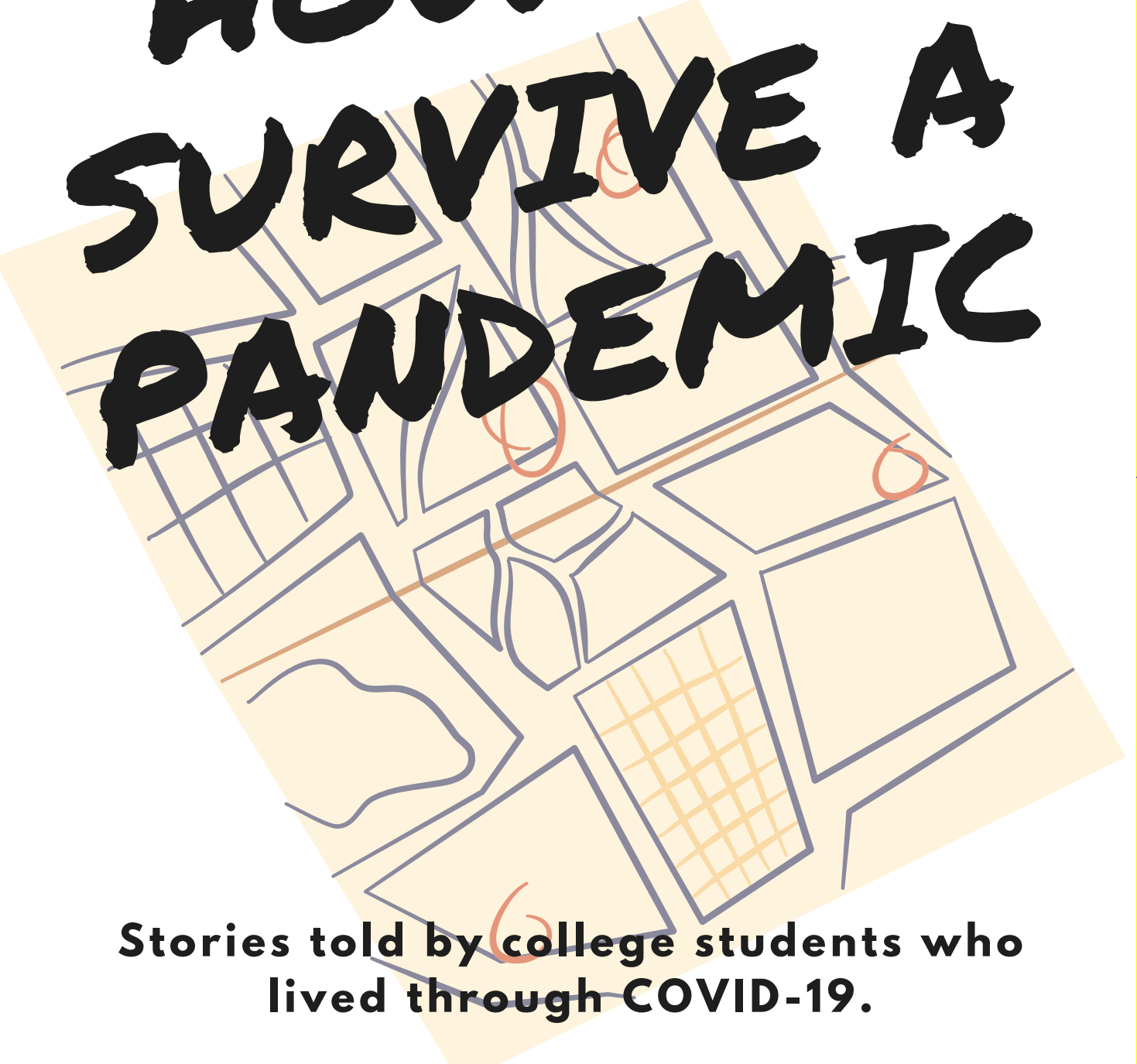


**HANNAH CLARKE - MARIE DUKE**  
**MOLLY MCNAMARA - MADY WILSON**

# HOW TO SURVIVE A PANDEMIC



**Stories told by college students who  
lived through COVID-19.**

Disclaimer: The stories compiled in this book are the sole opinions of the authors they are written by, unless cited otherwise. Although the text in this book is meant to be informative, any piece of information not cited by a verified source reflects the experience of the author who wrote it and cannot be taken as fact. That said, we are hopeful that others may benefit from the lessons we have learned about surviving in a time of such uncertainty.

This collection was edited, compiled, and designed by Marie Duke, Hannah Clarke, Mady Wilson, and Molly McNamara. Each essay piece used in this book is used with permission by the author. Additional thanks to our contributors.

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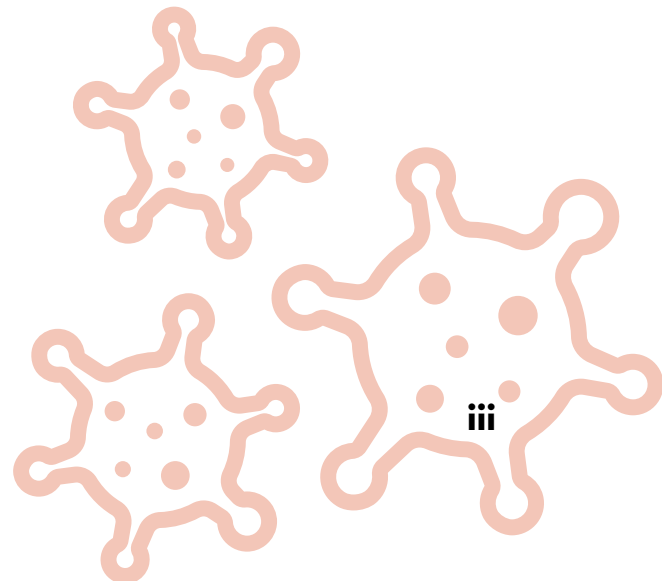
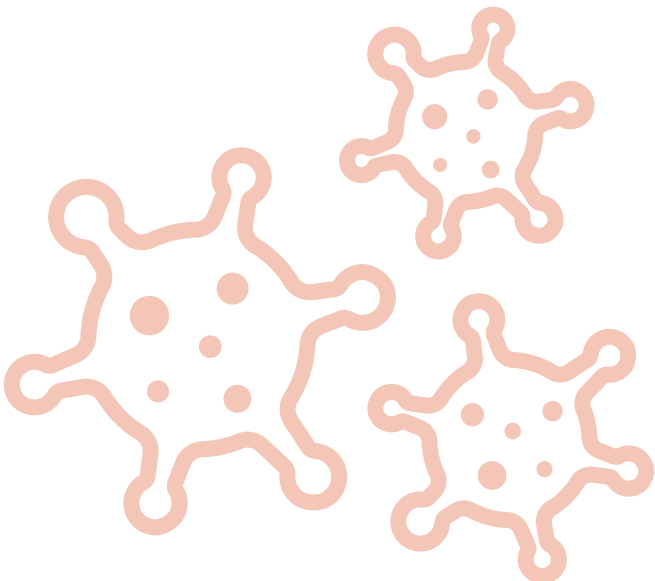


This survival guide is one we never thought we would need. The last time we heard the word "pandemic" was in reference to the Bubonic Plague, which seemed like an eternity ago. To think that in a modern world, we still had diseases that could wipe out populations and change lives forever seemed unfathomable until recently.

There was no playbook for us. We had to sit around and wait; wait for the CDC to tell us to wear masks and socially distance, wait for restaurants to open back up, wait for a vaccine, wait for a normal semester of college. There was a lot of waiting and a lot of navigating the unknown.

Because life is unpredictable, and modern is never truly modern enough, we have created a guide we wish we had on how to survive a pandemic in 19 cities, written through the eyes and opinions of college students.

Within this guide you will learn how to survive grief, boredom, loneliness, isolation, holidays, celebrations, families, and more. In short, you'll learn *How To Survive a Pandemic*.





# SURVIVING A STATE OF LIMBO

When the pandemic first came to the United States, most people were convinced nothing would really change and that the restrictions put into place in March 2020 would be lifted by April. Over a year later, there's no clear end in sight. Each person found a different way to measure the past year; some took note of the daily ins and outs of quarantine life, while others felt that the pandemic forced us to exist in a state of limbo. While COVID-19 affected every life in a different way, one universal truth is the time it took away from us.



