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When the Pandemic's Over...

A COVID-19 Time Capsule

DO NOT OPEN UNTIL MAY
2031

Guide Through the Capsule

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To Those Who Helped Us Make It Through

We'd like to thank our friends and family, especially those who were on our quaran-teams, for supporting us and taking care of us through the pandemic. You the real ones. Sorry for all the stuff we said when we were suffering from cabin fever.

We'd also like to thank our peers from ENG 412 for your hard work, dedication, communication, and patience with this project. We tried to honor your pieces well, and we hope you love what we did with them. All pictures were taken by authors and authorized for use. Also, thank you to our fearless leader, Professor Tim Lockridge. Your grace, wisdom, passion, and gentle leadership made Zoom class the best that it could possibly be. Thank you for your continued effort in teaching this class. We've learned much from you.

Lastly, we'd like to give a shout out to the things that got us through the pandemic. You'll find these mementos and items nestled below this letter.



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Hello Miami University Class of 2031!

Congratulations on locating and opening this time capsule! We're hoping that it's contents give you a glimpse of what life as a Miami student was like in 2021, when all of our lives had been upended due to COVID-19. We're sure you remember the loss, the disruption, the isolation, the family walks, the Zoom calls, and the frantic search for toilet paper at the grocery store. But you might not know what it was like for college students to experience the pandemic, when we were kicked off campus and forced to move back home. That's why we've created this time capsule—to give you a snapshot of this weird time and to show you not only how COVID-19 affected the world, but how it affected us as individuals. When the pandemic's over, we want to remember what we did with this unique time we were given, at home, isolated, and ripped from our normal routines. We want to remember how it sparked our creativity, changed the way we think about the world, disrupted our education, and inspired us to take a deeper look inside ourselves. We want to remember the good and the bad, and we're hoping that in reading these essays, you see the good *and* bad too. We encourage you to let these essays take you back to that time, to that fateful year of 2020, and reflect on how it shaped you and your life. Because we know it certainly shaped ours.

Sincerely,

Professor Lockridge's ENG 412 Class of Spring 2021





Sparkling our Creativity

If you hadn't figured it out yet, we're English students. And so the onset of the pandemic for many of us brought dreams of using this time to be creative, maybe even write the next great American novel. While that may not have happened for any of us, we didn't waste our hours on end at home. We used this time as an outlet to foster creativity. Away from the business and bustle of everyday life, we let our minds wander and our imaginations and curiosities run wild. Being in quarantine gave us the space to think about the pandemic in creative ways, to reflect and mirror our experiences in creative writing, and to engage in consuming and creating art.

The following pieces are the result of a few of our creative pursuits and ways of thinking from the pandemic, because we want to remember how the pandemic sparked our creativity.



The Panny Shoved Me into Animated TV

Brianna Porter

The most upsetting thing about lockdown was the libraries closing. I thought that I could stock up before the shutdown. 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. My little turquoise bookshelf suddenly looked dismal. I read over a hundred books every year, and yet I only had maybe thirty books at home. I read too fast to regularly buy new books; the library is more cost efficient. I never regretted that choice until I was facing two months without anything to read.

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



That left TV, even though I wasn't particularly interested in it. I wasn't thrilled about it, but I had to do something between the time I spent playing my Nintendo Switch and doing online classes. Besides that, my brother had been getting on me to "up my numbers" in anime since my sophomore year of college, so I figured I should be more proactive about that. He already recommended *Violet Evergarden*, *Your lie in April*, and *The Seven Deadly Sins*, and I enjoyed them.

I figured I could find more on my own since I had nothing but time.



For a while, I worried that TV was my lockdown “thing.” People were gardening, making bread, and learning to knit, and all I had done was start two video games and watch TV. This change happened so fast, I had forgotten that watching anything regularly was new to me. Reading and cooking couldn’t be my lockdown time-spender because I had built those into my life before the world shut down. I had to stop comparing myself to everyone else and maybe find my way to BookTok.

It’s been a year since this radical change, and I’ve liked almost every animated show I’ve watched. I still have an ongoing list of anime and cartoons to watch. 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. He knows I’m sensitive, and picked shows with sob stories that would get me in my feelings for kicks. 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 form of young adult fantasy novels—my genre of choice. With that, here are some reviews and ratings of shows from the bookworm who thought she didn’t like TV. My rating system comes from the heart and doesn’t reflect actual good qualities of the shows. The closer to ten the rating is, the more likely I am to rewatch the show and have a Pinterest board for it.

Adventure Time: 7/10

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 crimes 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.



Hunter x Hunter: 10/10

This is my favorite anime by far. It's a show about a little boy following in the professional footsteps of his deadbeat father. Whether he follows in his deadbeat footsteps is to be determined. 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.

Avatar: The Last Airbender: 9/10 just for Zuko's redemption arc

For the unaware, this is about a twelve-year-old saving the world from the weakest element trying to rule the world. Aang, the avatar who has been lost for a hundred years and is supposed to bring balance to the world, 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.

Erased: 9/10

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

Phineas and Ferb: 8/10 for no plot

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.

Blood of Zeus: 9/10

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 one 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.



She-Ra: 9/10

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.

Haikyu!!: 10/10

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.



My name is Brianna Porter and I am a senior Miami undergraduate student, double majoring in professional and creative writing. I’ve spent the last four years worrying about school, and now I’m a little concerned that I’m not that concerned about leaving college. Right now, I’m looking for jobs anywhere doing something. I know it won’t be my last stop, but I’m looking for something that feels right anyway.

I hope that in ten years I’m somewhere writing fantastical novels during my day job and playing with puppies in the evenings, but for now, I’m writing stories during class and dreaming of my first dog.



Home Is

Emma Naille

Home is a Place (and a pace)



Home has become a foreign, desolate place. To be home feels like exile. It feels unfamiliar and strange. It's a slow, uncomfortable pace of life. To be stuck inside these walls and to be forced to be still. To rest, to be nourished, to notice my surroundings. My house is no longer a place where I feel at home—it has become the overlap of all the places I used to go. It serves so many new functions alongside the old ones. 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. And it is still where I rest and where my family gathers. It has become hard to tell where home really is. It used to be 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. 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 stopping to smell the flippin' roses instead of rushing right by. Home is multiple places, 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

Each shared meal and gathering around the table, presents a point of connection and community. *Community*, a golden word in a time of extreme isolation. I realized over a few weeks that this time with my family, these 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 graduate and go off and form their own families, planting their own roots. But in quarantine, my parents and my sister become the only face-to-face connection I get. But in quarantine, my parents and my sister become the only face-to-face connection I get. We eat together, we sit next to each other while reading, we go on family walks. We watch movies together and laugh. We get on our Zoom calls, connecting to our peers, teammates, and coworkers, all the while feeling the digital disconnect. We are acutely aware that it's not the same as being in person. All the same, I feel more connected to the country, the world, than I ever have before. This is a collectiveness of humanity that I have never experienced. In our suffering, we identify with each other. And in our shared joy, we find hope. I watch TikToks and feel inspired by people's creativity. I watch *Some Good News* with John Krasinski and feel grateful to live in a world where goodness persists in the face of hopelessness. I get on Marco Polo and FaceTime and feel hopeful for a future where I reunite with my friends. Home is a community, a people. Where your 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 to be 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, made me seriously consider adoption, made me confront my ignorance, and made me laugh. I've read books I've read many times before, revisiting 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 in times of hopelessness and see light in darkness. Lead me to love instead of giving in to 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 it contained the word “permanently.” Homes are almost never permanent. We attach this word to street addresses and familial relationships, but those are never permanent. I think the real home, the true definition, is belonging. It’s what I long for deep in my soul—connection, depth, authenticity, feeling special, love, life, and a sense of self. It is the opposite of abandonment. It’s a gift we’re given and a gift we give ourselves. It’s in us and through us. It’s a place of delight, safety, and rest where all our needs are met, not a place of perfection or productivity. It’s being seen and known 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.



