

A Voice From 2020

How can I begin to characterize an event in our lives that is so far from being over? Being in the middle of a pandemic is unlike any experience I have ever had. The virus has no sympathy. It does not pick and choose who it affects but instead invades any person that it can reach. This has resulted in numerous months of isolation and loneliness for a lot of people. Yes, thanks to technology we can still communicate with friends and family through a screen, but this is no substitute for face-to-face interaction; something that we previously took for granted. Schools began to close in the middle of March and since then there have been multiple waves of the virus. Now it is December and another major wave has hit the country, but despite this, the administration of a vaccine has started, and the storm cloud that has cast a gloom over the entire world for the past year seems to slowly be lifting.

Covid-19 has caused so many aspects of my life to be uprooted. The end of my senior year in high school was basically canceled: no prom, no spring track season, and a graduation ceremony with only 20 out of the 400 students in my graduating class. I already felt like I was living in a dystopian society, but little did I know that this was the tip of the iceberg in terms of normal aspects in my life that would be taken from me.

Every kid dreams of going to college, to finally live on their own with no parental guidance. All of my ideas of what I imagined my college experience to be like were immediately thrown out the window. Masks had to be worn everywhere besides my own dorm room. Walking around campus I could not make out the faces behind the masks. In my double dorm room, besides me and my roommate, only two others could be in there at a time. My soccer season was modified to the extent that we played zero

games and practiced only three days a week. School did not feel like school. I rolled out of bed for my 8 am class at 7:59 am only to go sit at my desk, flip my laptop open, and click on a link to a Zoom meeting, still in my pajamas and wrapped in a warm blanket. Even that was more than I had to do. I could have just logged into Zoom from my bed, but knowing myself I would not have been able to focus on school and might have even drifted off to sleep during a class if I did that.

Despite all of these changes that no one expects to have to endure when going to college for the first time, I was still able to make new friends, socialize safely on the weekends, learn a lot, and play the sport I love. This all ended abruptly though when at the end of October, all members of Gulick Hall, where I lived, were quarantined and two days later all classes went remote. Students were given the option to stay on campus or to go home until the start of the spring semester. Most everyone chose to go home, as did I. This sudden change caused my final days of living at school for the fall semester to be filled with stress. On top of the normal anxiousness that I was already feeling, my roommate found out that she was in close contact with someone that had tested positive. This made me wonder if I should go home or not. My mind was swirling with questions. Should I go home and risk bringing the virus to my family? Should I stay and be quarantined for two weeks in Gulick without my friends as they were moving back home? My parents made the decision for me: I was coming home. I got a Covid test on the morning of the day I moved out. I had to move every last thing out of my dorm room by myself as my parents were not allowed to enter the building. On my ride home I wore a mask as I had spent the last 48 hours in my ten-foot by ten-foot dorm room with a potentially infected person.

At home, I immediately quarantined myself in my room, not knowing if my exposure to the virus had caused me to become infected. I received my test results the next day and I was negative, but my roommate also found out that she was positive that same day. The tricky thing about Covid is that even though I tested negative, the health center told me that a positive test result could still be produced up to fourteen days after I was last exposed. For the next two weeks, I lived in my bedroom, leaving only to walk the five steps out my door and into the bathroom, or to go for runs around my neighborhood. My parents brought food up to me on a tray and I would even eat with my door open so I would feel like I was at least partly eating with my family. I tried to keep myself occupied so I would not think about the high possibility that I was infected, but it was difficult not to let my mind wander. After one week of quarantine, I tested negative again. I loosened my restrictions a little to allow myself to go into the kitchen to make my own food but was still wearing a mask in my own home. On the last day of my two-week quarantine, I went to get tested for the third and final time. This was the moment of truth. The next morning I woke up to a negative test result. I was lucky. I feel like I escaped not only Covid but the long-term effects from it that no one knows about yet.

I feel grateful that I was able to learn about Covid-19 while I was living through it. This class has taught me so much about infectious diseases. I was able to gain a better understanding of the microscopic world around me. What I have learned is something that I will be thinking about years from now, even in the absence of Covid. A major takeaway from this class for me is how nations across the globe can be better prepared and equipped to take on a virus, like the coronavirus, before it manifests itself in the

human population. In six years I will be graduated from the physician assistant program here at Springfield College. Who knows, maybe I will travel to underdeveloped nations and teach fellow medical professionals how to prepare for pandemics before they emerge, and it will all be thanks to this class.