**COVID-19**

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Having graduated high school in the middle of a pandemic, my graduation and start to college was much different than any generation before. We didn't get the typical graduation, having friends and family come and watch you and the people you've spent 12 years with, walk across the stage to shake the principal’s hand. We didn't get to throw our caps up in the air when it was all done. We didn't get the last day of high school or a senior skip day or senior prom. A lot of us didn't even get to say goodbye to our favorite teachers. It wasn’t ideal but all of that aside, in my opinion, it was handled very well.

Since we didn't get the typical senior experience, my school went out of its way to make us feel special. We had parades to wave to our old teachers, picked up our cap and gowns and yearbooks, they held virtual events which aren't the same but were still interesting. For graduation, they gave us time slots to come to the school with our families, told us to decorate our cars, and come dressed in our cap and gowns. We drove through the parking lot of the school, got our senior gift, and were even able to get out of the cars and take a picture with our principle holding our diplomas. I was lucky enough to have my best friend in the car right behind me which made the experience even more special.

Starting college during a pandemic is a whole other story. Being a freshman and not knowing anything about how college life works is stressful enough. On top of that having to worry about the new guidelines and restrictions, I feel like you don't get the real college experience. To start the moving process was very confusing, having to move my stuff in and leave and then come back a week later to stay put a lot of added pressure on the process. Not being able to have my parents in my room to say goodbye or unpack my last few things was hard because once they left, I had nobody.

 Everyone tells you you have to go out and make new connections and friends but when social events aren’t allowed, and you can't work together in class you are kind of stuck. You can only make friends with your roommate and the people on your floor, which is not necessarily a bad thing. But if you don't get along with those people, you don't have another way to go out and connect with different people. A big part of college is the social aspect, which again, you don't get during this time if you're trying to be responsible, as everyone should.

Lastly hearing about the schools like UNC-Chapel Hill and NC State being sent home in questioning if your school would be next brought about a lot of anxiety. My roommate and I knew we would be sent home eventually due to the news and all of the parties that were being thrown but we definitely didn't think it would be only after 2 weeks. Now being back at home in doing classes online we really don't get any of the freedom or college experience that we should be having, it feels as though nothing has changed from high school.

Obviously, it's a letdown that we are experiencing some of our most important events like this, but right now we just have to accept that it could be so much worse. It's important to put into perspective the other people around the world who do have it worse than we do. As long as we keep following what the government tells us and hopefully get a vaccine soon, things can go back as close to normal as possible. I don't believe the world will ever be the same as it was before COVID-19.