I’m Emma Naille and I am a junior majoring in English—creative writing with a minor in interactive media studies and in digital marketing. Ten years from now, I want to remember how I courageously held onto hope and love in the midst of so much darkness. I want to remember that light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it and that those who sow weeping will come home with shouts of joy.



Fog and Lights

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' 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 every time 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 673 miles away, thinking a mere mention of it would infect their younger sisters too.

The professor's monotonous lecture voice changes for the end of class signing off, and they quickly end the call and close their computer. Sinking further into the safety of the covers, they contemplate dropping out for the thirtieth time that day. If they weren't so close to getting their degree, they probably would 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 thirty don't know how to wear masks right, and grown men throw temper tantrums when they're not allowed into the store without a mask, and how 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 is strange; numbness was never so full, so frustrating, so overwhelming as it is now.

Amidst the miasma of fog, a looming red light floats, clearing a path through the numbness, making their heart race and their breathing quicken and their throat close. Wheezing breaths pass their chapped lips and burning tears stream down their face. They bury their wet face into their mountain of pillows, muffling their heaving and sobbing in hopes that they

won't be heard by their roommates who were still in too-loud Zoom calls in the apartment with too-thin walls. In their mind, their mother's voice echoes. *Calm down and stop crying. You're making a scene. You're just doing this for attention.*



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

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



A few minutes and several dry heaves later, the glowing red light retreats to the corner of the room, dimming and blurring as the fog rushes in to fill the empty space. They lay there, numb once again, face still wet and beginning to tighten, lips swollen, eyes reddened, eyelashes saturated and clumped. Through the wall, they can hear their roommates now talking, 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 is so frayed because she can't get blackout drunk and wake up with some random frat guy anymore. How COVID-19 is really dampening her life. The other roommate agrees, saying that she thinks she is developing depression from being inside for so long.

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

Their third roommate is in her own room, a room that is steeped in the same fog, tinted with her own color. In the far end of the common room, their dark gray 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 thirty milligrams of Zoloft had stopped working when the pandemic choked society, that her psychiatrist was closed until spring semester. She suggested one night that they go to a psychiatrist, whenever the offices opened back. A global pandemic is a pretty good reason to start SSRIs after all.

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

Maybe, they said again. And maybe they would.



My name is Jenny Robinson, and I'm a junior creative and professional writing double major with a minor in history. In ten years, I'd like to remember the way that the pandemic has impacted my personal growth and the positive impact it had on my personal introspection in my mental health journey. The pressure of the time forced me to work on myself, and the growth it caused has made a serious impact on my life.



The Lessons We Learn From Dogs: Pandemic Edition

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. The positive experiences we have brought our dogs by staying home offer some positivity in the midst of the innumerable negative experiences the pandemic has caused. Even further, these experiences give us many positive lessons that we can take from our furry friends.

Turning Isolation into Connection

For most of us, the pandemic has been especially difficult because of the isolation we have felt from others. This is especially true about our loved ones—the people we enjoy 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 and days that we used to spend away from our dogs have transformed into countless hours and days that we spend at home 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 miss this time, just as we have missed the time we lived in normalcy before the pandemic. Their experience has been the direct opposite of ours.

The lesson you can learn from your dog in this sense is to take advantage of this time, and seek the companionship you desire through them.

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

Encouraging Good Habits

We are living in a time when it is extremely difficult to practice good habits. Currently, many of us do not have a structure in our lives to hold us accountable for the things that we need to do for self-care, 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, and 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.

To combat these challenges, dogs can encourage us to nurture good habits that keep us energized and positive. Dogs need exercise, and as many of us have taken our dogs on countless walks throughout quarantine, 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 provides a routine for those who are lacking 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 they sure 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 reminding us that we have many of the same needs they do, making them an effortless resource for self-care.



Next time you are feeling as though you are falling into a state of pandemic fatigue, be sure to take a step back and evaluate the many ways your dog may be able to help you.

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 amidst 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 there are many people that 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, not on the new treats and toys that they used to receive.

Dogs do not need to be spoiled with expensive gifts to be happy.

Furthermore, 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 (it is a fairly expensive feat) instead of adopting (a much cheaper choice in the midst of a global financial crisis). Those shelter dogs would not have the wonderful homes they have now where they spend countless hours and days with their new, loving owners.

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



BAILEY MILLER

My name is Bailey Miller, and I am a sophomore at Miami University double majoring in psychology and professional writing with a minor in statistical methods. Ten years from now, I want to remember how much progress I made in myself throughout the pandemic. This was a difficult time for a variety of reasons, but I am extremely proud of myself for pushing through and bettering myself in many ways during it.

The powers of resilience and self-care are extremely strong, and I hope that in the next ten years I continue to focus on cultivating them.



Making Us Think

Taking a step back from the world as we knew it helped us reexamine various aspects of pre-pandemic life. We began to ponder the big ideas in life, reflecting on religion and celebrations as we shifted into a new reality. We contemplated the smaller topics that we were able to immerse ourselves in with our newly found time, making connections between things like the arts, fitness, and the grander state of our world. Thoughts became deeper, realizations were sparked, and new ideas were juggled in our minds as we made sense of how our normal worlds fit into this new one.

The following pieces showcase how we were able to piece together the various important fragments of our pre-pandemic world in the new, greater context of the world with COVID-19. We want to remember the depth of our analysis and thinking during the pandemic.



Social Media During a Pandemic: TikTok Study

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 a pasta dish. 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.

A Beacon of Hope

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 people could start seeing each other again, the whole world was able to share in that and see what the future could hold. Now in 2021, still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok is the leading iPhone app globally in the App 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 lighthearted trends that TikTok bestowed upon us, it also became a place for activism. From the presidential election of 2020, to sustainability efforts, to the Black Lives Matter movement, and more, TikTok helped light a political fire for users. Most notably, this fire was lit in Gen Z users. Even *Ratatouille: The TikTok Musical* was created to raise money for The Actors Fund, since actors and actresses in musicals have been out of work so long with no live audiences. This musical alone ended up raising \$2 million.

One statistic even notes that 26 percent of TikTok users attended a Black Lives Matter protest as of July 2020, 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. These users all have well over one million followers. Because TikTok has a ton of younger users who are in their preteens and developing ideas about themselves, it's empowering and encouraging to see such a large movement based around the acceptance of all body types.

Along with the fun side of TikTok, which is easily publicized, TikTok also 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; 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 virus. Less than 1 percent of the medical information shared on TikTok was misleading or false (Ostrovsky 2020).

In addition to TikTok creators using their platforms to share information, TikTok itself 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 livestreams for TikTok users (Hutchinson 2020).

Medical professionals were able to garner credibility with their TikTok audiences by sharing important COVID-19 information through the vehicle of TikTok trends. The latest medical trend as of March 2021 surrounds myths, misconceptions, and information 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 hosting an immense amount of misinformation about world news and politics. LinkedIn has become a place to "one up" each other and only share good news. But TikTok isn't always in that category. TikTok is known for being more authentic, especially because of its algorithm. Anyone can go viral, not just influencers.

When asked about TikTok, 57 percent of people described having a positive sentiment towards the app, whereas only 27 percent of people had a positive sentiment towards social media overall (Molla 2021). Whether the negativity on the other platforms drove users to TikTok, or TikTok just genuinely gives users a more authentic experience, this is a social media platform that has significantly positive sentiments attached to it.

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



My name is Molly McNamara, and I'm a senior at Miami University studying marketing and professional writing. After graduation, I will be doing merchandising for DICK's Sporting Goods in Pittsburgh, PA. In 10 years, I want to remember how hard I worked in college both academically and in organizations on campus.

