from schools across Ohio, starting with The Ohio State University. Students thought it was a 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. That was the birth of Zoom University. Students were struggling this first week. From making traveling 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, hanging with each other in their dorms, and seeing their friends daily to total lockdown. The difference from last year to this year 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 people they bring into their rooms, and they have to wear a mask traveling around their hall. One thing in favor of the pandemic is that there aren't as many people living in residential halls, but that is not in the favor of the people that do. 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 interaction people get is 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 at the moment. 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 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 has been proven harder to obtain information or to take anything away when looking at a screen all day. People don't participate or pay attention as much. It is 100 percent easier to get distracted when you are in class in your own 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, but still unable to grasp information in class, it is a lack of motivation. 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 even have synchronous classes, they are juggling five to six completely asynchronous classes without guidance from their instructor. Office hours have never been more important.

Even after two full semesters of synchronous and asynchronous 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, and by now universities should have stopped treating it like such, but here we are. An entire year later, still stuck in this pandemic, still trying to teach ourselves.

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 online synchronous and asynchronous, with a little sprinkle of in-person. The switch to a fully online format was a tough transition for most students. Imagine walking to an in-person class and then having another one online after, but still needing to complete work for an asynchronous class. There is no balance between the classes, because there are not always set times, which can decrease student's time management and the time they are able to spend for one class.

Next Fall Semester

With the increase of vaccinations in the United States, an announcement was made on behalf of Miami University that in-person classes will resume like normal the following semester. By the end of this semester, two sets of senior college students have gone through their final semester and been stripped of it. Their college experience was stolen from them, and hopefully there won't have to be a third set of seniors who have the same fate. By next fall, it can be expected that a majority of our older population will have had both doses of the vaccine. People are always thinking that college students are overreacting with the situation of the pandemic and its effects towards 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.



Photo from UC Davis

My piece connects to hard times because it shows how every demographic is affected and it didn't force just one particular group into hardship. College kids have pushed through the pandemic and are still currently struggling but they keep going. Their education didn't stop when they were forced to quarantine, it only made it much harder to continue.

Quarantine Church

By: Mady Wilson

Christmas looked different for us all this past year, and not just because we couldn't gather together; some of us did anyway. I am a Christian from a moderate-sized city in Southeast Ohio. My town does not have a lot of diversity, and it does not have a lot of open minds, but what we do have an abundance of is 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. A quick Google search has proven that there are almost fifty churches in my town. Now, I don't know what the average number of churches per city is, but I will continue to marvel at this fact. Since COVID-19 started, I've been actively looking for those churches to see if there are cars in the parking lot with or without people in them.

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 an actual 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 its radio to the frequency of the microphone the pastor will be using, and rolls down its windows or blasts the A/C for personal comfort. It was a major emotional boost to be around my congregation without the danger of contagion.

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 that poked fun at COVID-19. It was probably a pretty weird sight, but it was the safest way to keep our traditions, as well as all who were in attendance, alive.

Driving around my town, I witnessed the difference in celebration 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.

Aside from churches in my city, my eyes fell on Solid Rock Church, the mega-church 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 naive officials and citizens, Bishop 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 their 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 superspreader events. So why do churches continue to open their doors?

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

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 COVID-19 was heavily swayed by political party. According to the paper, “Getting Conservatives and Liberals to Agree on the COVID-19 Threat,” published in the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research (2020), conservatives tend to attribute outcomes to purposeful actions, compared to liberals; they're more likely to blame any negative outcomes in their lives on the government or fellow Americans rather than the virus itself. As many people blamed government officials for the lock down, protests popped up all over the country. 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 “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 is 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 by 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 in the vaccine 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 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 hospitals.