Photo by Sara Kurfeß | Unsplash



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

By Zoe Kelley

## January–Mid March 2020

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

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

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

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

## March 2020

On March 10th, I was walking back from class with my friend and we got an email that none of us could have anticipated. President Crawford told us that we were going to be sent home and classes would move online, effective immediately. I knew that there had been talk of us going online but didn't realize it would be happening that abruptly. I remember being extremely scared. I never thought things would get bad enough that we would have to completely change everything about our lives.

March went on to be the longest month of my life. My birthday is March 14th and normally I would be happy that March felt a little longer than normal. This was different though. My mom is a doctor so the atmosphere in my house was very somber. She was having regular meetings with the hospital about the state of the country and what our futures held.

My dad is a professor at Miami University, so he was trying to figure out how to move his classes online and still keep his students engaged. My older sister was a senior at the time, so we were both trying to figure out how to balance our class schedules and share the kitchen table to do our work. Every day started to look the exact same, and it was hard to feel connected to reality.

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

Doing the same thing everyday, acting like everything was normal, was extremely disorienting. March felt like it was a year long. I know I'm not alone in this thought either. My family, friends, and classmates were all talking about how time seemed to stop. From March to August, nothing felt real. I used to joke around that 2020 was actually four years long: Year one was January to Mid-March, year two was the rest of March and April, year three was May to August, and year four was August to December.

### **May–August 2020**

In May, I eventually made my way back to work. There was still a lot of uncertainty if this was even safe and what the protocols were to ensure we stayed COVID-free. I didn't see any of my friends. It felt like the outside COVID-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 suddenly 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 time to relax or process everything that was going on. Everyday I felt myself asking, "what have I accomplished today?" It was exhausting to see people learning how to cook, working out more, or learning a new instrument on my social media. It made me feel like I wasn't doing enough. That period of time was extremely draining.

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

## March 2021

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

From what I have seen up to now, it seems like COVID-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 help prevent our chances of getting it. 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 way the pandemic disrupted our sense of reality is going to have a long-term impact on all of us. I truly can't comprehend how we got here or how it's already a year later. I'm not sure if reflecting on this time will bring different feelings when life does look more normal but for right now, I really think just moving on and moving forward is the best thing to do.

I can't wait for the day that life is back to normal; when 24 hours actually feels like 24 hours, and we can all collectively cope with the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. I know I'm not alone with these thoughts. We all have plenty of experiences to tell our future kids and grandkids when they start learning about 2020 in their history classes. The pandemic has been a pretty traumatic experience for all of us, but we are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel with the success of the vaccines. Though there is a lot we lost to mourn and grieve, 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.







# A Daily Dose of the Pandemic

By 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 normal day. I walked to class with Emily and we talked about our date party this Friday.

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

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

Apparently we were wrong, though, because at 4:17pm Miami announced the suspension of all face-to-face instruction, effective immediately.

A lot of people are excited about this but I don't think they're thinking about the fact that we don't get this time back.

## March 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. 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 26, 2020**

*The senate passes the CARES Act*

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

**April 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 me and Tiffany 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 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 10pm*

Apparently the coronavirus only comes out to play after 10pm. 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 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 10pm curfew*

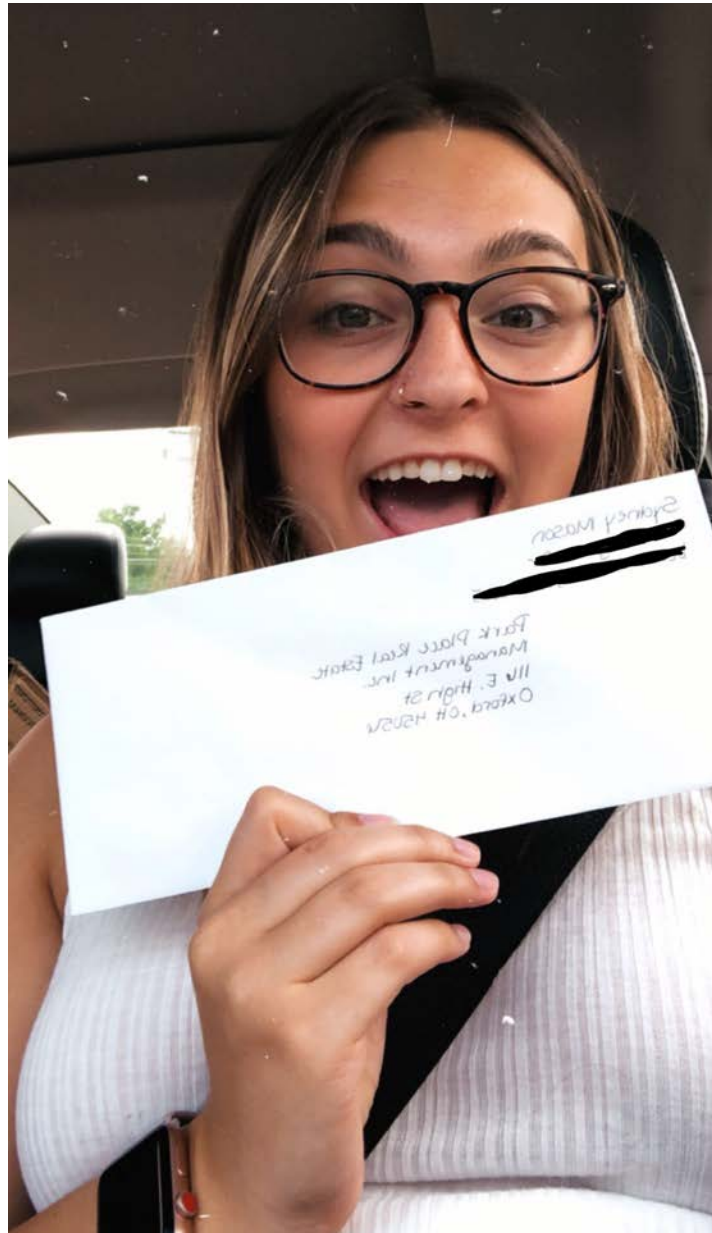
Today felt like a national holiday, the way people celebrated the end of our curfew. With bars going back to regular hours again, it's definitely starting to feel like we might see an end to all this craziness soon.


**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.



 Sydney mails her first rent check—a proud achievement amidst the pandemic



# A Novel Pandemic

By 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 more convenient. We didn't have to walk there, we could log into class from our phones, and we didn't really have to pay attention because it was just Zoom, right? We were still on campus with our friends, only now our schedules seemed too good to be true. This was all fine for about two days, and then campus shut down. Suddenly it didn't seem so fun anymore, because now we were being shipped back home to finish the semester. It became a mad dash to pack up our rooms and say goodbye to our friends because we didn't know how long it would be until we'd see them again.

Even then, the novelty of this new world we found ourselves in was still fresh. No one wanted to be home and isolated, but in those first few weeks, the abrupt shift in the way we lived our lives wasn't entirely unpleasant. I spent more time with my family in that time than I had in a long while. We were all 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 though school was still 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 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 physically 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 while 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 we were suddenly thrust in, 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 filling the void. What began as regular lengthy Zoom meetings with the important people in my life turned into infrequent, brief sessions. Everyone was sick of being glued to a screen all the time, and Zoom fatigue was hitting us all hard. So, things began to fizzle. There's only so many nights you can spend watching Netflix movies on a laptop, so after a while no one wanted to get together for that anymore either. Technology that had initially seemed like a haven now seemed like a crutch, and we were all tired of limping. However, 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 texting and Snapchat—seemed only to remind me of the fact that at the end of the day, I was alone in my room and not with the people I wanted to be with.

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

### **Settling Into the New Reality**

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

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 King 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.

Later, the most jarring realization came: I was used to this now. I had stopped saying things like “when COVID-19 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 left my house I would find myself counting to make sure there weren’t more than ten people. It became 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.



Photo by Engin Akyurt | Unsplash





## Essentially Non-Essential: A Different Sort of Virus

By Kevin Goss

When the first shutdowns happened in mid-March, I was suddenly whisked away from the dynamic freedom of college life and plopped back into the unremarkable mundanity of life back home. I traveled six hours from my residence hall in Oxford, Ohio to my former childhood bedroom and had only a few days to adjust before my mom hit me with an absolutely dreadful reminder—I needed a job. While these weren't exactly words I was excited to hear, there was no denying she was right. Our family needed the money, and so did my student loans.