Making and Teaching Theatre in the Pandemic

Miranda Scharf

Of the many aspects of our life affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the world of theatre is one of keen interest to me. I have a BFA in Theatre Studies and throughout the pandemic, I have seen numerous friends and theatres struggle to adapt to the situation. I'm struck by how this is a familiar struggle to the theatre world. As one of our earliest art forms, theatre has confronted the dangerous spread of deadly diseases before. During the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, English theatres were regularly ordered to be closed by the Crown due to frequent 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 has not been affected by the pandemic does not exist. A modern day solution is sharing recordings of performances, though this comes with its own problems. The practice of making recorded or livestreamed versions of theatrical performances available to a wide audience is not new. It is possible to find original cast recordings of Broadway shows from, for example, the 70s and even footage of vaudeville performances from around the time film recording was invented. However, apart from the fundamentally different experience of live theatre and recordings as mediums, the process of theatres making this significant switch is complex. Not all theatre companies have the resources to film, upload, and pay the online-specific licensing fees involved in making a performance available online, instead of licensing associated with charging tickets for live theatre.

As with the rest of the world, the theatre world has had to treat COVID-19 as a developing situation. Initially, this meant staying home and shutting down for two weeks, but that was hardly the end of it. A local theatre, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, started selling the crafted goods of the theatre designers and technicians. Costume designers made masks and other textile-based crafts.



Scenic designers and builders made simple furniture pieces. And for a while, this was one small way that the theatre could keep some money coming in and be able to pay their employees. Then, the three largest theatre companies in Cincinnati worked together to create a donation fund to support local artists. As the pandemic dragged on into the fall of 2020, the company began selling tickets for 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-19 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 with appropriate regulations in place. Through this, theatre companies were able to offer these online representations of shows without a live audience. Now, as the weather warms and we have vaccine rollouts 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 how the pandemic was a double hit to theatre artists. While some theatre professionals are lucky enough to work in a professional theatre full-time, there are just as many who have to work day jobs alongside their jobs in theatre. 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 typical nine-to-five job, generally 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.

Since many theatre professionals are working two jobs, and the nature of those jobs were impossible to adapt to working from, many of them were hit doubly hard by the pandemic.

The final element of this I want to explore is the third job I most often see theatre artists work in—teaching. Whether they are teaching classes through a recreational studio, as part of an occupational or rehabilitation program, or through any stage of school, many theatre artists teach. 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.

Even with hope and ever-increasing numbers of vaccinations, 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 the arts provide to our lives, especially in this last year when consumption of art and entertainment provided an incalculable service to us all. Many artists have come together to ensure that artists have a chance to keep putting their art out into the world.

They are using the phrase “be an #artshero” to call on our politicians to include the arts in proposed government funding for various sectors that is helping us all become financially stable again. Similarly to the incredible support for the arts during the Great Depression that gave us a lively intersection of creativity for work like the Federal Theatre Project, funding at this time would provide vital support for our artists and facilitate some amazing creations.



My name is Miranda Scharf. I am a senior English literature major and history minor. In ten years, what I would like to remember most is to value the time spent with loved ones and time spent on fun experiences exploring the world.

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


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..." (Sheffield 2020). 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.



The song “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 is a reference to the soldiers who stormed the Normandy beaches during World War II. Finally, with conviction, Swift places weight on the gut-wrenching words, “With you, I serve/ With you, I fall down” and “And some things you just can’t speak about.” These lyrics convey a level of despair accompanying 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 firsthand. 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 feel inside.

The lyrics illustrate a literal battleground. Meanwhile, the state of the world during the pandemic was characteristically similar. Doctors, nurses, and medical 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 have faced as well. Finally, the death rate skyrocketed in just a few months, in the same way that the army of men in World War II fatally fell down by means of a weapon. Through it all, Swift was able to capture hope, the main source that kept people moving forward in both time periods.

In both situations, individuals were 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, and more closed temporarily or permanently. This meant that people were 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 outside of the home, this ultimatum came as a difficult task. It is not a simple procedure to just drop everything and switch it up quickly. Swift continues on with the lyrics “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. Swift is not alone in this battle. Every human in some capacity has tried to cope with the changes brought by COVID-19, regardless of if it is 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 was the only thing keeping them alive.

Ultimately, COVID-19 has changed the way society functions. Swift chose to translate her time of adjustment 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 know it.



Hi, my name is Corie Maurer and I’m a junior. I have a major in professional writing with minors in creating writing and digital marketing. My hope in the midst of chaos comes from my relationship with Christ, my family, and friends. I have found that it is essential to rest and know that today’s issues are not eternal. Instead, each day is a new opportunity to love and be loved by others. It is a time to celebrate both the past and the present for what it is in this moment.

How Celebrations Have Changed

Hannah Clarke

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

But as the year has gone by, I've noticed that celebrations have continued, albeit in different forms than before. Notably, *how* and *why* we celebrate has shifted dramatically. Celebrations aren't the big, extravagant events we used to see. 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 after the onset of the pandemic was a few short months after quarantine began; it was for my brother's graduation in May. He was graduating high school, which I had done two years prior. I kept thinking back to my own graduation and comparing it to how his looked different due to 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 that recognition. Since school isn't something he particularly enjoys, his graduation was a big deal for him and my family. I felt guilty that I had gotten to celebrate my graduation 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 (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 prepared a video for my family and I to watch, filled with 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 re-create 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 had 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.

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

My birthday followed shortly after. I was turning twenty, and for months my family and I had been making jokes about entering into my soon-to-be “roaring twenties.” 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 (no contact delivery, of course), and my friends planned to have a Netflix Party call later that night.

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 watch a movie—we had a lot of catching up to do—but it was enjoyable regardless. Sometimes a faint whisper of a party is more than enough to remind you of what really matters.

And Everything In-Between

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

Others shared in my appreciation of the small things, too. During those summer weeks I wrote an article for an organization I am a part of on campus 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 being turned upside down. The pandemic brought us back to the basics and reminded us 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; people will still graduate, get older, and live through all those small, slow moments in life. 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 takeaway from something so devastating.



My name is Hannah Clarke, and I am currently a third-year undergraduate at Miami University double majoring in public health and professional writing. In ten years, I would want to remember how much I grew during this time period. I had to spend a lot of time with myself, and I learned so much about how to care for myself both mentally and physically. It was definitely a tough time mentally, as it was for almost everyone around me, and having to experience such a challenging year taught me a lot about putting my mental health first.

Drive-in Church: The New Normal?


Mady Wilson

Celebrations looked different for us all this past year. That's not because we couldn't gather together; it's because some of us did anyway. I am a Christian from a moderately-sized city in Southeast Ohio. My town does not have a lot of diversity, and it does not have a lot of open minds, but what it does have is an abundance of churches. I frequently laugh to myself when I pass nine different denominations just to get to Kroger. I've always wondered just how many churches I am surrounded by without knowing they're there. A quick Google search has shown that there are almost fifty churches in my town (Zanesville Church Directory 2000). While I don't know the average number of churches per city is, I will always marvel at this fact. On my weekly jaunts to and from my own church I find myself glancing at the parking lots of other churches, trying to guess the size of their congregations by counting cars. But since COVID-19, I've been actively looking for churches with cars in their parking lots on Sundays for a different reason.

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 (Budryk 2020). When it was too cold for our pastor to stand outside, we moved to recorded online services. Drive-in church is simple enough, and it was an actual technique used in the 1950s to curb the lack of church facilities and a newfound resentment toward dress clothes (Koeth 2020).



It's just like a drive-in movie: a car pulls into the parking lot, tunes their radio to the frequency of the microphone the pastor will be using, and rolls down their windows or blasts the AC for personal comfort. It was a major emotional boost to be around my congregation without causing any danger.