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

1. It came up-on the mid-night clear, that glo-rious song of old, from
2. It came up-on a quar-an-tine, that om-i-nous song of old, From
3. For lo! the days are has-tening on by C - D - C fore - told, When

an - gels bend-ing near the earth, to touch their harps of gold; "Peace
doc - tors fret - ting o'er the earth to warn "this ain't a cold!" "Peace
CO - VID-nine - teen fi - n'ly is a page from his - tory old. Un -

on the earth, good will to all, from heaven's all - gra-cious King": the
on the earth, good will to all" is still our cry to - day, But
til that day, good cit - i - zens, hold on to this one thing: Main -

world in sol - emn still - ness lay, to hear the an - gels song,
please ex - tend that true good will from six full feet a - way!
tain good so - cial dis - tan - cing to hear each oth - er sing

Photos taekn by Mady Wilson

O Come, All Ye Faithful

1. O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant, O
2. Stay home, all you faith - ful, pru - dent and pro - tect - ed. Stay
3. Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion,

come ye, O come ye to Beth - le - hem;
Sing, all ye cit - i - zens of heav'n - a - bove!

Come and be - hold him, born the King of an - gels;
six feet be - tween you, shar - ing peace ver - bal - ly,
Glo - ry to God, all glo - ry in the high - est;

O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him,
Stay home and wash your hands; stay home and wash your hands;

O come, let us a - dore him, Christ, the Lord!
stay home and wash your hands and clean your hearts.

During the pandemic, it would have been easy to let social groups fall through the cracks and potentially disband. It required a constant choice from everyone to adapt and uphold safety guidelines to keep congregations, social movements, and clubs alive. The distance was not a threat to faith, but misapprehension about safety was.

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Making and Teaching Theatre in the Pandemic

By: Miranda Scharf

Of the many aspects of our lives that have been 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 have seen numerous friends and theatres struggle to adapt to the situation throughout the pandemic. I'm struck by how this is a familiar struggle to the theatre world. As one of our earliest artforms, theatre has been confronted with 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.

Today, the situation is quite different. In many ways, access to technology has made things much easier. However, the option to simply travel to an area that's not affected by the pandemic is impossible. The practice of making recorded or live-streamed versions of theatrical performances available to a wide audience is not new. It is possible to find original cast recordings of Broadway shows from the 70s, for example, and even footage of Vaudeville performances from around the time film recording was invented. However, apart from how fundamentally different the experience of live theatre is from 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 fees 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, staying home and shutting down for two weeks was all that was planned for, but that was hardly the end of it. A local theatre company, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, started selling the crafted goods of their theatre designers and technicians. Ranging from masks to simple furniture pieces, this was one small way that the theatre could keep money coming in for operation costs and paying their employees. Then, 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. The pandemic was a developing situation where originally, we all stayed home uncertain how to keep everyone safe. Over time, thanks to hardworking scientists and doctors, we had a better understanding of how COVID worked and spread. In addition to this, we'd had a chance to catch up to the demand for testing.

That information had a huge impact on how we were able to move forward safely so that some people could get back to work safely in limited numbers and with appropriate regulations in place. Because of this, theatre companies were able to offer these online representations of shows, but still without a live audience. Now, as the weather warms and we have vaccine rolls reaching more and more people each day, our 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 see also 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 also 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 nine-to-five, allowing performers to arrange their work schedules 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 that 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 to our lives that the arts provide us, especially in this last 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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Photo taken by Miranda Scharf

During the pandemic, many of us turned to various forms of entertainment to cope with the time spent away from family and friends. The theatre community has had a particularly difficult time adapting to social distancing, but they have persevered and innovated to share their art. I hope as we get back to normal, the theatre community will be able to thrive and be appreciated all the more for the unique experience of live, in-person theatre.

Social Media During a Pandemic: TikTok Study

By: Molly McNamara

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* together, painted geometric shapes on our walls, and even watched *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical*. During a time of uncertainty where we were locked in our houses, 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, still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok is the leading iPhone app globally in the Apple Store still after an incredible year of growth and even 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 during the most confusing time of many of our lives: living through the pandemic.

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 Gen Z. Even *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical* was created to raise money for The Actors Fund, since actors in musicals have been out of work so long with no live audiences. This musical ended up raising \$2 million.

One statistic even 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 largest 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 even music artist Lizzo who all have well over one million followers. Because TikTok has a ton of younger users who are 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.

So despite the fun side of TikTok that it easily publicized, it 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.

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, but it also contained important information as 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 was misleading or false (Ostrovsky 2020).

In addition to TikTok creators using their platforms to share information, TikTok itself even 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).

The 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 information was about the vaccines. Health officials are coming together to make TikToks that explain the vaccine, encouraging people who are skeptics to get the injection.