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



Photo by Pixabay | Pexels

To start, I was certainly not treated like a hero. In early stages, nearly every customer yelled or cursed at me. I had worked in customer service before, but this store's shoppers were an entirely new level of nasty. While inspiring commercials praised me for my noble efforts, patrons hurled expletive-laden tirades my way. The frustration of customers was only compounded by the fact that record numbers of people were coming into the store. The store's manager told me he had never seen the store as busy as it was in the forty years he had worked there. This abundance was not only of the shoppers, but of their items as well. Most purchases I rang up totaled around \$400 to \$600 on average, and customers often used multiple carts. I had never seen groceries purchased en masse like this, and learning a new cash register system made things even harder on me. Customers grew more and more impatient, and one of my female coworkers was even physically shoved by a grown man after she "bagged his groceries wrong." Transgressions such as these became somewhat 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 my illness and my 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 \$2.00 an hour for what they called "hero pay." It turns out his company was represented by a labor union who negotiated the extra wage increase. Because of this and other perks that made his workplace more attractive to me, I gave into my newfound mercenary nature and sent in an application. I got hired, and enjoyed benefits like longer and more frequent breaks. Very nice! Or at least, it was nice for about 4 days until my new corporation decided to end our "hero pay" in mid-May of 2020 because apparently that's when the global plague ended. Who knew it ended so soon? I can't blame my employer for this, however. Times were tough, and they are only the fifth largest retailer in the entire world. Their profits went up 90% 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 continually cut our hours in half. This meant that not only were my coworkers and I earning significantly less money, but also many of us didn't meet the required hours to be considered “full time” workers. Thus, benefits like health insurance were stripped away. While I am fortunate enough to be covered by my parents’ insurance, many of my older (and more vulnerable) coworkers worried for the safety of themselves and their loved ones.

My experience working during the pandemic opened my eyes to the hardships workers often face at the hands of their employers, and the disrespectful nature many customers 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 on their own. Those who make a conscious effort to be kind and compassionate are a cure to this worldwide ailment.

# SURVIVING LOSS

The transition from young adults to adulthood is something all college students face. New responsibilities in the workplace change who we think we are, and it changes how others may see us, now as employees before young people. Sometimes your position in life weighs heavy on you. And the pandemic only increased this feeling of isolation. The percentage of adults under age 30 with recent symptoms of anxiety or a depressive disorder rose significantly about five months after the U.S. imposed COVID-19 related lockdowns and reported rising deaths from the fast-spreading virus.<sup>1</sup> Loss, or feeling lost, has shaped college students' experiences, and we have come out of the pandemic as different people.



Exhausted Physicians | FamVeld/Shutterstock.com

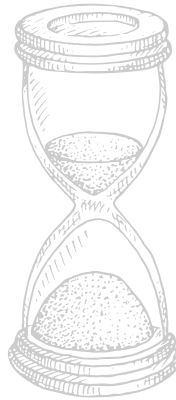
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# The Day Everything Changed

By Grace Driscoll

Time. One never realizes how precious it is until it's taken away. And time was stripped from the world by one simple phrase, one vicious virus, the Coronavirus Disease 2019. COVID-19, a simple noun that triggers many people. It's a word that needs no explanation. It goes without saying that the year 2020 will go down in history. It affected everyone in a plethora of ways, changing 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. We went from having the time of our lives, no curfew, no indoor capacity limits, and no virtual 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 13, 2020 and my friends and I decided to go out for brunch. It was nine of us girls and we went to Patterson's Cafe. We sat at a big round table in the back corner of the restaurant. As we were all sitting there, we received an email from Miami University. It said we will be going home for two weeks. We cheered with joy thinking it would just be a temporary break from classes. Oh boy, were we wrong. After brunch we scurried back to Scott Hall, our dorm, got dressed and went to go hangout with all of our friends. It was a beautiful, sunny day. We were sitting on a big couch in front of the Sigma Phi Epsilon house. We were 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 ( the days have all blurred together since then) we were notified that we could not go back to campus for the remainder of the semester. All of the sudden that laughter turned to tears and anger. I was thinking to myself, "Why! This is so stupid, everything is going to be fine." Oh boy, was I wrong. An amazing semester has been ruined. For as long as I could remember, I was always told "college is the best four years of your life." And just like that something so precious was taken away. The strike of COVID-19 took more from me than I ever thought imaginable. It didn't just take away a semester of college. It took away time from people I love. I couldn't be with my friends or my extended family.

The day after we found out about our two-week “vacation” I had to go say goodbye to someone who meant the world to me, my grandmother. We drove over ten hours to New Jersey to be submerged into a world of chaos.

When we arrived, we went straight to the hospital. Upon arrival, the hospitals were already enforcing protocols. We had our temperature checked and we 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. She was lying there, practically lifeless. Next to her sat my grandfather who refused to leave her side or let go of her hand. Each cousin went in and said our goodbyes and left my father and his sister and their spouses to stay with her. Us cousins went back to my aunt’s house and ordered dinner and sat around waiting for the call that she passed. But it never came. It was days, she held on for days.

After she peacefully passed came the funeral. We were the last funeral before everything closed down. When we were in New Jersey another email came through saying that our classes would be switching to virtual learning for the rest of the semester and if we were in the dorms, which I was at the time, our stuff had to be moved out by a certain date. Unfortunately, I would not be home in time to move my stuff out and everything I had was back at school. Nicely enough, my best friend drove up to Miami and gathered some of my belongings while I was out east grieving. All of the sudden it hit me; this 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. Classes changed from in-person to completely online, virtual learning. This has been a difficult transition for me because I have had to basically teach myself everything. It wasn’t just an adaption for us students, but for the professors as well. Many professors had to reconstruct their whole lesson plans for online friendly content. It had been a challenge to say the least. I feel we do not receive the same education we used to. It has become more of a “teach yourself” and apply it scenario. Some professors were absolutely incredible and worked extremely hard with their students to adapt together. It has been a struggle and a learning process, but as time passed by we learned better each day.

Here we are, one year later and COVID-19 is still here. We went from a shut down to a mask mandate and a major loss of time. As college students, we lost half of a semester of memories, laughs, and fun. But the seniors, they lost their last semester of college with their friends who grew to be their family. They lost the most precious moments to bond with their classmates one last time. To make matters even worse, they lost their graduation; their one final time to all be together. Instead, they were sent off into the world without a formal goodbye. The seniors left, got jobs, and never looked back. But the rest of us Miamians were unsure of what college would like. Now, being back at school, everything is different, but at least we are here on-campus. I am not sure if anything will ever return to normal, but I am truly grateful for the time that I have now.



## Fog and Lights

By Jenny Robinson

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

Through the thin walls, the sound of their roommates' own Zoom classes filter in, joining the ever-present din and the stifling fog in their brain. Once it would have annoyed them, made it difficult to concentrate, and maybe it still did on some level. But the fog numbed it, numbed everything really. The fog that hung like a thick wall of smoke in the air at all times, burning like ash 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 full time at minimum wage. 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 was. But her room doesn't have the fog.

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

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



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

*Maybe*, they said again. And maybe they would.



Photo by Kilian Seiler | Unsplash

# SURVIVING ISOLATION

Loss seemed to characterize the early stages of the pandemic: loss of normalcy, of other people, and of self. Many of us had to alter our lives in some way, staying home and away from others for extended periods of time. So, on top of everything else we had lost, it was easy to feel like we had lost our connection with the outside world, too. Feelings of distance were widespread, and emotions were heavier to carry when you felt separated from others. Even introverts struggled with the alone time. The next few chapters highlight the impact of isolation for weeks on end, even for those who thought they might enjoy it.





## **An Introvert Stuck at Home During the Pandemic**

**By Emma Kazmaier**

In March 2020, the world seemed to shut down. COVID-19 made its way to the United States and caused schools and businesses to close until further notice. Millennials and Gen Z had never really seen anything like this. To me, it seemed like a weird dream or as if we were living in a different reality. It didn't seem like something that would actually happen in our society. It was a strange experience, one I never thought would happen in my lifetime. As a result of the pandemic, we were forced to stay home for months in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This impacted me so much more than I thought it would.