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, we rolled down a window or two, and we sang Christmas carols together. We even sang “updated” carols full of satirical lyrics, poking fun at the pandemic. It was probably a pretty weird sight, but it was the safest way to keep our traditions alive (as well as all who were in attendance).

But driving around in my town in December, I witnessed the celebration vary between other 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 been lifted.

You may have heard about Solid Rock Church, the mega church in Monroe, OH that returned to in-person church services in early April. Pastor Lawrence Bishop II, a pastor at the church, 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, he believed that “Easter Sunday, Amen, this thing will all be done and over with,” and that “God was in control,” (2020).

In July, 236 people at Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Union County, Oregon, or 60 percent of their congregation, contracted COVID-19 after they held services during lockdown (Woodward 2020). The church held services in defiance of Oregon’s stay-at-home order. These experiences aren’t unique; many places of worship have been connected to superspreader events. So why do churches continue to open their doors?

Throughout the pandemic, there has been a question of priorities—what people were willing to sacrifice in order to get back to the normal. When religion was nonnegotiable, 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 of politics, potentially using Christianity as justification for ignorance at best and insurrection at worst. Unfortunately, belief in COVID-19 was heavily swayed by political parties. Places like Pennsylvania saw pandemic protests as early as April 2020.

Protesters at the Capitol building in Harrisburg used the phrase “Jesus Is My Vaccine” on signs and wore old Tea Party (“Don’t Tread On Me”) garb and flags (Badash 2020). Protests like these were organized by right wing groups adding God into the mix.

Christian distrust in the scientific community and governmental authorities was not something new brought on by the pandemic. It is part of a vast history of associating physical health with spiritual strength. When Christianity was a very young religion, Christians sought to separate themselves from Jewish people as much as possible, labeling them as “impure” (Bonar 2020). These early Christians thought that refusing medical attention from Jewish doctors would be a way to preserve their faith in Jesus. Their mindset was that to admit poor health would threaten the widespread belief in God. Faith still plays a part in the refusal of medical care, 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 a vaccine is still strong, and I don’t think it will end anytime soon. Unlike the fun, satirical carols we sang at my church that poked fun at COVID-19, the 2020 song “Jesus Is My Vaccine” by Paddy Goodwin and the Holy Ghosts will be a reminder of the ridiculous lengths people will go to to prove their nonchalant attitude towards the pandemic. And the COVID-19 cases that sprung from untimely church services will be a reminder of the wrong kind of priorities.

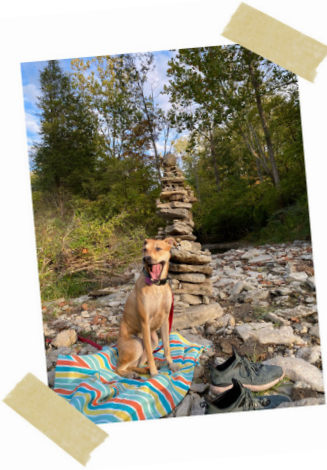
Sometimes it’s not a lack of believing in the virus. Some religious rituals encourage the faithful to be in the physical presence of the minister. Others believe that in order to “love thy neighbor,” they must be in churches and be physically with people. Many people were longing for a greater sense of community built in congregations throughout the pandemic, 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.



My name is Mady, and I'm a third-year English literature and professional writing double major with a social justice studies minor. I'm not exactly sure what I'm doing after graduation, but whatever it is, it'll be an adventure. In the future, I hope I still love painting, Pinterest crafts, and everything chocolate. But if not, that's okay too.

Essential Worker


Kevin Goss



When the first shutdowns happened in mid-March, I was suddenly whisked away from the dynamic freedom of college life and plopped back into the unremarkable mundanity of life back home. I traveled six hours from my residence hall in Oxford, OH 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 COVID-19 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, the 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.

I was certainly not treated like a hero. In the early stages, nearly every customer yelled or cursed at me. I had worked in customer service before, but this store’s shoppers were an entirely new level of nasty. While inspiring commercials praised me for my noble efforts, patrons hurled expletive-laden tirades my way. The frustration of customers was only compounded by the fact that record numbers of people were coming into the store. The store’s manager told me he had never seen the store as busy as it was in the forty years he had worked there.

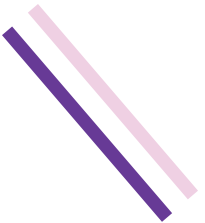


There was not only an abundance of shoppers, but also an abundance of their items. Most purchases I rang up totaled around \$400 to \$600 on average, and customers often used multiple carts. I had never seen groceries purchased en masse like this, and learning a new cash register system made things even 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 common, 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 illness and health, but would then greet at least one-hundred customers a day face-to-face. One day, however, my manager handed me a face mask and said “Hey, you need to wear this now,” and I replied “Okay,” and wore a mask during my shifts from then on. If only the rest of the country had been that easy to convince.

Eventually, I discovered employees at the store where my brother was working were receiving an extra two-dollars an hour for what they called “hero pay.” It turns out his company was represented by a labor union who negotiated the 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 was 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 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 were only the fifth largest retailer in the entire world. Their profits went up ninety percent 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.



As one can tell, it seems our labor union isn't exactly powerful enough to resist the rulings of a Fortune 500 company. Around June, these same corporate overlords also decided too many people were working in our store, so they continuously 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 either.

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 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 on their own. Those who make a conscious effort to be kind and compassionate are a cure to this worldwide ailment.



My name is Kevin Goss and I am a junior at Miami University pursuing a degree in professional writing. I live in the Chicago suburbs and am excited to continue studying at Miami University. In ten years, I would like to remember my friends who I kept in touch with during the quarantine.



Hindering Our Learning

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic allowed us to think critically about a variety of topics, it did not make our lives any easier when it came to being college students. For many of us, being a student is a large part of our identity, and we had gotten quite used to the way our education worked. We went to class, came home, did homework, hung out with friends, and got very minimal hours of sleep each night. However, the pandemic disrupted this routine in a way we never thought possible. We were physically kicked out of our various homes at Miami, forcing many of us to move away from our close friends who served as our support systems during our stressful lives as college students. Subsequently, we began online classes. Online learning decreased our motivation to learn, shifted the way we learn, and diminished the quality of our educational experiences. But we were not the only ones who felt this wave of disruption in our educational systems; professors and students alike struggled with staying engaged and making the best out of the present situation. We had to find new ways to adjust, but that didn't necessarily mean we were good at adjusting.

The following pieces describe how the pandemic uprooted us from our expectations of our college experience, because we want to remember how we persevered through academic struggles.



COVID-19 Final Exams and Proctorio

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. I was ready to take my finals, be done with the semester, and figure out what I would do for the summer. Little did I know things were about to get rough. My finals all went quite well—except for my biology final.

My biology final was on an evil software known as Proctorio. Proctorio is a Google Chrome extension that films the user to make sure they aren't cheating on an exam, but it often doesn't work correctly. This was the reason it went so poorly, or I guess you could say it didn't go at all. I had run into some very minor problems with Proctorio in the past, but nothing could compare to what was about to happen. The other small problems I had 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. This meant that if I got a 60 percent or higher I would pass the class, and if I got below a 60 percent it wouldn't show up on my transcript at all. 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 one 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, it wasn't an issue with my Wi-Fi, it was the Proctorio network that went down. I was taken out of the test and Canvas (my school's online platform) believed that I had completed it because I was automatically taken out of Proctorio due to its crash.