A Social Media Anomaly

Social media platforms haven't had the best reputations lately. Instagram is known for lowering self-esteem and only showing the shiny 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 always in that category. TikTok is known for being more authentic, especially because their algorithm allows anyone to go viral, not just influencers.

Most people, as high as 57 percent, have a positive sentiment towards TikTok, whereas, when asked about social media overall, only 27 percent had a positive sentiment (Molla 2021).

Whether the negativity on the other platforms drove users to TikTok, or TikTok just genuinely gives users a more authentic experience, this is a social media platform that 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. The platforms, like TikTok, that give people an outlet to be creative, active, informed, and maybe a little self-deprecating, are the platforms that will be here to stay even after the pandemic is long gone.

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Although talking about social media and specifically TikTok may seem like a silly subject, it served as a way for people to persevere. It shows that in hard times, we will always find new ways to be creative and share our voices. It shows that persevering together, whether that be with a real community or one online, is something that we all seek out.

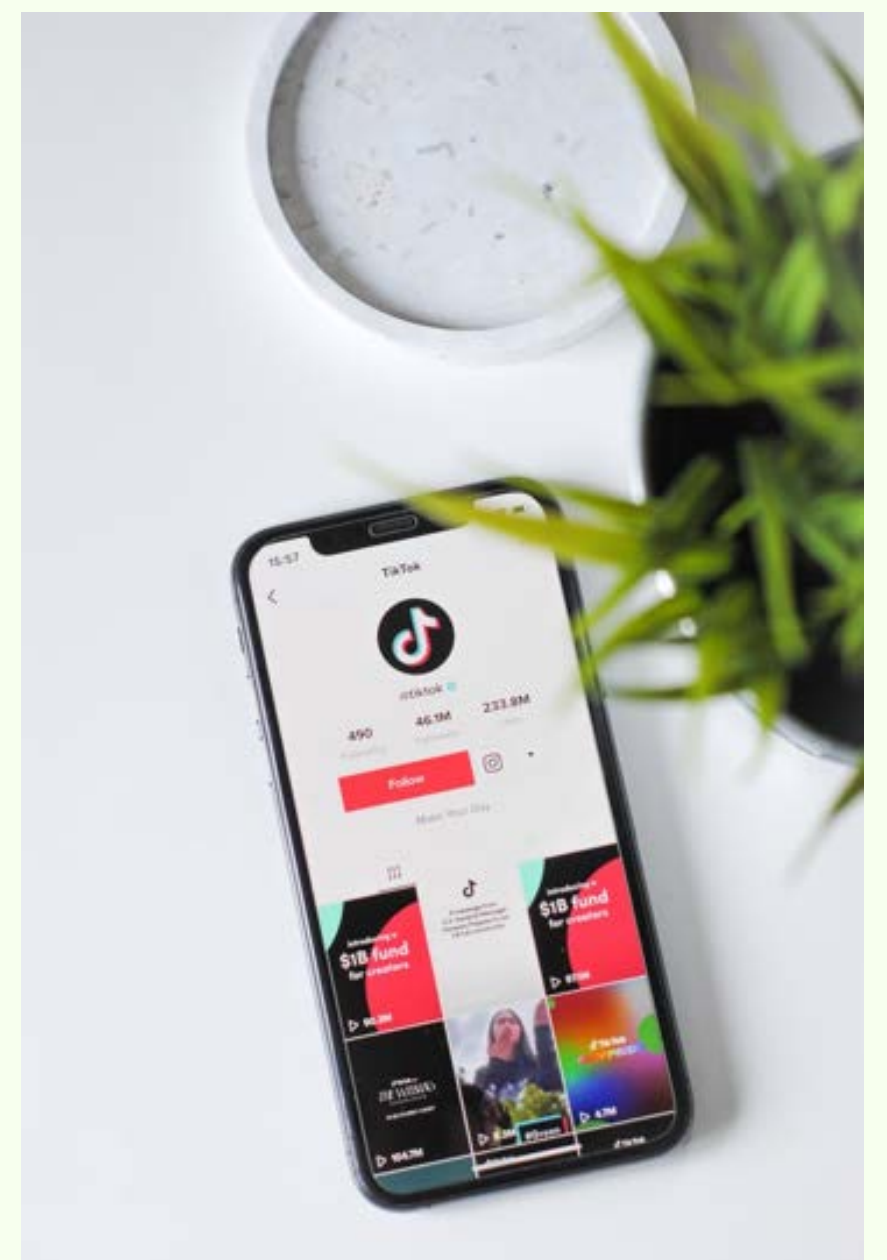


Photo by HelloImNik from Unsplash

Chapter 3: Creative Nonfiction

This section provides an array of creative nonfiction pieces about personal experience during the pandemic. By either zooming in on a specific personal scene or by reminiscing on the concept of pandemic or chronicling the monotony of quarantine, each piece uses literary methods of tone, structure, or imagery to convey a particular message of hope and perseverance even through the most difficult of times.

A COVID-Free Christmas

By: Emily Hickman

It all started with a breakup. 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 breakup; I had been anticipating to spend the holidays with him and his family in Columbus. Now I had 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 had 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!"

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 for me as it was for her. Once Santa lost his shine, Christmas followed soon after. My only memories of Christmas are wrapped in chaos, with 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 breakup, 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 pound weight limit as I shoveled half my closet into the biggest suitcase I owned.

The flight out was uneventful. I had packed 49.5 pounds of clothing, some of my best work, and had a short layover in Denver. My butt was sore as I got 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.

She responded quickly.

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, which is entirely overrated by the way, 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,

something my family calls 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. The 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 sound of the ocean.

"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-19 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-19 scare at the Dallas-Fort Worth Air

Traffic Control Center led to a five-hour long airport shutdown, causing me to miss 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 that 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.

When the pandemic hit, I found myself drawn to others, craving the validation that this experience was weird and hard to cope with. Being able to talk to people like my family and friends about how the pandemic has affected us has helped make the whole ordeal seem less scary and isolating.