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

During the many months of quarantine, I watched multiple TV series and movies and even downloaded TikTok, which I had been opposed to before. Society had already been very digital, but I felt 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. In a way, I enjoyed this at first, because it sometimes gave me an excuse not to have to go out and socialize, I could do it right from my computer. I was able to just stay at home and spend more time by myself and relax.

However, after a month or two of quarantining, I was ready to get out of the house. The days merged together, and it seemed like one long day that wouldn't end. I was getting tired of being with my family all the time, and I wanted to see my friends again in person. I didn't realize how much the pandemic and quarantine would impact me. Knowing I'm an introvert, I thought I would be fine being stuck at home for so long. I was for a while, but it got to a certain point where I needed to get out and do something. I began to get really bored and was tired of doing the same thing every day, only leaving the house to take many walks with my family outside.

Just doing schoolwork and hanging out at home every day was getting really old, even for a person like me who loves a routine. While I still felt like an introvert, I longed to see my friends and family in person. I didn't realize how much I missed people until I couldn't see them anymore. I started realizing how many things I took for granted and decided that maybe there is such a thing as too much time alone.

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, including those who enjoy spending time alone, because even introverts can't be alone forever. The pandemic made many people feel isolated from society and loved ones, and even those who enjoy time to themselves don't want to feel *completely* isolated. I know I personally realized that as an introvert, I don't want too much time alone because it can get lonely and boring.

Even though we're beginning to go out and see people again in person, I still find myself sometimes reverting to my introverted ways of wanting to spend some time alone. Now that vaccines are available and businesses are opening back up, I miss the times when I had an excuse to just stay at home. This doesn't surprise me, because not even a pandemic could change who I am as a person. I still do enjoy time to myself and take advantage of it when I can. However, I appreciate seeing my friends and going places again because it makes life more exciting, and every day is a new adventure. Going out and seeing people makes my time to myself seem more valuable because it's not something I'm doing constantly. I also feel like spending so much time isolated from others makes me appreciate the people and friendships I have in my life. The pandemic has made me appreciate a balance between alone time and socializing. I've learned that as an introvert, I still need both.

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



A Quarantine Walk



## Dreaming of a Way Forward

By Angela Weckle

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

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

Though that is not my reality now and neither is it my dream.

At the start of my fall semester I got hired to work at a grocery store. At times, it was one of the only things that brought me out of my apartment and around people. I still can't decide whether I like this fact or not. Classes were online. Meetings were online. People were online. And this meant less going out and seeing people and more sitting at my desk in my tiny room in my tiny apartment. Before the pandemic it was so easy to see and meet and hang out with other people—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. Though suddenly there was this set time in my week, every week, where I knew I had a reason to leave my little apartment and venture out into the world that we now live in.

My new routine was anything but normal to the life I had lived before, but that's usually how life is: ever-changing. It is incredible to me how easily I adjusted into my new way of living. Now in my junior year of college, I was off campus not just in terms of classes, 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 four-by-four shoe box of a dorm room. I had my own space, my own bedroom, and I was able to spend the newfound time inside to do things like discover new recipes, catch up on TV shows, and spend time with myself.

Spend time with myself...I know that sounds funny, but it's incredible what time alone does. It made me discover a new side of myself and allowed me to appreciate time spent alone when time spent alone was what I was given.

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

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

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

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

Moving forward, I am left with a mission to not let life pass me by. Even though it felt as though time stopped or at least slowed when this pandemic hit, life has never truly been that way. Time does not stop. People have experienced hardships and have still kept moving. People—like first responders and educators—have stepped up. People have kept living, working, and taking care of their families. This has allowed me to recognize that time does not freeze even when life gets rough and neither should you. From now on, I will carry this message with me and keep moving forward through both the good times and the bad, taking action over the things that inspire me.





night Netflix binge. That changed when my classes went online. I now spent all day staring at my screen, watching video-lectures and trying to understand my new Canvas modules.

I didn't want to fill my free time with more long hours spent staring at my laptop or television, but there weren't many other options. My classes were almost entirely asynchronous, so aside from turning in my assignments, I didn't have anything to do during the day. I couldn't work because my place of employment was closed, but my family members were working all day. I couldn't go hang out with my friends, or go shopping just for fun, and I could only go on so many walks while avoiding human contact before it got boring. Because of this, I took to my room, where my stocked bookshelves awaited. When spring break hit just two weeks after I got home from school, I really only stopped reading to eat meals. It wasn't like I had anything better to do.

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

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 truer. Because I was reading so much, I started talking to a few of my friends from high school who I knew had read some of the books I was getting into. We started a group chat during that first month of quarantine that we still chat in every day, a year later. Books rekindled the friendships that I had kind of lost due to the distance college put between us. My college roommate also took notice of the distance I was creating between us. Luckily, she was more than willing to force me into weekly FaceTime calls. To make sure I didn't back out of the calls in a moment of panic, we started a sort of two-person book club to discuss what we were reading. We read books together, despite being states apart, and spent hours on those calls. Not only did it help to make sure I actually had some form of face-to-face (or face-to-screen) contact when I couldn't physically be with my 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.



# SURVIVING CHANGE

The COVID-19 pandemic had wide-reaching impacts. For some, it caused feelings of grief and isolation, but for others it simply brought about change. This change ranged from negative to positive to simply different. Some people found upsides to quarantine: increased time with their loved ones, more time to spend on hobbies, etc. Many others were less enthused, missing out on some big life events and experiencing plenty of technical difficulties. And of course there were people who simply noted that the world was changing around us to accommodate the effects of this virus. From birthday parties to religious gatherings, COVID-19 has forced everyone to rethink how they live their lives.



Photo by Matteo Jojorson | Unsplash

# Surviving Personal Change

COVID-19 thrust more free time onto people than they knew what to do with. People famously picked up every new habit from learning instruments to making homemade bread. But for some, they were able to find more satisfying change by looking within themselves.



Photo by Manny Becerra | Unsplash



# The Lessons We Learn From Dogs: Pandemic Edition

By Bailey Miller

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

## 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 love spending time with the most who we have had to physically distance ourselves from for over a year. We feel this isolation and longing for connection with strangers, too! We miss seeing the barista's smile at our local coffee shop. We long for the day when we can interact with a new classmate without worrying about another exposure to the virus. We grasp for any sliver of interaction with others that we can get.

Dogs have not felt the same way. In fact, their lives have progressed in an inverse direction—from isolation to connection. The countless hours of countless days that we used to spend at work or in class away from our dogs have transformed into the hours and days that we spend with them. They feel more connected to us than ever. When this pandemic ends, they will long for the days when they could spend every second with us. They will feel as though they took this time for granted, just as we have felt about the time we lived in normalcy before the pandemic. Their experience has been the direct opposite of ours.

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

## Encouraging Good Habits

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

Instead, we are putting more effort into making sure we can simply get by as we confront new challenges such as Zoom fatigue and isolation.

Even so, dogs encourage us to nurture some good habits that can help to keep us energized and positive. Dogs need exercise, and as many of us have taken our dogs on countless walks throughout quarantines and lockdowns, we have gotten to exercise as well. The act of owning a dog, therefore, has helped us keep our bodies healthy and in-shape.

Dogs thrive on routine, just as many people do. They wake up around the same time every morning, eat a certain number of times throughout the day, need to go outside to do their business X amount of times after eating, and so on. Owning a dog thus provides a routine for those who feel as though they do not have one since everything has shifted to a more flexible, online format. They keep us from sleeping in too late or sitting in our desk chairs all day. Dogs also *love* food, so I'm sure they are happy that the pandemic has fostered the new habit of every meal being at home; it means more food scraps for them!

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

### **Moving Away from Materialism**

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

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

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

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



📍 Bailey's dogs: Alexei (front), Schumi (middle), and Sascha (back)



## Pandemic Fitness

By Sam Mittenthal

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

Being stuck inside caused weight gain despite many people eating healthier as takeout and fast food became less available due to restaurant closures. Food can become a coping mechanism during times of stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Gym closures could have been a cause for the population's weight gain. Monitoring food intake and calories is a great way to keep control of weight along with a healthy amount of exercise every day. The pandemic caused many people to pick up hobbies such as cooking since there was much more time spent at home this past year. Due to COVID-19, people have turned to local and micro-local food sources, straying away from the formerly popular foreign ingredients as they became more expensive due to the pandemic. People relied more on home-cooked meals as restaurants remained closed. Because of the stress of the pandemic, comfort foods have risen in popularity and most likely will be here to stay for a while. Growing food has become more popular as people realize the financial benefits of homegrown foods. Experts predict that the trend of eating early will continue to gain in popularity. Eating food used to be a social activity but COVID-19 changed that. Before COVID-19, people in the United States ate half their meals outside of the home.

