**COVID-19**

As the deadly coronavirus took the world by storm, it would be a test of both strength and character to combat the fast-spreading disease. It is no surprise that the global pandemic will be a memorable event for most as the spread of the virus was a crucial moment. Entering all of our lives with little time to prepare, it became necessary to take precautions in order to protect the lives of the people we care most about. Impacting both physical and emotional health, COVID-19 will go down as a monumental event in history.

What appeared to be any normal day in March, rapidly became the last day that I would step foot inside of my high school. I remember sitting in my last class when the announcement blared through the intercom, informing us that we would be taking a short break from school as a safety precaution for the virus. The students were ecstatic as we all believed the temporary suspension from school would mimic an extended spring break, but we would soon bite our tongues once we realized the severity of the matter was more serious than intended. The preconceived idea of a two-week hiatus became an indefinite break that would transform into the class of 2020 graduating online. It was heartbreaking hearing the news that we were going to have an online ceremony for graduation and that we were going to miss out on our senior prom.

Senior prom and graduation were hyped up, long-standing traditions that were instilled in us through movies to be fun and memorable. Although the senior class did not have the luxury of experiencing the customary events that came with being a senior, our year was made distinct in an unpredictable way. Unable to be in person for the last days of high school, I was devastated knowing I was not able to say a proper goodbye to the people I had spent the last four years with and had to enjoy the dwindling moments through a computer screen. Graduating during a global pandemic revealed to me that I took my high school moments for granted and taught me to savor each memory before it would be swept up from under my feet at any given moment.

When I believed that graduating from high school in an online setting would be a bizarre experience, I was unaware that starting college in a pandemic would take me for a whirl. The year I imagined to be a crucial period of self-discovery and a time to live on my own would be delayed as the pandemic ensued. Not having the “normal” college experience everyone raved about will always cause me to believe that I missed out on an opportunity that marked the start of my adulthood.

Although the pandemic had a sizeable impact on my educational life, it also affected my family life. I became very health-conscious around my parents and grandmother as they were more susceptible to the disease. Before COVID-19, my parents worked for long hours and I did not see them for extended periods of time; but that would all change when the country went into lockdown. I found it unusual to see my parents at home during the day when I spent most of my childhood alone while they were away at work. On the contrary, I was accustomed to seeing my grandma around the house; but she began to distance herself and stay in her room ever since the start of the pandemic, afraid to contract the disease. The shift in my familial situation was both a positive and negative experience. I bonded more with my parents, but the distance from my grandma became increasingly difficult to handle since she was my best friend and mentor when my parents were not present.

Although I am saddened that the pandemic negatively impacted many lives as it sent countless amounts of people to the hospital and took away numerous lives; it was a principal time for personal self-reflection. As a child, I never enjoyed being alone and often perceived that my happiness stemmed from the presence of others. I felt incapable of feeling satisfaction in my own presence. When the pandemic struck, I became nostalgic of the once cheerful girl and I quickly fell into a depression due to the isolation. Every day felt draining knowing that when I woke up, I would have to exist in a daily continuous loop. My emotional health declined rapidly during the state of exhaustion and I lost all motivation to be productive. What once was routine in my life, such as eating and keeping up with my hygiene, became a chore. Through the turmoil of the undesired isolation, I found myself becoming more comfortable and independent. Steadily, I no longer felt the need to seek happiness from others and would instead find myself enjoying my own company, a state I never thought I would achieve.

Through the journey of self-reflection, I discovered new hobbies and interests that I never had the time to uncover before due to my busy schedule. While informing myself on politics and human rights issues, I found it extremely fascinating there were issues taking place in different parts of the world that had little coverage since the media was mainly focused on the spread of the coronavirus. Through educating myself, I expanded my perspective on the world and was able to educate my peers on unheard-of events.

The pandemic was a learning experience that would provide many life lessons and impact my future permanently. There were countless times when my experience with quarantine fluctuated from being optimistic to pessimistic, helping me learn that growth is never a linear pattern. I learned to accept the bleak times with the good because the unfavorable days are what makes the pleasant ones feel so positive. I matured mentally knowing that everything in life cannot be planned and you have to just experience life. Going through the pandemic during a crucial time of maturity prompted me to not take for granted the good moments as they may be fleeting, and that sadness is only a temporary setback that would open new doors to happier experiences.