Photos taken by Emily Hickman

Home Is

By: Emma Naille

Home is 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 all the places 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, as well as 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 noticing 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.

Home is a 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 go off and 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 and 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, to 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 sweatpants 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 that 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 clichés 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 into 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, and 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 permanent either. I think the *real* home, the true definition, is belonging.

Home is 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 is 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 and 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.

The experiences I had during quarantine that led me to discover a new definition of home were the experiences that allowed me to cope in this pandemic. By holding on to each new piece of home I found, I was able to hold on to comfort, joy, community, and authenticity. Finding spaces where I felt I belonged allowed me to be able to navigate the disruption of my life, and the world, and the complicated emotions that came with that. It gave me freedom within the confines of quarantine.



Photo taken by Emma Naille

Fog and Lights

By: Jenny Robinson

A fog covers the room. Suffocating and thick. The drone of a professor over a buffering Zoom call explaining 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 showered, but the thought of standing under a too-hot shower with too-hard water made their brain squirm in the worst way.

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 did on some level. But the fog numbed it, numbed everything really. The fog that hung like a thick wall of smoke in the air at all times, burning like ash everytime they breathed. The fog that gummed up the gears of their mind, sinking into the folds of their brain in a way that they were sure would leave nebulous stains on the squishy pink cortexes and synapses. The fog that their parents talked about in hushed whispers in the kitchen 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 have. Their sister did last semester. Sometimes she would call them to complain about working minimum wage full-time. She would say that people over 30 don't know how to wear masks right, grown men throw temper tantrums when they're not allowed into the store without a mask, and when she takes her break, her friends' Snapchat stories are full of maskless pics 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 was strange; numbness was never so full, so frustrating, so overwhelming as it was now.

Amidst the miasma of fog, a looming red light floats, clearing a path through the numbness, making their heart race, 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 wouldn't be heard by their roommates who were still in 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, the Zoom classes now 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 was so frayed because she couldn't get blackout drunk and wake up with some random frat guy anymore. How COVID was really dampening her life. The other roommate agrees, saying that she thought she was developing depression from being inside for so long.

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

Their third roommate is in her own room, a room that was 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 reopened. 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.