It seems that home cooking may be a form of therapy, especially with loved ones. The truth is there are inexpensive gym items that can make working out at home easy. The gym closures due to the pandemic have caused people to become creative with how they exercise. Golf and tennis are great ways to get safe exercise. Swimming is safe as long as the pool is socially distanced. Be creative with movement: walk up and down stairs or do lunges and jumps around the house. Work out with friends using virtual services like Zoom. An immediate positive of exercise is reduced anxiety, which is especially important during a pandemic where anxiety levels are increasing. Although exercise is important, be wary of the health and safety of yourself and those around you. A few minutes of exercise per day is proven to increase and improve your brain function.

Be careful in gyms as germs thrive there. They are a safe haven for germs because of the increased temperature inside. COVID-19 can remain on surfaces for hours, which can make the gym a dangerous place to go. It is important to have hospital-grade sanitizer when working out. If you are worried about getting sick, working out using online exercise services is an option.

Focusing on working out can help mend the anxiety caused by COVID-19. It is very easy to lose discipline while working out, especially if you are working out alone. Online plans and free fitness apps can keep you motivated and on track. Social media workout videos are a great way to learn unique ways to workout with items in your home, such as sliders with hand towels. “Make a date with exercise”—schedule a time to workout and stick with it. A good workout is a HIIT workout or High-Intensity Interval Training.

It is important to stay mentally fit as well as physically fit during a pandemic. People with a history of mental illness need to keep their mental fitness in check as the pandemic can bring back old issues. Limiting exposure to social media can help your mental health. Educate yourself on mental health using trusted sources and websites.

Never be afraid to reach out, protect, and hold on to your social connections the best you can. It is important to refrain from alcohol and tobacco as they may be used as a crutch and/or coping mechanism. Look for ways to make a positive impact in your community; this may help boost your mental wellbeing. The mental side of fitness should be acknowledged and respected just as much as the physical side. American culture is heading into the direction of being more individualized. The COVID-19 pandemic has allowed us to catch up with family members and reconnect. This is important for our mental health to know we are not alone.

- Start each morning with a clear mind; this can help boost your mood and start your day off on a positive note.
- Keeping a strict schedule is vital to mental wellbeing in a time when it is easy to slack off because of all the free time we have.
- Trying new hobbies is a great way to boost your mental wellbeing—these do not have to be physical workouts. Try out cooking or another hobby that you previously haven’t had the time to do.
- Put time away every day to spend with family. Try to limit social media use during this time.
- Exercise increases blood flow to the brain which helps you stay mentally healthy. This is important during a pandemic. Aerobic exercise is a great way to keep your brain healthy while we are forced to be indoors more than usual. Exercises do not need to be intense; walking and/or cycling will have positive effects.
- Analyze the stress in your life and try to target it. By putting the stress “on the table” and realizing where it is coming from, it will be easier to target and try to eliminate that stress. This will improve your mental wellbeing.
- A great way to remain healthy mentally is to practice yoga. Yoga helps the mind tremendously and will decrease stress and anxiety, as well as improve physical fitness.
- Limiting anxiety medications can help with your mental wellbeing. Although using medications to assist in falling asleep may be beneficial in the short term, this can create reliance and natural sleep is always more beneficial to your health.



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

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





## A Quarantine Christmas

By Emily Hickman

It all started with a breakup. My boyfriend and I, having survived the COVID-19 pandemic quarantining together for four months with his family, finally broke up. It was mid-September, meaning I was screwed. I hadn't planned on the breakup—I 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, which is one of the reasons I stayed in Ohio with my boyfriend when the pandemic hit instead of going home to my parents in Idaho. I was terrified of transmitting COVID-19 to him from planes I had traveled on to get home. Not knowing what to do, I called my big sister to fix everything.

“Hey, kid! What's up?”

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

“Come here!”

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 50-pound weight limit as I shoveled half my closet into the biggest suitcase I owned.

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

*Just landed. Headed to baggage claim.*

*Almost there, meet you by door 4.*

When I walked out, my sister looked disgusted.

"You look homeless."

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

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

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

"Thank you!"

"That wasn't a compliment."

My sister's boyfriend, Kyle, was playing chauffeur and laughed at my comment, making me instantly like him. My sister rolled her eyes, a smile creeping up on her face. We went and got In-N-Out (overrated), and I saw her apartment for the first time.

It was a cute one bedroom close to downtown Sacramento and perfect for her. I spent the first night on an air mattress that took up her entire living room, dreaming of the SoCal vacay she had promised me.

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I spent the next few days in Sacramento exploring the city with my sister. We spent a lot of time shopping and eating, like any good vacation. On December 23 (my family calls it Christmas Eve Eve), Kyle, my sister, and I all piled into Kyle's SUV to head to Los Angeles (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 out toward the ocean and I got my own room with a real bed! We unloaded the car, pulling out suitcases, duffle bags, and box after box of wrapped presents. My sister also insisted on lugging a pathetic four-foot tree with us for the holidays, so we had to set that up too. She forgot to bring ornaments, so we hung our stockings on the branches, hoping the bowing plastic branches would hold the weight of our knitted socks.

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

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"They call it the Newport Bubble," my sister explained to me one night on the beach. We had found a lifeguard stand earlier that day and came back after dark to sit on it and enjoy the 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-foot distances 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 walking between destinations. On the beach and on our patio, the two most frequently visited spots of this vacation, I could be socially distanced and breathe freely.

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We spent four days in Newport and drove back to Sacramento on December 27. I flew home on December 30. A COVID-19 scare at the Dallas Fort Worth Air Traffic Control center created a five-hour long airport shutdown, which led to me missing my connecting flight. I called my sister, sobbing in the airport terminal after the gate agent said there was nothing she could do to help me. My sister spent 20 minutes on hold with the airline trying to get some information while I panicked about how I was going to get back to Ohio.


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



 Santa Monica Pier



 The Very Sad Christmas Tree

# Surviving College Change

As we know, many communities were affected by COVID-19. The writers featured in this book know this more than most, and experienced it first hand as their college experience was moved online. Their experiences varied, but they can all agree that online college was quite a big change.



Photo by Paul Siewert | Unsplash



## [No] Tech Support

By Charlie Ortman

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

My biology final was on an evil software known as Proctorio; this was the reason it went so poorly, or didn't go at all. I had run into some very minor problems with Proctorio in the past, but nothing could compare to what was about to happen. The other small problems I had run into with Proctorio happened in a classroom, so professors and proctors were able to quickly help me.

At the time of the exam, I had an 83% in the class, but it was credit/no credit. I figured I had nothing to worry about. I studied a bit for a 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. Toward the end of the pre-checks, the Proctorio system crashed. It wasn't a Miami University network issue or an issue with my WiFi; the Proctorio network went down. I was taken out of the test, and Canvas believed that I had completed it because I was automatically taken out of Proctorio due to its crash.



Charlie's frustration with Proctorio

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, when she said I would not be able to take the exam. Though the class was being taken credit/no credit, I wasn't sure if I would pass with several other assignments that needed to be graded and a zero on the final exam.

My professor originally thought that I was kicked from the exam due to starting it too late and not having enough time to finish. But as I stated before, I was never able to even view the exam as the system crashed prior to me finishing the Proctorio pre-checks. This further complicated things because I had to email her again 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 especially prepared for setbacks like this because this was the first time measures like Proctorio were ever put in place. Online schooling and exams was a whole new frontier brought about by COVID-19. Had we not been in a pandemic, this exam would have been taken in person on pencil and paper with no possibility of a computer malfunction halting my exam. My professor remained adamant in her stance 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 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 might have run into this problem more than once.