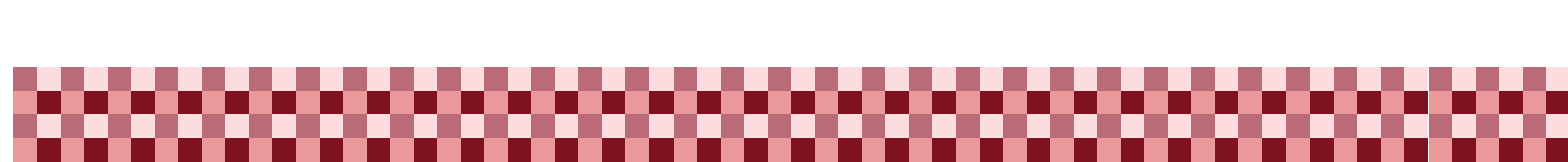
I frantically called the number for Proctorio support. No answer. I tried to get in touch with the Proctorio message boards. No answer there either. This was a huge issue because if a problem like this happens, the student isn't in direct contact with the professor, just with some random person working 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 a zero on the final exam along with several other assignments that still needed to be graded. 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 view the exam because the system crashed prior to me finishing the Proctorio pre-checks. This further complicated things because I had to email her again and 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 prepared for setbacks like this because this was the first time measures like Proctorio were ever put in place. Online schooling and exams were 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 needed to be completed through Proctorio, I may have run into this problem more than just this once.



Because the biology final took place on the last day of finals, I had nothing else to occupy my mind. My professor was set on not allowing me to take the exam, and grades were due in a few days. I got very little sleep as I awaited the answer from my professor. I wasn't able to do anything fun to take my mind off of 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 60 percent in the class to pass, and I received 65.92 percent. If a few other assignments went differently, I could have ended up not getting credit for the class.

My Proctorio debacle turned out okay, but I'm sure that 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. COVID-19 has disrupted everyone's lives, and Proctorio has only added to the stress. It's great to see that all of my professors since that class have recognized the problems Proctorio can cause, and I have not had a professor use Proctorio ever since. If COVID-19 persists, hopefully Miami University and the rest of the academic world will find a better system for proctoring online exams.



My name is Charlie Ortman. I'm an English: professional writing major with a minor in film studies. One thing to remember about myself during the pandemic of 2020-2021 is that I was able to persevere through the dark times and that nothing is more precious than time. One should always do the best they can with the time they have.

Corona College

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. What should have lasted a few weeks has now gone on to be an entire year. The virus cannot be brushed aside or downplayed; 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 greatly affected, though not necessarily by death. This specific demographic is college students. Now, it may sound silly or ridiculous to want to understand how college students have been affected by this pandemic. But 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 later that week on Friday online. That was the birth of Zoom University. Students were struggling this first week, from making travel plans and trying to move off campus while trying to attend 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 are nearly desolate. Students living on campus are bound by all the rules of the CDC.

They are limited in the number of people they bring into their rooms, and they have to wear a mask while traveling around their hall. It is like living in a ghost town, only seeing another person once in a blue moon.

There are few places to socialize on campus since many things are either completely shut down or limited to outdoor seating. Some of the only social interactions people get are from their in-person classes, if they're lucky enough to not be entirely online. 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 or throwing a frisbee. As for now, the social scene at Miami 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 harder to obtain information or to take away anything when looking at a screen all day. People don't participate or pay attention as much. It is much easier to get distracted when you are in class in your own home or dorm 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. It seems pointless to pay attention to slides on a computer screen or to listen to a person inside a little box. All those students who don't have synchronous classes—where students meet virtually with their instructor—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 nor the education they are paying for.

Some students have even taken a gap semester because of it. An online education is not the same as in-person, and by now, universities should stop treating it like such. An entire year later still stuck in this pandemic, college students are still trying to teach themselves.

For the spring semester of 2021, some students were fortunate enough to resume partially in-person while others had to remain entirely online. The majority is still synchronous and asynchronous with a little sprinkle of in-person. It was a big transition and maybe a tougher one to manage due to all the different formations of classes. Imagine walking to an in-person class and then having another one online after but still needing to complete work for an asynchronous class. There is no balance between the classes because there are not always set times for them, which can decrease students' ability to evenly allocate time to each class.

Next Fall Semester

With the increase of vaccinations in the United States, an announcement was made on behalf of Miami that in-person classes will resume like normal the following semester. By the end of this semester, two sets of senior college students have gone through their final semester hindered by a pandemic. Their college experiences were stolen from them and, hopefully there won't have to be a third set of seniors who go through this. By next fall, it can be expected that a majority of our older population has had both doses of the vaccine. People are always thinking that college students are overreacting 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, regardless of what that may look like.



GABRIELLA DOBSON

My name is Gabriella Dobson and I am a junior professional writing major at Miami University. I have minors in criminology and general business. What I want to remember about this time in ten years are the relationships I was able to develop with complete strangers who turned into my roommates who turned into my best friends.

The Day Everything Changed

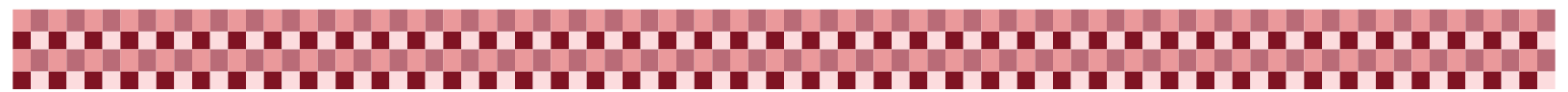
Grace Driscoll

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—a simple noun that has completely disrupted the lives of millions. It's a word that needs no explanation. It goes without saying that the year 2020 will go down in history. 2020 affected everyone, with states shut down, people could no longer see their loved ones; it changed the way everyone lives. It affected every age group, from infants and their mothers to the elderly and adolescents. As a college student, it turned my world upside down. I went from having the time of my life, with no curfews or capacity issues and in-person classes, to it all being taken away in an instant. As soon as COVID-19 hit, everything changed. The idea of COVID-19 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 10, 2020. My friends and I decided to go out for brunch. It was nine of us girls, and we went to Patterson's Cafe in Oxford, OH. 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 the president of Miami University. It said that classes would be switching to an online format, and we would all be returning home for two weeks. We cheered with joy thinking it would just be a temporary break where we didn't have class. But oh boy were we wrong. After brunch, we scurried back to Scott Hall, our dorm, got dressed, and went to go hang out 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 come back to campus.



All of a sudden, that laughter turned to tears and anger. I remember thinking to myself, “WHY! This is so stupid. Everything is going to be fine.” Oh boy was I wrong. An amazing semester had 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 say goodbye to someone who meant the world to me—my grandmother. We drove ten plus 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 as we entered her room. There she was, laying there, practically lifeless. Next to her, my grandfather, who refused to leave her side or let go of her hand. Each cousin went in one-by-one 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 and ordered dinner. We sat around waiting for the call that she passed. But it never came. It was days. She held on for days before she eventually passed.

After she peacefully passed, the funeral came. We were the last funeral to meet 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. The administration explained that 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. Fortunately, my best friend drove up to Miami and gathered some of my belongings while I was grieving out East. All of a sudden it hit me; this is 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 virtual learning. This has been a difficult transition to basically teaching yourself everything. It hasn't just been an adaptation for us students, but the professors had to transition to virtual teaching as well. Many had to reconstruct their whole lesson plans to work online. 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 teaching yourself and applying it to exams and assignments. 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 we adapt more each day.

Here we are, one year later, and COVID-19 is still here. We went from a shutdown to a mask mandate and a major loss of time. As college students, we lost half of a semester of memories, laughter, and fun. But the seniors lost their last semester of college with their friends who had grown 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 Miamians, we were unsure of what going back to college would be 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.



