**COVID-19**

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Looking back on who I was almost a year ago, I am amazed at how much I have grown.

With our world under the influence of the Covid 19 pandemic, society was put on pause, allowing for an immense amount of time for reflection. As one who has struggled with chronic anxiety from a young age, this unexpected stretch of time was concerning. Although I am extremely independent, I do heavily rely on the aspect of socialization because it serves as a healthy distraction from any anxious thoughts. For me, anxiety feels a magnetic force, slowly pulling me towards a bottomless pit, and there is nothing I can do to stop it. It is a mix of fear and frustration that my biggest enemy in the world is my own brain. Another side effect of my anxiety is the struggle to adapt to change. In the months before going off to college, I struggled with unbearable anxious thoughts and, without the cushion of socialization, they consumed me. I would run at least 6 miles a day just for a distraction, go nights without sleeping, barely ate, and slowly exhausted my body to a point where I could barely feel anything.

The most significant lesson I have learned over the course of this past year is acceptance of myself. Instead of constantly trying to fight my anxiety, I have learned to embrace it as a part of who I am. I am now able to use it for motivation instead of something that would previously confine me. I was never a straight A student in high school because I could never find the motivation to complete assignments or to study. Now, I have learned to channel some of my anxious energy through productive activities such as schoolwork or cleaning. Choosing to view something that, originally, controlled me as something that I now control is empowering and makes an astounding difference in the way I live my life.

Recently, I have made the decision to transfer to UNC Wilmington. Ever since I was little, the beach has always been a place of tranquility and it is where I feel most content. I feel like this change in environment will help me continue to grow into the person that I want to be. In addition, I have also made the decision to switch my major to psychology. I used a respectable amount of time in quarantine to reflect on my mental health journey, trying to determine the root of my anxiety. In my experience, if something can be taken apart and analyzed to a point of understanding, it becomes less of threat. This new understanding of my anxiety has inspired me to take a new path in life. It is my hope that I will be able to help others take back control of their lives because having control is an essential part of healing. After making this decision, I realized that this was something I was meant to do. I have always been fascinated by people’s behavior patterns and how experiences have molded them into who they are now. I want to be a person who others know and are comfortable coming to about emotional stress because I believe that lives can be changed by simply choosing to listen.

The pandemic taught people how to come together amid a national disaster. Relationships between ourselves and those around us are enhanced when we share experiences and, in a time when the future of the virus was unclear, those relationships became stronger because millions shared the same fears. Despite time spent isolated from the physical world, people found ways to come together. Things such as facetime and other social media platforms allowed us to stay connected with each other because they served as a reminder that we were not alone. It was reassuring to know that people all over the nation shared the same concerns and questions about the world’s new state. I believe that the pandemic revealed to the world the power unity and the importance of relationships. It is my hope that we will learn from this experience and remember what can be accomplished if we choose to work together.