Because the biology final took place on the last day of finals, I had nothing else to occupy my mind with. My professor was set on not allowing me to take the exam, and grades were due in a few days. I got very little sleep as I awaited the answer from my professor. I wasn't able to do anything fun to take my mind off of this situation either as everything was closed in my town, even the basketball courts at the local park. After a few days of heart palpitations, my professor emailed me and said that I would pass the class by a very small margin. I needed a 60% to pass, and I received a 65.92%. 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 different universities were not as lucky as I was. I haven't had to use Proctorio since this incident, though friends of mine still do have to use it. COVID-19 has made everyone's lives a bit more difficult, and Proctorio only made it harder. It's great to see that all of my professors since that class have recognized the problems Proctorio can cause. If COVID-19 persists, hopefully Miami University and the rest of the academic world will find a better system for proctoring online exams.



## Corona College

By Gabriella Dobson

Everyone has been affected by the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the time spent in the pandemic. Some have experienced worse things than others. There are people dying all around us, even an entire year after what should've been a few weeks. The virus cannot be brushed aside or downplayed, because it is deadly and it has ruined many people's lives. Let us take a step back and think about a type of demographic that has been destroyed, but not by death. This specific demographic is college students. Now, it may sound silly or ridiculous to want to understand how college students have been affected by this pandemic. However, COVID-19 didn't just steal the social lives of college students, it also stole their education.

### The Beginning

Any Miami University student 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 classes resumed again on Friday that same week online. That was the birth of Zoom University. Students were struggling this first week, from making traveling plans to trying to move off campus to attending classes. There was a sigh of relief when spring break came along and forced everyone to take a break.

### Social

College students went from partying every night and hanging with each other in their dorms and seeing their friends daily to total lockdown. The difference from last year to this year is astounding. Common areas in academic and residential buildings have seen better days. Students living on campus are bound by all the rules of the pandemic. They are limited to the people they bring into their rooms and they have to wear a mask traveling around their hall. One thing in favor of the pandemic is that there aren't as many people living in residential halls, but that is not in favor of the people that do. It is like living in a ghost town, seeing another person once in a blue moon. There are few places to socialize on campus since many things are either shut down or don't allow indoor seating. Some of the only social interaction people get is from their in-person classes, which is also limited because most people don't have any in-person classes. It also doesn't help that people are unable to congregate outside because of the cold weather at the moment. It is possible that once the weather warms and spring is here, it will be like old times with students sitting out in the lawns together throwing a frisbee. As for now, the social scene at Miami has also seen better days.

## **Education**

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

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

For the Spring semester of 2021, some students were fortunate enough to resume in-person while others had to remain online. The majority is still synchronous and asynchronous with a little sprinkle of in-person. It was a big transition, and maybe a tougher one to manage all the different formations of classes. Imagine walking to an in-person class and then having another one online after, while still needing to complete work for an asynchronous class. There is no balance between the classes because there are not always set times, which can decrease students' time management and time able to be spent for one 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 in the fall of 2021. By the end of this semester, two sets of senior college students have gone through their final semester and been stripped of it. Their college experience was stolen from them, and hopefully there won't have to be a third set of seniors. 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, and everyone is being affected differently.



# Surviving Social Change

When many events were cancelled to prevent the spread of COVID-19, people worked to find ways to celebrate life, ranging from new birthday party setups to drive-in church services. While this change was not exactly welcome, it forced people to try and find the good in a bad situation.



Photo by Raj Rana | Unsplash



## A New Way to Celebrate

By Hannah Clarke

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

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

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

### Graduations

The first notable celebration that my family had subsequent to the onset of the pandemic was a few short months after quarantine began, for my brother's graduation in May 2020. He was graduating high school, which I had done two years prior to him. I kept thinking back to my own graduation and comparing it to how his looked in light of the pandemic. I felt like I had gotten so much attention between walking across a stage with a packed auditorium to receive my diploma and having a graduation party with all of my friends and family. I felt terrible that it looked like my brother was going to miss out on all of the recognition I had received two years earlier. Since academics aren't something he particularly enjoys, graduating was a big deal for him and my family, and I felt guilty that I had gotten to celebrate mine in a bigger way than we were planning to do for him.

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 the memories that my brother had collected from his four years in high school. We sat in our living room and watched as a small family of five, reminiscing over the past few years. It felt so intimate to reflect on those moments with my family, and I still go back and watch the video sometimes to recreate that feeling.

Since we were only allowed one car, my parents, brother, grandma, and I filed into my dad's Honda and drove to the drive-in together. When we got there, we were all excited to watch my brother on the big screen. I don't think we ever discussed how excited we were to watch me walk across the stage

when I graduated two years earlier. As such a normal practice, no one really thought anything of it. But watching my brother—even if it was for 10 seconds at most—on the big screen at a drive-in theater? Now that was something worth getting excited about.

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

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

### **Birthdays**

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

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

To be honest, it was amazing. I love Chinese food, and it’s normally so difficult to get all of my old high school friends together at once, so it was exciting to get to meet up with all of them, even if it was over a Zoom call. We never did get to watching a movie—we had a lot of catching up to do—but it was so enjoyable regardless. A faint whisper of a party was more than enough to remind me 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 the pandemic, I learned to celebrate the little things, like getting out of the house for the first time in five days or finally being able to order my go-to Starbucks drink again.

Others shared in my appreciation of the small things, too. During those summer weeks I wrote an article where I asked college students what they missed about life before the pandemic. Most answers

were along the lines of “having study dates with my friends,” “going to the dining hall alone and leaving with a group of friends,” or “being able to participate in classes or extracurriculars.” I’m sure if I had asked those same students before the pandemic hit what their favorite part about college was, their answers would be much different than what they gave after experiencing their lives turned upside down. The pandemic had a way of bringing us back to the basics and reminding us of what’s truly important.

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

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

Although 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.



A Quarantine Graduation Celebration





## Drive-In Church: The New Normal?

By Mady Wilson

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

My own church, one that I like to think is very liberal, had been holding drive-in church services since the end of the lockdown in May and moved to recorded online services when it was too cold for our pastor to stand outdoors. Drive-in church is simple enough, and it was an actual technique used in the 1950s to curb the lack of church facilities and the new resentment toward dress clothes.<sup>2</sup> 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, rolled down a window or two, and sang Christmas carols together. We even sang "updated" carols full of satirical lyrics, poking fun at COVID-19. Probably a pretty weird sight, but it was the safest way to keep our traditions alive.



<sup>2</sup>Koeth, S. (2020). "Perspective | drive-in church is a 1950s throwback—and may be the future of religious practice." The Washington Post, WP Company. Retrieved from [www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/05/10/drive-in-church-is-1950s-throwback-may-be-future-religious-practice/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/05/10/drive-in-church-is-1950s-throwback-may-be-future-religious-practice/).

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

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 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 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.”<sup>3</sup> And like other naïve officials and citizens, Bishop believed that “Easter Sunday, Amen, this thing will all be done and over with” and that “God was in control.”

In July, 236 people, 60% of their congregation, got COVID-19 after an Oregon church held services during lockdown.<sup>4</sup> The Lighthouse Pentecostal Church in Union County held services in defiance of Oregon’s stay-at-home order. These experiences aren’t unique; many places of worship have been connected with superspreader events. So why do churches continue to open their doors?

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

Like almost everything in our country, religion has become increasingly polarized. Conservative Christians can often be found in the right or far-right wing, potentially using Christianity justification for ignorance at best and insurrection at worst. Unfortunately, the belief in the coronavirus 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. Protests like these were organized by right-wing groups adding God into the mix.

Christian distrust in the scientific community and governmental authorities was not something new brought on by the pandemic. It is part of a vast history of associating physical sickness with spiritual strength. This idea has been around for a millennium and first attacked Jewish people.<sup>5</sup> When Christianity was a very young religion, Christians sought to separate themselves from Jews as much as possible, labeling them impure and refusing medical attention from Jewish doctors. We see the

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<sup>3</sup> Callahan, D. (2020). Solid rock pastor targets reaction to church’s services during Sunday sermon. Dayton Daily News. Retrieved from [www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/solid-rock-pastor-targets-reaction-church-services-during-sunday-sermon/15QyOacdLeAXnh7AyQ2KwK/](http://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/solid-rock-pastor-targets-reaction-church-services-during-sunday-sermon/15QyOacdLeAXnh7AyQ2KwK/).

<sup>4</sup> Woodward, A. (2020). 236 people got the coronavirus after an Oregon church held services during lockdown—More evidence that religious gatherings are superspreading hot spots. Retrieved from [www.businessinsider.com/church-oregon-largest-coronavirus-outbreak-superspreading-2020-6](http://www.businessinsider.com/church-oregon-largest-coronavirus-outbreak-superspreading-2020-6).