Hi! My name is Grace Driscoll and I am currently a junior at Miami University. I am a strategic communications and professional writing double major with a focus in editing. If COVID-19 taught me one thing it would be that time is precious and it's the little things that matter the most. I used to be so focused on being the perfect person. Over the course of the pandemic I realized that being perfect is an unachievable goal because no single person is perfect.

I came to realize that it's your family and friends that truly matter and the time you get to spend with them. It is important to not waste a second of your life because you never know when something so precious can be taken away.

Timeline of my Quarantine Experience

Sydney Mason

March 7, 2020

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

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

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

March 10, 2020

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

When I woke up this morning, it felt like any other 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. What about labs? And how could they expect us to learn on our own?

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 won't get this time back.



March 12, 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 canceled for the rest of the semester.

I can't figure out why they didn't at least wait to see if things get better in a few weeks. I mean it's only been two days since the first announcement, how do they know things won't improve by April?

March 13, 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 15, 2020

All bars and restaurants forced to close

Even the RAs have gone home. I don't even know if anyone has been supervising our dorm for the past week. There are 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 17, 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 22, 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 25, 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 Nintendo Switch to cheer me up and we played for the rest of the night, just like when we were kids. It helped.

April 6, 2020

Taylor turned twenty-five 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 10, 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 15, 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 10, 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 19, 2020

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

I met up with some Miami friends at Ohio State 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 23, 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 fourth grade teacher's husband. Small world.

July 27, 2020

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

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

July 31, 2020

The sale of liquor is banned in all Ohio establishments after 10 p.m.

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

August 6, 2020

Today would have marked dad's sixty-sixth 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 12, 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 21, 2020

Miami University 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 15, 2020

People traveling from border states are asked to quarantine for fourteen 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 thirty pounds since quarantine started, so that's dope.

December 4, 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 11, 2021

DeWine lifts 10 p.m. curfew

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

March 24, 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 6, 2021

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



My name is Sydney Mason and I am a junior at Miami University, where I am double majoring in professional writing and marketing. When I look back on this time ten years from now, I want to remember how far I've come and how much I've grown over the past year. As much as quarantine and this pandemic has taken away from us, I feel like it has given a lot back too. I learned so much about myself and what I truly value, and for that I am definitely a much better version of myself than I was before COVID hit last March.



Introspection

The complete disruption of our normal lives took a lot of adjusting for most of us. The quick pace of our everyday lives was suddenly replaced with immense amounts of time. Time spent at home and time spent alone. Some of us quarantined with family members, others with roommates, and some completely alone. Spending time alone forced many of us to reflect on who we are. We had to learn what it meant to be comfortable spending time with ourselves. By understanding ourselves, we better understood what our role was in our new normal. We had to look at how we would choose to develop as people in this new reality. For many of us, this meant losing a lot, both physically and emotionally. We lost loved ones, time with friends, jobs, and parts of ourselves that only fit with our old reality. The pandemic inspired many of us to look inward and really understand who we are.

The following pieces are the experiences a few of us had while looking inward with all of our time spent alone, because we want to remember time alone was not a waste.





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

Zoe Kelley

I used to joke that 2020 was actually four years long. To make sense of everything going on, I sectioned 2020 into the following “years”:

Year one: 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. It really felt like 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-19 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.

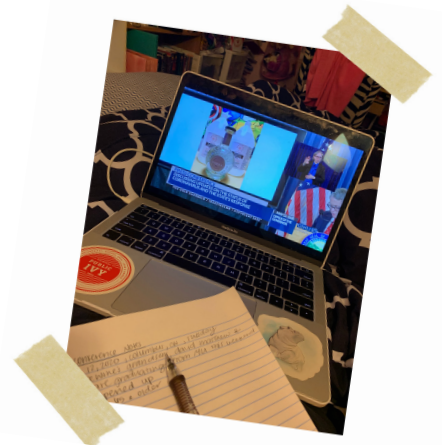
Fast forward to the first week back at school and there was already a scare that students contracted the virus before they came back to school. I began to think maybe I did get the virus in Italy when news begins to spread that things are really bad there.

The semester progressed as normal, but then we started to hear of cases in Washington. Things began to spiral and all of a sudden, my professors were talking about rumors that we were going to be sent home and go online. Cases began to spread like wildfire in the United States, and I couldn't wrap my head around what was happening. Little did I know that the worst had yet to come.

Year two: March

On March 10 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 completed online, effective immediately. I knew that there had been talk of us going online, but I didn't realize it would be happening so 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 14, so 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 University, 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 exactly the 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 a.m., 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 drink my coffee, eat some breakfast, and then get started on my schoolwork that I would spend the rest of the day doing.

Doing the same thing every day and 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 have all talked about how time seemed to stop. From March to August, nothing felt real.



Year three: May–August

In May, I eventually made my way back to work, but there was still a lot of uncertainty about whether it was 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-19 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 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 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.

Year four: March 2021

It's really hard to fathom how we've made it a year in this nightmare. I never anticipated that COVID-19 would last this long. I remember over the summer talking about how things would be normal by 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-19 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 protect us from new variants. Life without masks and social distancing 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 disoriented our reality is going to have a long-term impact on all of us. I 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 new feelings when life does look more normal, but for right now, I really think just moving on and moving forward is the best thing to do.

I can't wait for the day that life is back to normal, when twenty-four hours actually feels like twenty-four 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 a high school AP United States History document-based question about it. The pandemic has been a pretty traumatic experience for all of us, but with the success of the vaccines, we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel. 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.



My name is Zoe Kelley and I am a junior double majoring in marketing and professional writing with a minor in literature. Ten years from now, I want to remember the growth I went through during this pandemic. I want to remember the tough times and the little victories that made me the person I am now. I also hope that ten years from now, I have continued my growth and development as a person.

A New World. A New Appreciation

Angela Weckle

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

I'm on a boat out in the middle of a lake with the warmth of the sun on my skin and a breeze through my hair. Out in 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 fear, from the world. The pandemic has brought much hardship and suffering, and I can't help but yearn for a different world. A world of the past. Or maybe a world in the future where the pandemic no longer exists. Where the pandemic is behind us.

But, a life without a pandemic, as well as my recurring dream, are not my reality. At the start of my fall semester I was 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. I still can't decide whether I liked this fact or not. Classes were online. Meetings were online. People were online. This meant less going out and seeing people and more sitting at my desk in my tiny room in my tiny apartment. Before the pandemic, it was so easy to see and meet and hang out with other people—new people—but now there is always a subconscious fear of catching or spreading the virus 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. But after getting this job, there was suddenly this set time in my week, every week, where I knew I had a reason to leave my little apartment and venture out into the world that we now live in, which was both exciting and scary.

My new routine was anything but normal compared to the life I had lived before the pandemic, but life is full of uncertainties and routines are never guaranteed. Looking back, it is incredible to me how easily I adjusted to my new way of living. I was in my junior year of college and was off campus not just in terms of classes being online, but I was also no longer living in a dorm.





It was a new experience to finally have a place of my own bigger than the shoe box of a dorm room I lived in. I had my own space, my own bedroom, and I was able to spend my newfound time inside doing things like discovering new recipes, catching up on TV shows, and spending time with myself. *Spending 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 it was all I had.

Despite bringing a new appreciation for alone time, the pandemic also introduced me to three new people—my roommates. Living with others during this pandemic has ultimately saved me from feeling so lonely. They have been people that I can talk and relate to through shared experiences, from the fear of the unknown related to this pandemic, to more simple things, such as the boringness of Zoom classes.

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

With the COVID-19 vaccine feeling like 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 new experiences are mixed with old experiences is on the horizon.

Though this pandemic has changed my daily routine, my outlook on life, and the way I view my experiences, I am looking forward to a time where I will be able to take advantage of the experiences that I let myself pass on before and truly live my life without regret.

