**COVID-19**

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Being a college student during this pandemic has been an experience, I was a Freshman when the pandemic started. It started with Spring break of 2020 being extended for two extra weeks, which would make the traditional college student happy to be going without homework or classes. Personally, I enjoyed the free time and being able to see my family after so many months. It was difficult to make time to see them due to my hometown being three and a half hours away and struggling financially as a college student. Soon, that all changed.

The extension for Spring break continued to grow like a weed, I was back at East Carolina University by the third week of Spring break until that awful student announcement was sent out. Classes would now be online and there would no longer be a “life on campus,” my freshman year had to been cut short and I had to move back home. I did enjoy my time with my family but knowing that short amount of being independent was gone took a toll on my mental health. Coming back home was fun at first but soon I started butting heads with my parents with not being able to go out when I wanted to or being able to participate in those “college life activities”. Being stuck inside all the time due to Covid constantly made me bored, I had difficulty staying focused in class, I started to become depressed as well due to all the stressors of Covid. Wear a mask. Only go out when necessary. No more college. I had to drop my sorority because of Covid as well. It felt like torture, no one knew when this pandemic was going to end.

I did pick up on some old hobbies that I did before college, I had time to start reading more, being able to spend time with my younger siblings, and my saving grace, art. I used to paint a lot before college, having the time to do so was not an issue. Being able to paint allowed all my worries drain away, I had made myself a mental note to make sure to bring my art stuff with me when I was able to return to East Carolina University. Reading that email stating that certain classes were going to be held on campus for the next school year made me ecstatic, I was ready to return to that college life that I had missed so much.

Moving back to Greenville made me so happy, I was able to see my friends again that lived so far away from my hometown. Originally, I had thought that getting an apartment and being independent again would fix everything, shortly I had noticed that I did have an issue with my mental health and not being able to focus. I took the necessary steps with my doctor and parents, it was true, I had depression and ADHD. Indirectly, I would have to thank this awful pandemic for putting these issues into light. I was able to get onto medication for both of those which helped my mental health and my grades tremendously. When classes had started again and with these new medications, I was able to keep motivation for continuing school and keeping my head high. I started a job here in Greenville as well to help give me a routine and managing my time better. I have continued to create art in my spare time at ECU and having leisure time to read my personal books. I do still have classes online but with these changes, I have done better with my school, work, and social life.

While Covid is still around but not as big of an issue as it was back last year, I do still take the necessary precautions to keep myself, my roommates, my family, and my friends safe. I do still wear a mask while going out and I try to avoid going to clubs or parties. (Still haven’t been to either yet this year!) While registering for my classes for next semester I am overjoyed that majority of classes are going to be on campus, but that still means that East Carolina University is not back to normal. We still need to wear masks to class, keep a safe distance from each other, and make sure that everyone is being safe to avoid the possible closure of campus again. I would hate for upcoming graduates to miss walking across the stage and receiving their diploma like those from this previous year. I would also hate for upcoming freshman to miss that first-year college experience, even though it is slightly different. Just be safe!

Here is some of my artwork from the pandemic, many arts which are still a work in progress!

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