Photo by Kilian Seiler from Unsplash

The pandemic was the biggest turning point in my mental health journey. The isolation and time of global trauma was a big push for me to seek help for my mental health problems. I learned not to compare my mental health progress to anyone else's, and in many ways, the pandemic and quarantine did wonders for my mental health, if only for the push it gave me to go to the psychiatrist. Now three months into my SSRIs, I feel the best that I have ever.

Reading Saved My Sanity

By: 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 FaceTimes just to see my friends was 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, as the ease of chatting with friends in a dorm common area didn't translate to scheduling video chats. I didn't really realize this was what I was doing at the time, but I now see that in my retreat from the world, I turned to books.

I have always loved reading and have always been an avid reader, 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.

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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 members were working all day. I couldn't go hang out with my friends, or go shopping just for fun, and I could only go on so many walks while avoiding human contact before it got boring. Because of this, I took to my room, where my stocked bookshelves awaited. When spring break hit just two weeks after I had gotten home from school, I really only stopped reading to eat meals. There was just nothing better to do.

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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.

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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 10 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. 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 I had kind of lost 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 friend, but it ultimately brought the two of us a lot closer.

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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.



Photo taken by Marie Duke

I had finally started to feel like Miami was my second home when the pandemic forced me and all of my friends to leave campus and enter lockdown. Moving from my dorm, where I could always find a friend to hang out with, back home, where there was no one to talk to but my family, was really difficult at first. I didn't know exactly how to cope with the isolation I was feeling, or how to deal with all the newfound free time I had. In the end, I turned to books. Reading had always been something I enjoyed, but as the pandemic wore on, it became a sort of lifeline for me, and I don't think I would've made it through the past year without books.

COVID Chronicles

By: 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 Trash Can; 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.

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 this 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 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're thinking about the fact that we don't get this time back.

March 12th, 2020

Miami University cancels all in-person classes for the rest of the semester and asks 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 get 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, 2020

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

Someone sent Tiffany and I tequila shots while we were out at lunch today. We were thrown off at first, but turns out it was her 4th grade teacher's husband. Small world.

July 27th, 2020

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

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, 2020

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

Apparently the Coronavirus only comes out to play after 10pm. 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 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

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

DeWine lifts 10pm curfew

Today felt like a national holiday with 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.



Photo taken by Sydney Mason

I think this pandemic taught everyone a lot about themselves and made us think about what truly matters in our lives. When I first moved back home I found myself feeling claustrophobic and trapped within the walls of my house. I wasn't sure how I was going to survive months of isolation with my family, specifically my mother, who I've historically had issues with. In the beginning, we butted heads a lot. But as time went on we learned how to coexist and definitely ended up getting a lot closer because of it. One of the main things that helped with this was when I started focusing on health and fitness in my life. I started doing various workout challenges, which helped me to relieve steam and improved my mental health tremendously. Additionally, I started cooking a lot and found joy in trying new, healthy recipes. The cooking made a huge difference in the atmosphere at home. My mom was happy to not have to cook dinner for us all the time and everyone started to connect through the meals I'd make. By the end of quarantine, my mom, brother, and I would sometimes all make dinner together, which was a really great way for us to connect and bond with one another. Looking back, it's crazy to think about how far we've all come since the beginning of quarantine, and I'm grateful that we had the opportunity to improve our relationships.

The Illusion of Time: A Discussion on How the Pandemic Made Us Aware of Time

By: Zoe Kelley

January–Mid March

A new decade. I was headed to the airport to board my flight for my three-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. I really thought 2020 was going to be my year.

It wasn't until I touched down in O'Hare International Airport that I began to notice this COVID thing was more serious than I thought. Passengers coming from China were being sent to different rooms in the airport to be screened for any signs of illness. I was pretty sick at this point, and I began to panic that maybe I had contracted the virus in Italy.

First week back at school, and there's already a scare that students contracted the virus before they came back to school. I begin 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. Things began to spiral, and all of a sudden, my professors are talking about rumors that we are going to be sent home and go online. Cases began to spread like wildfire in the U.S., and 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, and we got an email that none of us could have anticipated. President Crawford told us that we were going to be sent home and classes would be online effective immediately. I knew that there had been talk of us going online, 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 we would have to completely change everything about our lives.