Living through this pandemic has truly impacted how I view life. Moving forward, I am left with a mission to not let life pass me by. Even though it felt as though time stopped, or at least slowed, when this pandemic hit, life has never truly been that way. Time does not stop. People have experienced hardships and have kept moving despite this. People have stepped up as first responders and educators. People have kept living, working, and taking care of their families.

This has taught me the importance of making every second count and taking action over the things that inspire me. I now have optimism for the future and can consider these experiences a blessing in the way that they have taught me how I can handle the hurdles of the unknown and the experiences that come along with this new world that we live in.



Hi my name is Angela Weckle. I am a junior at Miami University studying professional writing with a focus on digital and technical communication. I am also pursuing a minor in entrepreneurship. Something I want to remember about myself in ten years is how strong and determined I was during this time.



An Introvert Stuck at Home During the Pandemic

Emma Kazmaier

In March 2020, the world seemed to shut down. COVID-19 made its way to the United States and caused schools and businesses to close until further notice. We were forced to stay home for months in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. My generation had never experienced a worldwide crisis like this. To me, it seemed like a weird dream or like 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. It impacted me so much more than I thought it would.

I consider myself to be an introvert. An introvert is someone who feels energized by spending time by themselves and who finds social situations to be draining. As an introvert, I enjoy solitary activities such as reading, writing, watching TV, and playing the piano. Doing these things allows me to relax and recharge after being immersed in an extroverted society. When the pandemic hit and we all had to stay home, I was okay with it at first because I enjoy being at home. There is a stereotype that introverts always want to be alone and don't like going out and seeing people. Because of this, I didn't think quarantine would affect me that much, and I wasn't really worried about being stuck at home for a while. I left Miami University and went back to my hometown to stay with my family while doing school online. I enjoyed this because I missed my family and was happy I got to see them every day. I was really glad to have an excuse to stay home and not feel forced to socialize.

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 has already been very digital, but I feel like the pandemic increased this. Any sort of interaction I had with people was either with my family (who I was living with) or friends and extended family over Zoom or FaceTime.

I enjoyed this at first because it gave me an excuse not to have to go out and socialize all the time. I could just stay at home, 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 in person again. I didn't realize how much the pandemic and quarantine would impact me. As an introvert, I thought I would be fine being stuck at home for so long.



And I was for a while, but it got to a certain point where I needed to get out and do something. I began to get really bored, and I was tired of doing the same thing every day—only leaving the house to take walks with my family. 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. 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 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. The pandemic made many people feel isolated from society and loved ones, and even introverts don't want to feel completely isolated. I 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 wanting to spend some time alone. A part of me longs for a time when I had an excuse to just stay at home. This doesn't surprise me; 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 now 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 has made me appreciate the people and friendships I have in my life. The pandemic has made me value 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 antisocial; they may just need some time to themselves to recharge before seeing people again. The stereotype that introverts always want to be alone 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 differently for each individual. Everyone is different, but I personally need a lot of alone time. Although, quarantine may have been a little too long for me.



My name is Emma Kazmaier and I am a junior strategic communication and professional writing major at Miami University. Something I want to remember about myself during this time in ten years is that I have great friends and family in my life. Even though the pandemic has made it difficult to see people, it's made me see how grateful I am to have such wonderful people in my life. I no longer take for granted the time I get to spend with friends and family. Although I still consider myself to be an introvert, the pandemic has made me see how much I enjoy spending time with the people I care about.





Reading Saved My Sanity

Marie Duke

It's been over a year since the world shut down. In 2020, I was afraid to quickly go into 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 felt like something from a horror movie. But I found a way to cope with this anxiety—just don't use FaceTime! 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, but I haven't been an avid reader for the past few years. With the all-encompassing nothingness surrounding me in the middle of quarantine, I finally had the time to fall back in love with reading.

Looking back on those months of lockdown, it's clear that reading saved my sanity. While I read mostly because I had nothing better to do, I found that the unexpected escape and socialization I gained from re-entering the world of books was what I really *needed* at the time.



Reading 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 I no longer had a strict class schedule to follow. Aside from turning in my assignments, I didn't have anything to do during the day. My family members were working all day, but I couldn't work because my place of employment was closed. I couldn't go hang out with my friends, or go shopping just for fun, and you can only go on so many walks while avoiding human contact before it gets boring. Because of this, I took to my room, where my stocked bookshelves awaited. When spring break hit just two weeks after I got home from school, I really only stopped reading to eat meals. There was just nothing better to do.



Anyone who is living 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. Whether I was watching the number of deaths caused by COVID rise or seeing a disgustingly loud brand of racism break out across the country, I felt like I had no safe place to turn. 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 books offered.

In the end, the most important thing that reading did for me was rebuild my friendships. As weird as it may sound, reading has almost always been at the center of my socialization skills. During the pandemic, this became ten times more true. Because I was reading so much, I started talking to a few of my friends from high school who I knew had read some of the books I was getting into. We started a group chat to talk about our current bookish obsessions during that first month of quarantine that we still chat in every day, a whole year later. Books rekindled the friendships that I had kind of lost due to the distance college put between us.

My college roommate quickly took notice of the distance I was creating between us, but she was more than willing to force me into weekly FaceTime calls. To make sure I didn't back out of the calls in a moment of panic, we started a sort of two-person book club to discuss what we were reading. We read books together, despite being states apart, and spent hours on those calls. Not only did it help to make sure I actually had some form of face-to-face (or face-to-screen) contact when I couldn't physically be with my friends, but it ultimately brought the two of us a lot closer.

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

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



My name is Marie Duke and I am a junior at Miami University studying professional writing and emerging technologies in business & design. I am a member of two service fraternities, the marching band, and an on-campus dance organization and also work at the campus writing center. Despite my busy schedule, I love to find time to read and watch movies with my roommate. Though the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an overall awful year, I did learn that while I may be an introvert, time spent with friends is invaluable.



How the Pandemic Gave Me A Perfect Christmas

Emily Hickman

It all started with a breakup. My boyfriend and I, having survived the COVID-19 pandemic after 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 was going 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 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 them from the 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 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!”

• • • •

I love my sister, but this trip wasn’t as exciting to me as it was to her. Once Santa lost his shine, Christmas followed soon after. My only memories of Christmas are wrapped in chaos, 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 bag the night before, crossing my fingers that it would be under the fifty-pound weight limit as I shoveled half my closet into the biggest suitcase I owned.

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

• • • •

Just landed. Headed to baggage claim.

Almost there, meet you by the door at 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.”

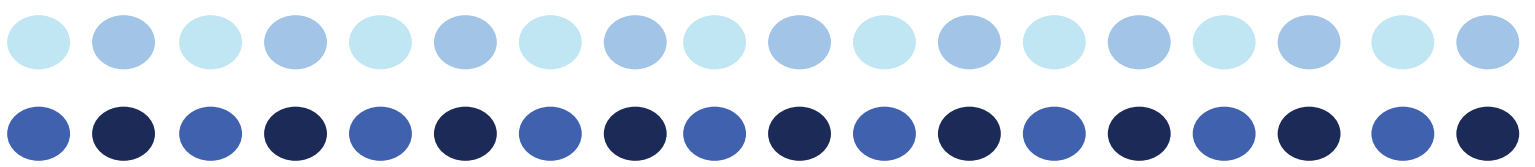
“Thank you!”

“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 Burger (overrated), and then 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 SoCal vacay she had promised me.

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



Kyle and my sister had rented a gorgeous house that was a five-minute walk from downtown Newport and a one-minute walk to the beach. We had a patio that looked toward the ocean, and I got my own room with a real bed! We unloaded the car, pulling out suitcases, duffel 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.

As with any vacation, we spent most of our time enjoying the surrounding sights. Almost every day we went on a 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. I had no responsibilities or deadlines to stress over. I never wanted to leave.

