**COVID-19**

I always feel slightly selfish when I say I had a hard COVID experience. I know others had it so much harder than I did, but I also believe that doesn’t deter my emotions or experiences throughout the journey of COVID -19.

I believe the family aspect of it was what hit me the hardest. I have a very close family and we see each other almost daily, it’s pretty convenient when your grandparents and aunt live no more than 15 minutes from you. Both of my parents were essential workers due to my father working for a company who was a major producer of the clear shields at most grocery stores today and mother working in the health care system with cancer patients receiving chemotherapy. We didn’t have the luxury many other families had when it came to leaving home. Even when rules were loosened some, my parents and I could only leave the house for grocery store visits or to just drive around town to get the slightest bit of freedom. To say it was hard to go without seeing my grandparents for months is an understatement. My family are my built-in best friends, and I don’t know where I would be without them.

My journey through learning during COVID comes in a very close second to my struggles with my family. I’ve always been a very hands on/ in person learner so this learning curve really through me for a loop. I think what I’ve struggled the most with was retaining knowledge. I just haven’t been able to learn through PowerPoints and reading from the textbook. I also have felt like I’m not even in college right now to learn, at this point I’m doing everything in my power to at least pass. Everyday seems like it’s just filled with pointless busy work and struggling to keep high enough grades to stay in my sorority. Learning used to be fun for me, now it feels like a cycle of headaches that will never end. For a long time, I considered to withdrawal from ECU to take a year off. I thought I would never be able to make it and always felt like I was slipping through the cracks in all my classes and was too embarrassed to ask for help. I’ve somewhat started to get the hang of these but I’m still struggling, I don’t think this virtual learning will ever be easy and sometimes I still think I should have taken that year off.

I would be lying if I said COVID didn’t hit me just as hard mentally and physically as it did with education. I have struggled my entire life with severe anxiety. COVID seems to heighten my normal anxiety to the max. The fear of catching COVID was always at the front of my mind. So, when I inevitably caught it, you can imagine how I felt mentally. Not only did it crush me mentally, but it also crushed me physically. I have a very poor immune system and suffer from moderate to severe asthma. I had the strand that hits your lungs the hardest so there were about three days during my quarantine that my family and I thought I would need to go the hospital to be put on a machine just to help me breathe. Having it was not the only hard part, hearing what people said about me was just as bad. Everyone treats me like a disgusting plague and some wouldn’t even talk to me for weeks. It’s safe to say I lost many “friends” during this period of my life.

In conclusion, the most valuable life lesson I have become more respectful of throughout this experience is to simply just respect other humans. Please just wear a mask in public, if not for you then for the safety of others. Please respect healthcare workers, because they are fighting every day to stay alive, just so they can save others. Please respect your educators, because they are doing the best they can to teach us in this crazy situation they were thrown into. Just please respect the people around you because at the end of the day, that’s what makes you a good person.