March then went on to be the longest month of my life. My birthday is March 14th, and normally I would 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 to do 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 9:00, I would make a cup of coffee and put it in the fridge so I could have it iced, and then I would take a shower. After showering, I'd make my coffee, eat some breakfast, and then get started on my school work 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. 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.

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, but inside my family bubble everything was the same. This definitely contributed to the feelings of disorientation in relation to time.

Since I was only 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 all of a sudden 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. That period of time was extremely draining.

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

March 2021

It's really hard to fathom how we've made it a year in this nightmare. I never anticipated that this would last this long. I remember over the summer talking about how things would be normal by 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 normal and just a slight blip in my life.

From what I have seen up to now, it seems like COVID is going to be around for a lot longer. It will likely 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 we 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. I know I'm not alone with these thoughts. We all have plenty of experiences to tell our future kids and grandkids when they start learning about 2020 in their history classes. 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.



Photo by Jon Tyson from Unsplash

I found that taking everything day by day helped me get through lockdown. Since time stopped feeling real, I found that looking at everything from a smaller scale instead of looking at the big picture stopped me from completely losing touch with reality. Whenever I would think to the future, it was hard to imagine a time when this would all end. Instead, I took things day by day, trying to find some positivity in each day to get by.

Chapter 4: Personal and Opinion Pieces

These last two pieces reflect on the author's experiences with self during quarantine and the pandemic as a whole. They fall outside the realm of creative nonfiction but also simultaneously transcend the personal essay. Perhaps a nonfiction character study is the best analogy for these two pieces. These pieces showcase a turning point in each writer's life, both as a result of the pandemic as well as in tandem with it. Their resilience throughout this time of hardship manifests in the way they choose to introspect and deal with the idea of self during a time of global trauma.

Alone Time

By: 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 of the past. Or maybe a world of the future where this pandemic no longer exists. Where this pandemic is behind us.

That is not my reality now nor is it my dream. 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. And I still can't decide whether I like this fact or not. Classes were online. Meetings were online. People were online. And 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, but now there is always a subconscious fear of catching or spreading the virus that 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. Though suddenly, there was this set time 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. Now in my junior year of college, I was off campus not just in terms of classes being online but also no longer living in a dorm. It was a new experience to finally have a place of my own bigger than the four-by-four shoe box of a dorm room. 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.

Spend time with myself. I know that sounds funny, but it's incredible what time alone with yourself 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 ultimately saved me from feeling so alone. 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 what is in front of me as well as what is behind me. I do not want to have regrets about 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 when 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.

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. 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.



Photo by Jimflix from Unsplash

My piece is really just a personal reflection of persevering through this hard time and how I was able to find a new appreciation for this new world that we have all lived through. I discuss my new routine, new people, and even new experiences such as getting a job during a pandemic. In the end I explain how these changes have impacted me and the outlook I now take on life.

An Introvert Stuck At Home During the Pandemic

By: 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 really seen anything like this. To me, it seemed like a weird dream or as if we were living in a different reality. It seemed like something that wouldn't actually happen in our society. 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 in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This impacted me so much more than I thought it would have.

I consider myself to be an introvert. An introvert is someone who feels energized by spending time by themselves, because social situations are often draining. As an introvert, I enjoy time being alone to do things such as read, write, watch TV, and play 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 University and stayed with my family while doing school online. I liked this because I missed my family and was happy to see them every day. I was really glad to have an excuse to stay home and not feel forced to socialize.

During the many months of quarantine, I watched multiple TV series 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 increased this. Any sort of interaction I had with people was either my family who I was living with or friends and extended family over Zoom or FaceTime. I was content with this 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. It got to a certain 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. Just 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 missed 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, because no one can be alone forever. The pandemic made many people feel isolated from society and loved ones, and even introverts don't want to feel completely isolated. I know I personally realized that 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 again in person, 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 may just need some time to themselves to recharge before seeing people again. I feel like 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 myself, a lot of alone time might be best. Although, quarantine may have been a little too long for me.



Photo taken by Emma Kazmaier

As an introvert, I enjoy time alone. However, being forced to stay at home for a long period of time was a little too much time for me. While I liked some time alone, it got to the point where I just wanted to see people again. I've learned that it's okay to like some time alone, but keeping in touch with friends and family is still important and helped me not feel so lonely during quarantine.