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

“Why? Because everyone who lives here is rich and doesn’t have the concerns of normal people?”

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

She was right. Something about Newport made it easy to forget we were in a pandemic. There was no tape marking six feet of distance 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 were none. Because most of our activities were outside, I also only had to wear a mask while walking between destinations. On the beach and our patio, the two most frequently visited spots of this vacation, I could be socially distanced and breathe freely.

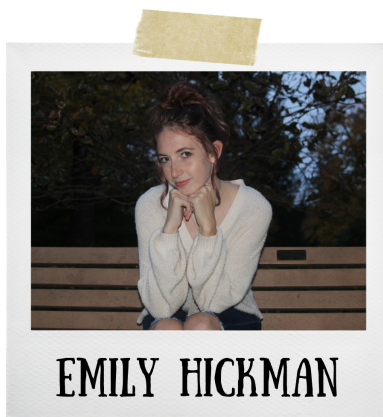
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We spent four days in Newport and drove back to Sacramento on December 27. I flew home on December 30. A COVID-19 scare at the Fort Worth Air Route Traffic Control Center led to a five-hour long airport shutdown, which led to me missing my connecting flight. I called my sister, sobbing in the airport terminal after the gate agent said there was nothing she could do to help me. My sister spent twenty minutes on hold with the airline, trying to get some information while I panicked about how I was going to get back home.

• • • •

As with any adventure-story 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.



My name is Emily Hickman. I am a junior double-majoring in professional writing and journalism. Something I want to remember from my time here is how outgoing I was. Most of my involvement on campus started with me wanting to do something I felt I wasn't qualified for. Applying anyway has led to some of the most amazing experiences and opportunities. Hopefully, I'm still doing the same in ten years.



How Pandemic Life Became the New Normal

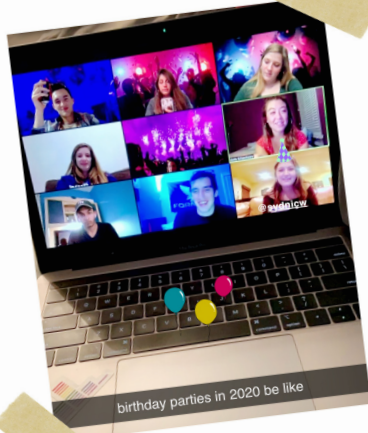
Katie Thompson

Being Content With the Novelty

It's funny how fast things can change when we're least expecting it. In March of 2020, no one expected our two-week "corona-cation" to turn into months upon months of isolation. I remember the very first day things shut down and how everyone was actually excited about it. Classes over Zoom seemed exciting. We didn't have to walk to class, we could be on our phones, and we didn't really have to pay attention because it was just Zoom, right? We were still on campus with our friends, but now our schedules were so free it 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 suddenly 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), and my dad and I started having game nights. It was strange, and it wasn't what anyone *wanted* to be doing, but at first it wasn't bad. Even with school happening virtually, most professors understood that this was uncharted territory for everyone, so for the most part they took it easy on us. In a way, it was almost exactly like that quick two-week break we all thought we were going to have, just not in the way we expected.

At that point, Zoom had yet to lose its novelty either. We had all used FaceTime to stay connected with friends at one point or another, but having organized Zoom hangouts was something entirely new to most of us. My friends from home, who I didn't normally keep in such close contact with, started having regular Zoom nights where we would spend hours just talking or playing online games together.



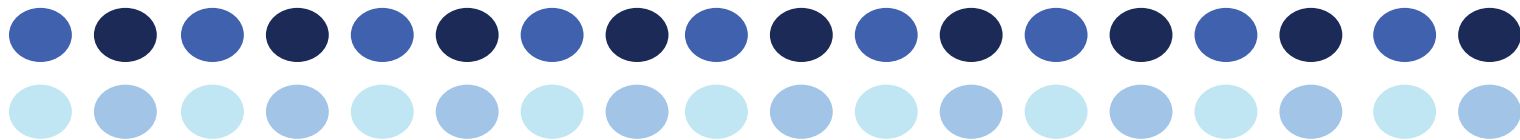
I did the same with my friends from school that I was now separated from, and in the beginning it was fun. This technology seemed like a massive gift that allowed us all to still be together, even when we were apart. We used Netflix Party to watch movies together on a regular basis, and everyone was so focused on finding ways to pass the time and not lose contact that for a time, it seemed like everyone was closer than ever. But that was the beginning, and the novelty didn't last forever.

When the Novelty Wears Off

Just when it seemed like everyone was finally falling into a new routine in this strange world, things began to fall apart. After weeks 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. Everyone was sick of being glued to a screen all the time, and Zoom fatigue was hitting us all hard. Things began to fizzle. There's only so many nights you can spend watching Netflix movies on a laptop. After a while, no one wanted to get together for that anymore either. Technology that 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 is where the reality of our situation really began to settle in. With everyone pulling back from our technological support systems, it became all too easy to truly feel the effects of isolation. We were tired, we were lonely, and we were all just a little bit sick of spending so much time with our families. Worst of all was the sense of helplessness that began to set in. 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? It felt like we were going to be stuck like this forever, and there was nothing we could do to force things to go back to normal. As sophomores entering our junior year of college, my friends and I faced the additional hurdle of our summer internship plans falling through. The world still hadn't quite figured out how to function through a pandemic, so we were stuck in a state of limbo right at the point in our lives when we should've been finally figuring things out. Instead of celebrating becoming upperclassmen and settling into jobs that would help us determine our futures, we were left feeling bitter and out of control as our lives threatened to pass us by. It wasn't fun anymore. It was scary.

Settling Into the New Reality

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

The hardest part at this point, for me, was figuring out how I was supposed to act in this new normal. I was surrounded by my friends, but I was extremely limited in how and when I could see them.

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



KATIE THOMPSON

My name is Katie Thompson, and I am a junior professional writing and psychology double major. This past year has been hard, and I’ve hated feeling like half of my college experience was taken away from me. But ten years from now, I don’t want to look back and only see the bad parts. Yes, there have been struggles, and lots of them. But this year has also taught me a lot about myself, and taught me how to appreciate the little things in life

Being isolated from everyone and everything has made me want to hold onto the things that matter most. It hasn’t been easy, but the pandemic taught me how to work for the important things in my life, because life isn’t always easy. Ten years from now, I want to look back at this time and see how I grew from the challenges.



Miami University Class of 2031,

You made it through! Not just this time capsule, but through the pandemic. We have to believe that. Right now, in May 2021, some of us are vaccinated, but we still don't know when this will all be over—or if it will ever truly be over. We don't know what “normal” will look like once we reach herd immunity, but we know it won't look like what it did before the pandemic. Our world and our lives have been irrevocably changed. We're aware that there are many experiences with COVID-19 and 2020 that were not reflected here, experiences with social injustice, activism, financial hardship, and sickness among them. But we honor and acknowledge that those experiences were valid, and that they too inform our own experience.

In light of all the ways things have changed, we'd like to invite you to reflect on your life and experience with the pandemic. We've included a reflection exercise below to guide your thoughts. We believe that introspection is integral to growth and knowing who you want to become, because first you must know who you've been. If we could offer some advice, we'd say this: hold tight to those you love and fight to see people's humanity, even if you're looking at them on a screen. We believe in you, Class of 2031. Be good.

Sincerely,

Your friends from Professor Lockridge's ENG 412 Class of Spring 2021

Reflection

1. What did “normal” life look like for you before the pandemic?
2. What do you remember about 2020? What events, experiences, conversations, thought processes, and lessons stick out to you?
3. What does “normal” life look like for you after the pandemic? What changed from before?
4. What parts of this time capsule stood out to you? Why?
5. What are you taking away from what you've read in this time capsule?

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