<sup>5</sup> Bonar, C. (2020). Jesus is my vaccine has a millennium-long history rooted in antisemitism.” Religion Dispatches. Retrieved from [www.religiondispatches.org/jesus-is-my-vaccine-has-a-millennium-long-history-rooted-in-antisemitism/](http://www.religiondispatches.org/jesus-is-my-vaccine-has-a-millennium-long-history-rooted-in-antisemitism/).

same attitude now when some members of the far right seek to separate themselves from all liberal ideas, including vaccination.

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

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

## It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

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

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

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

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





## Social Media During a Pandemic: A TikTok Study

By Molly McNamara

### A Creative Outlet

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

The whole world got behind TikTok and was able to share authentic experiences that they were having during COVID-19. Residents of Italy were sharing beautiful videos of people harmonizing and singing out of their apartment windows, and it gave people hope. When other countries got COVID-19 under control and started lifting restrictions, the whole world was able to share in that and see what the future can hold. Now in 2021, still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, TikTok is the leading iPhone app globally in the Apple Store after an incredible year of growth and even more growth projected for years to come.<sup>6</sup> 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.



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<sup>6</sup>Airnow. (2021, February 25). Leading iPhone apps in the Apple App Store worldwide in January 2021, by number of downloads. Statista. <https://www-statista-com.proxy.lib.miamioh.edu/statistics/695791/top-iphone-apps-worldwide-by-number-of-downloads/>

## A Space for Activism

In addition to the fun and light-hearted trends that TikTok bestowed upon us, it also became a place for activism. From the Presidential election of 2020, to sustainability efforts, to Black Lives Matter, and more, TikTok helped light a political fire for users, most notably Gen Z. Even *Ratatouille: The 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 ended up raising \$2 million.

One statistic even notes that 26% of TikTok users attended a Black Lives Matter protest as of July, compared to only 13% of non-TikTok users. For Gen Z specifically, 57% said that TikTok helps them stay up to date on the news.<sup>7</sup> Being an active member of society is becoming part of this generation's DNA, and TikTok is helping to solidify that.

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

So despite the fun side of TikTok that it easily publicized, it became a place for people to hear new perspectives, take in news, and learn about social and political issues. This led to actual action being taken, and it exposed us to different perspectives without the filters of Instagram and the character limits of Twitter.

## A COVID-19 Information Hub

The downtime caused by the pandemic certainly contributed to the rise of TikTok usage. It wasn't just the new trend, but it also contained important information as actual health information was shared on TikTok by medical professionals or patients with COVID-19 who were documenting their journey with the disease. Less than 1% of the medical information shared was misleading or false.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to TikTok creators using their platforms to share information, TikTok itself even partnered with the World Health Organization (WHO) at the very beginning of the pandemic in order to curb the spread of misinformation. They had members from WHO answer questions, dispel myths, and even do live streams for TikTok users.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hosie, K. (2020, July 29). More than just Tok: Gen Z's activism On TikTok is outperforming the performative. Reach3Insights.  
<https://www.reach3insights.com/blog/tiktok-social-activism>

<sup>8</sup> Ostrovsky, A. M., & Chen, J. R. (2020). TikTok and Its Role in COVID-19 Information Propagation. *The Journal of adolescent health*, 67(5), 730.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.039>

<sup>9</sup> Hutchinson, A. (2020, March 17). *TikTok partners with world health organization on COVID-19 information program*. Social Media Today.  
<https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/tiktok-partners-with-world-health-organization-on-covid-19-information-prog/574259/>

Medical professionals are 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 skeptics to get the injection.

### **A Social Media Anomaly**

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

57% of people have a positive sentiment towards TikTok, whereas, when asked about social media overall, only 27% had a positive sentiment.<sup>10</sup> Whether the negativity on the other platforms drove users to TikTok, or TikTok just genuinely gives users a more authentic experience, this is a social media platform that has mostly positive sentiments attached.

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

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<sup>10</sup> Molla, R. (2021, March 1). Posting less, posting more, and tired of it all: How the pandemic has changed all social media. Vox.  
<https://www.vox.com/recode/22295131/social-media-use-pandemic-covid-19-instagram-tiktok>

# Surviving Through Creativity

From gatherings, to celebrations, to new apps, the social world changed more than imaginable in a short period of time. At first, we thought it would lose its connection to one another, but in reality we just found new ways to connect. We also found new ways to get creative from music albums, to animated television, to theatre performances. The next chapters explore the ways in which our creativity was a spark in a dull time.



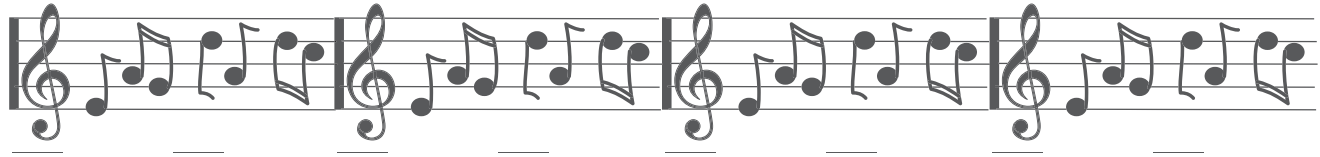
Photo by Ussama Azam | Unsplash





## Music During the Pandemic: Through the Lens of Taylor Swift's "folklore"

By Corie Maurer



The lyrical genius of Taylor Swift cannot be ignored nor denied. Many people know her as the country and pop princess that came in and out of relevance for the better half of this past decade. In 2020, the world was practicing social distancing to combat the highly contagious disease, COVID-19, when Swift stunned the public with two new albums. *Folklore*, Swift's eighth studio album, was released in late July. This piece of work received a Grammy for Album of the Year. Swift contributes the artistry to her time away from large crowds after her seventh studio album tour was cancelled for safety precautions.

Rolling Stone noted that "*Folklore* really feels like the debut album of a whole new Swift—her narrative scope has opened up..."<sup>11</sup> She moved away from the mainstream pop and country genres and took on alternative styles such as indie and folk. The majority of the album is piano and acoustic guitar-oriented. The softer sound stands in stark contrast to past albums where fast, upbeat tempos were center stage. Moreover, her previous albums placed an emphasis on the emotions of first love and heartbreak, whereas in *folklore*, feelings of despair and hope are employed all throughout the album. Standouts on the record include "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 unwritten but presumed time periods.

The track "epiphany" is a hauntingly beautiful ballad that follows the plot of soldiers in war. In the first chorus, Swift paints the scene: "Keep your helmet/Keep your life, son/Just a flesh wound." This line indicates that a man has been injured. However, it is not as specific as when the second chorus spells out, "Here's your rifle/Crawling up the beaches now." The wound having been sustained by a rifle shows that the injury was not perpetuated by your typical knife mishap in the kitchen. Beyond this, the mention of beaches can be referenced to when soldiers stormed the Normandy beaches during World War II. Finally, with conviction, Swift places weight on the gut-wrenching words, "With you, I serve/With you, I fall down," and "And some things you just can't speak about." These lyrics convey a level of despair due to the image of soldiers falling down. Additionally, the lyrics "And some things you just can't speak about" directly discloses the trauma that soldiers experienced first hand. The trauma is so rooted that it is hard to put into words. On the other hand, the lyrics "But you dream of some epiphany/Just one single glimpse of relief" manifests the idea of hope.

<sup>11</sup> Sheffield, R. (2020, July 24). Taylor Swift Leaves Her Comfort Zones Behind on the Head-Spinning, Heartbreaking 'Folklore.' RollingStone. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-album-reviews/taylor-swift-leaves-her-comfort-zones-behind-on-the-head-spinning-heart-breaking-folklore-1033533/>



Ultimately, the hope of relief is what keeps the soldiers moving forward despite the pain they may internally feel.

