



“Stay Home, Stay Safe”

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“Save a life, wear a seatbelt”, “A text can wait”, “Lane Closed →”, “Testing, Testing”. Often in our lives, we drive past electric road signs. Driving down the highway can often be seemingly mindless, yet a shining bright sign has the ability to entertain us, even if it is for a fleeting moment. Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself driving down I-91 South to my dad’s house. The sign that I passed that day said: “Stay Home, Stay Safe”.

March of 2020 found me blissfully ignorant halfway around the world. Fresh off my landing at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand it was only a matter of time before everything flipped upside down yet again. As emails warning of a spreading infectious disease filled my Springfield College email, the Kiwi lifestyle remained “normal”. Numbers abroad

grew, and it was not long after that we heard of the evacuation of Springfield College students being evacuated from European nations such as Italy and Spain. Next came the seizure of various study-abroad programs and friends and flatmates would vanish within a day's time. Eventually, the national 48-hour Emergency Effect solidified the need for action. The seemingly simple road sign of "Stay Home, Stay Safe" tore my conscious in two directions over nine thousand miles of distance.

I would end up leaving New Zealand to return home. I would be accompanied by my brother who had been evacuated from his position in the Peace Corps to return home to Norwich, Vermont. Gradually, we both settled into the "new normal" of the COVID-19 pandemic. Days of nothingness would fly by. The same activities, wake up, walk the dog, breakfast, and clean your room for the fourth time that week. Occasionally, I may have picked up a book or completed a puzzle. Yet it was not the abrupt stop of daily life and the consequential monotony that characterized the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the moment of shock and absurdity could occur at the simplest of moments. While enjoying your brainless TV or movie programming you may ask yourself, for just an instant: "Why aren't they wearing masks?"

In the Fall of 2020, I decided not to stay home. Going against the advice of the shining road sign I packed up my belongings and traveled back to Springfield College. As the year progressed I signed up for the course HNRS 192-26 World Diseases. Gradually the brain fog of the past year began to lift. Time allowed a logical sequence of events to explain what happened to the world. Yet, as a human race, we cannot simply wait for the recap of events if we hope to survive. While I enjoy the study of the past, I must acknowledge that there will be no future unless we look forward. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted innumerable divisions and disparities in our national and global society. If further collaboration and communication are not demanded, this will not be the only pandemic in my lifetime. Let us all hope that we never "return to normalcy" because if we do, we are merely doomed to fail yet again. Now is the time to act. We may not know what tomorrow will bring, but repeating history is no longer an option.

*The photo was taken by Chris Evans at the Springfield College Testing Center, May 2021.