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YMCA Storytelling Submission

I turned nineteen this year. I remember writing in my journal “What an irrelevant age. Not new, not scary” comical how wrong that single thought was. I was sent home from college on March 13th. Just in case you didn’t know that was Friday the 13th, and it was the last normal day of my life. Ironically it could not have been a more perfect day out, it was a stark contrast to the gossip around campus. Of course, there were hushed rumors about not being allowed to come back after spring break because of the pandemic, they turned out to be more than just rumors.

Getting set home permanently for online learning wasn’t as bad as I conjured it up in my head to be, at least at first. It felt more as an extended vacation, time to recuperate at home. The only real issue I had at the time was missing out on what I deemed in my head as “the college experience”. COVID-19 for the most part didn’t feel as dangerous as it should have to me, I had no family members to worry about and I was locked inside for what I guessed would only be a couple of weeks. Wrong. The weeks stretched into months until suddenly my semester was over. Since I was stuck home for the semester I returned to my seasonal job working at a small business that sold ice cream. It was interesting to see that since people couldn’t go out anymore, just coming to buy ice cream became a family fun activity and a chance for people to get out. My ice cream place served ice cream through a serving window, as it was an outdoor dining experience, this eased my worries a bit with customers spreading germs. I felt safe knowing I was wearing my gloves and mask and so were they, only as weeks progressed less people cared. I became a bit paranoid working as I was wearing my mask to protect them, but they wouldn’t wear a mask to protect me? Despite this, work became my happy place as it became the only time to socialize with someone who wasn’t my immediate family.

My dog ended up dying at sixteen years old due to health complications and my heart shattered. In a bleak couple of months, he had been a ray of sunshine that had always cheered my family up, cliché as it sounds but he was one of my best friends. Around this same time in June my family was worried about job security. My mother has been unemployed, my was finishing up her senior year of college, and my father worked two to three jobs at a time. My father is a physical education teacher, driver’s education instructor, and a high school basketball coach. My family relies heavily on the income from the driving school, but they were shut down for safety reasons during quarantine and since it was not my father’s full-time job as he was still finishing up teaching his semester at school, the driving school was not allowed to send a benefit check. This was when my father decided to take odd jobs, a couple days a week he would drive a taxi cab in the late hours of the night after school, pick up landscaping jobs, or work a graveyard shift at Amazon. I could see him deteriorating.

As I mentioned before I wasn’t terribly worried about my immediate family catching the virus and it becomes dire as none of them had any health issues. It turns out I was incorrect on that statement, but I did not find that out until August. My father was diagnosed with cancer that month. My biggest fear would be that I was the one to put him at risk, what if I infected him and he died because of me?

While everything around me felt like it was going a million miles an hour my body felt like it was moving at a snail’s pace. It started getting harder and harder to get out of bed. I toyed with a funny little thought in my head a lot. The thought of just vanishing so I wouldn’t have to deal with the rest of my day, life felt hard and I wanted a break. The thought of just ceasing to exist eased the burning of my chest, made the world feel less sad and instead more numb. I didn’t

know why I felt like this. I later found out I was spiraling into clinical depression, something I have never had to deal with in my entire life. It felt like another hurdle I'd have to jump as the last seven months felt like a marathon I could never finish, let alone win.

I try to imagine how different my life would have been if COVID-19 never existed. That's when I think of all the things I missed out on and will continue to miss out on until there is a widely distributed vaccine. Or until the next pandemic hits. If this one has taught us anything it's how prepared we think we are, and how unprepared we measure up to be. From difficult times like this I guess are where the real-life lessons are. One thing I have to say though, is how sick I am of living through major historical events such as this.