The lyrics illustrate a literal battleground; meanwhile, the state of the world during the pandemic was characteristically similar. Doctors, nurses, and grad students can be seen as warriors because they sacrificed their time and wellbeing 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 faced as well. Finally, the death rate skyrocketed in just a few months, the same way that an army of men fatally fell down by means of a weapon. Through it all, hope was the source that fueled the flame of desire to keep people moving forward in both time periods. To this day, medical workers are doing everything they can to research and care for those in need despite the complexities of all illnesses, including COVID-19 and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In both situations, each individual was met with challenges beyond their own control. Swift touches upon this idea in the song "this is me trying." The lyrics begin with, "I've been having a hard time adjusting." This line can explain the experience that many people endured during the pandemic. Several businesses, schools, churches, recreational facilities, etc. closed temporarily or permanently. This meant that people were basically told to stay in their own homes and find a way to make the circumstances work for the time being. For many individuals who have regular routines, this came as a difficult task. It is not a simple procedure to just drop everything and switch it up quickly. A lot of trial and error had to occur before a smooth transition to this lifestyle could occur. Swift continues on with, "I just wanted you to know that this is me trying/At least I'm trying." These lyrics convey the idea that despite the struggle, Swift has not given up. She hasn't completely figured out how to cope with her new reality, but at least she is trying to. Swift is not alone in this battle. Every human in some kind of capacity was trying to cope, regardless of if it was in a healthy manner or not. An individual could lay around on the couch all day drinking themselves silly and it would still be considered trying if it is the only thing keeping them alive.

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



# The Panny Shoved Me into Animated Television

By Brianna Porter

The most upsetting thing about lockdown was that the libraries closed. I thought that I could beat the 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 re-reading books I'd already read at least twice, I needed other options. E-books were a hard no. My brain won't comprehend good writing in e-book form, and I can't read trashy books for too long, or my brain might shrivel away to nothing.

That left television, even though I wasn't particularly interested in TV. 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 sophomore year of college, so I figured I should be more proactive about that. He already recommended *Violet Evergarden*, *Your Lie in April*, and *The Seven Deadly Sins*, and I enjoyed them. I figured I could find more on my own since I had nothing but time.

For a while, I worried that TV was my lockdown "thing." People were gardening and making bread and learning to knit and all I had done was start two videogames and watch TV. 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 book TikTok.

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

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

***Adventure Time:***

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

7/10

***Hunter x Hunter:***

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

10/10

***Avatar: the Last Airbender:***

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

9/10 just for Zuko's redemption arc

***Erased:***

It's both so cute and yet so sad. That little girl cried over breakfast, and I will never forgive them for that. This one is about a thirty-year-old man traveling back in time to when he was, like, 10 so he can stop a tragedy from happening in the present and further tragedy happening in the past. Imagine a grown man's vocabulary coming out of a ten-year-old's mouth and that's 30 percent of the show. The ending was. . . a choice. Still good though.

9/10

***Phineas and Ferb:***

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

8/10 for no plot

***Blood of Zeus:***

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

9/10

### ***She-Ra and the Princesses of Power:***

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

9/10

### ***Haikyu!!:***

I didn’t think I would like this, and then I remembered that I like sports. This is about a boy who loves volleyball so much, but 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.



Photo by Jorge Zapata | Unsplash



# Making and Teaching Theatre in the Pandemic

By **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 have seen numerous friends and theatres struggle to adapt to the situation. I'm struck by how this is a familiar struggle to the theatre world. As one of our earliest artforms, theatre has confronted the dangerous spread of deadly diseases before. During the 16th and 17th centuries, English theatres were regularly ordered to close by the crown due to 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, but the option to simply travel to an area that's not affected by the pandemic is impossible. The practice of making recorded or live streamed versions of theatrical performances available to a wide audience is not new. It is possible to find original cast recordings of Broadway shows from, 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 as a medium, as opposed to a recording of a live performance, the ability for theatres to make this significant switch is a complex one. Not all theatre companies have the resources to film, upload, and pay the online-specific licensing fees involved in making a performance available online, instead of licensing associated with charging tickets for live theatre.

As with the rest of the world, the theatre world has had to treat COVID-19 as a developing situation. Initially, theatres shut down for two weeks, but that was hardly the end of the story. Theatre companies found clever ways to adapt to a much longer pandemic. One theatre company, Cincinnati Shakespeare Company, started selling the crafted goods of their theatre designer and technicians. Ranging from costume designs to simple furniture pieces, this was one small way that the theatre could keep money coming in for operation costs and paying their employees. As the pandemic wore on, the three largest theatre companies in Cincinnati worked together to create a fund to support local artists through donations, later selling tickets to recorded broadcasts and radio plays. The pandemic was a developing situation where originally, we all stayed home uncertain how to keep everyone safe. Over time, thanks to hardworking scientists and doctors we had a better understanding of how COVID-19 worked and spread. In addition, we also 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 in limited numbers and with appropriate regulations in place. Theatre companies were then able to offer these online representations of shows but still without a

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

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

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

For further information, check out [cincyshakes.com](http://cincyshakes.com) and [beanartshero.com](http://beanartshero.com).





 Ernst Nature Theatre at Miami University

# Surviving Finding "Home"

The creativity seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is nothing short of remarkable. As humans, we adapt. We show this adaptation through the ways we express ourselves from Taylor Swift to Musical Theatre. But at the end of the day, what kept all of us going through COVID-19 was home; working from home, Zooming from home, and most importantly, finding who, and what, feels like home.



Photo by Courtney Coles | Unsplash





# Home is

By Emma Naille

## Home is Place (and a Pace)

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

## Home is People

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

## **Home is a Story**

I used to read books and watch movies to escape. But now I consider them a part of my life. I consider them my own experiences. I go to them to burrow myself in a story and feel held by it. I've watched movies that made tears trickle down my face, made me seriously consider adoption, made me confront my ignorance, and made me laugh. I've re-read books I've read many times before, revisited the soft, well-worn pages of stories from my library that a younger Emma loved. I feel filled up and buoyed by these good stories. I store and treasure them up in my heart. Part of me is embarrassed by the bravado, the cringe-worthy 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 find hope when things feel hopeless and see light in darkness. They lead me to love instead of give 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, I believe more than I have ever before that God will bring water in the wilderness and plant trees in the desert. I *believe* that He will bring life where there is none. Home is a story. The one that's already written, that's reflected and repeated in every story there is, and that we're telling with our lives all this time.

## **Home is Belonging**

In this annoyingly unprecedented time, I've come to know a new definition of home. I was reading back over the dictionary definition of "home" and it was interesting to me that they use the word "permanently." Homes are almost never permanent. We attach this word to street addresses and familial relationships, but those are never permanent either. I think the *real* home, the true definition, is belonging. 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, character, creativity, and soul, where people can come as they are and just be.



Emma's Home During Quarantine

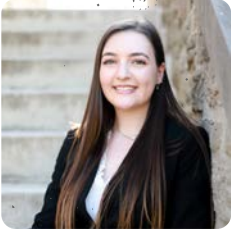
After a year of uncertainty in every aspect of life, we're all peering towards the future, hoping to forget some of the insanity that became our "new normal" during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some things, such as online schooling and drive-in graduations, may regain a sense of novelty as we transition back into a world where gatherings can occur. But having lived through these events even once has forced our mindsets to shift and prioritize what is really necessary for survival.

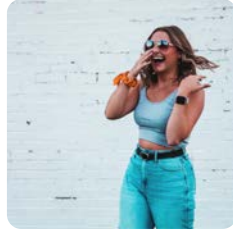
We learned not only how to survive but how to overcome so many challenges in the past year, and it's obvious that we're not at the finish line yet. As we continue moving out of this pandemic, we must remember why we changed in the ways we did, and we must continue surviving.



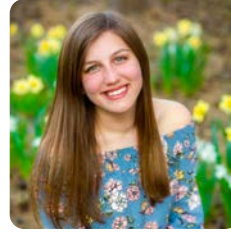
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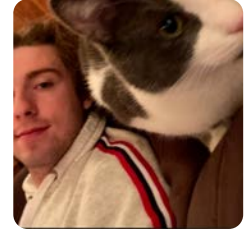
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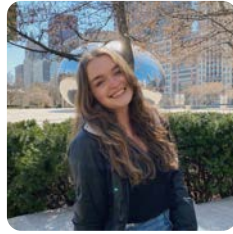
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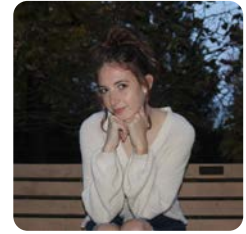
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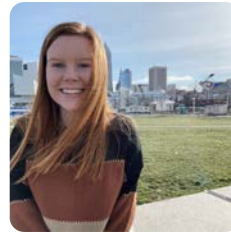
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