**COVID-19**

Ashlyn Ray

Department of English, East Carolina University

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Dr. Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs

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March 13, 2020 is a date that changed the lives of millions across the globe. This date started what we would know today as a new normalcy for the next year of our life and continuing. I remember hearing about some virus a few days before everything blew up, that was supposably very serious and had spread from China, across the world. At the time I was a senior in high school riding out the last few months of school until I was released into the real world. I wasn’t too caught up in politics at the time, and everything in my life was following its plan. Little did I know that it all would collapse in a few short days.

The afternoon of March 13, 2020 seemed like a normal Friday. I attended classes in the morning and then had softball afterwards. That day in particular, I recall preparing for an away softball game to find out minutes before we left that it had been cancelled due to the new protocols for Covid. It wasn’t hours after until the entire county was informed that school would be permanently switched to online until the governor said different. Covid at the time seemed like such a miniscule problem and I couldn’t grasp my head around what the big fuss was. All I knew was that my last few months of high school were just taken away and my final year of softball had been terminated before I could even think twice about it. I was upset. Upset at the fact that a virus I had only known about for less than a week was already making more impact in my life than I could even take in.

April 11, 2020 marked the day I first went out in public and wore a mask for the first time. Dollar tree seemed to be a good enough reason to risk my health in order to get some cheap goodies. As the weeks progressed and any sign of returning back to normalcy seemed slim to none, I began to accept the series of unfortunate events. Plans for graduation were up in the air and no one knew how to handle any circumstance. Classes had now been switched to online, and at the time I was taking a CNA1 class in order to be certified, to then engage in my ultimate goal, working in healthcare. This class was difficult to maneuver to online, mainly due to the fact that checkoffs required displays and physical involvement.

Weeks later I came to find out that due to Covid restrictions, our clinicals had been postponed until mid-July. I had picked up a job as a nanny for a coworker of my mom’s while everything was still being determined. I was making good money at the time and didn’t really want to stop working just to take a class basically over again in order to become certified. So, I decided to pass up the opportunity and continue babysitting. Was that a mistake? I don’t know, but I do think about it all the time. It was just crazy to me how one decision could have made my life go in such a different direction. Due to almost every fun activity being closed, I used babysitting as an outlet for creativity in order to take my mind off the reality of the world. I began to invest more time into painting. It took stress off my shoulders, made me forget about time, and appreciating myself and all my abilities. I would buy the small one-dollar canvas’ from Dollar Tree and would use the paint colors I had accumulated over the weeks. My go to was always flowers for some reason, but I believe this is when I began to appreciate nature and all its beauty.

By the beginning of May, I had decided that in order to prevent myself from losing my mind or becoming a bum, I needed to find another hobby. I had been involved in sports all my life, so not working out or doing any type of physical activity was new to me. I was eating more because I could access my kitchen easier, I wasn’t able to work out anywhere because every place that wasn’t essential had been shut down, and I wanted to appreciate myself. I’m sure you know where this is going, but yes, I made the best decision of my life and decided to begin working out just to give myself something to do. From the beginning of May until the moment I moved into Jones Hall on college hill, I worked out consistently every day. I would wake up early in the morning to take a walk and start the day refreshed. Once I returned from babysitting I would workout at home with the few weights we had and follow some workout routines I had picked off of YouTube. Chloe Ting will forever be my hero. I would then end the night with another walk to leave my conscience open and relaxed. This routine was great for me and it wasn’t even about losing weight, just appreciating myself. I began to learn my body and what it was capable of. I learned that nature was the world’s greatest gift, as no matter the weather, it was gorgeous to see the life that came out to indulge in it. I am thankful I decided to invest in myself and my ultimate mindset because it has changed who I am as a person. I believe I have grown up in a sense to understand that every moment, every relationship, every moral and value I have was so important because it determined how I accepted things. I was able to accept Covid and everything it came with by looking at the brighter side. I had landed a great nannying job, working for a great family to which I loved, I was able to grow up and begin the journey to financial independence, and lastly, I was able to invest in myself and focus on my well-being.

By August, the time to move into college was approaching. I had missed out on the opportunity to attend freshman orientation because an abundance of people on campus and close contact was restricted. After hearing from many people that this was one of the best initial experiences of college, I hated I had no choice but to miss it and attend the orientation virtually. The day finally came, August 7, 2020, the entire East Carolina freshman class made their way to the dorms, where they would spend the next year of their life…so we thought. I had visited friends in the dorms the previous year before, so I knew a little of what to expect. What I learned was that it was completely different. No more games like ping pong were being played, masks were everywhere, lines were much longer than before due to the six feet guidelines, and everyone was in the same position. Classes were in 8-week blocks, so I was having to adjust. I definitely liked this form of blocks just because it was easier to take more classes. It was hard having to constantly change styles of learning because of the inability to meet or hold class in person. It definitely took determination and self-made goals to push me to continue striving.

Two weeks later I was diagnosed with Covid. I felt horrible and that is an understatement. I was moved off campus to protect other students and ended up staying in an apartment with some friends I had already been exposed to. The first day I had bad headaches, congested sinuses and was so tired that I couldn’t eat. I remember having so much fatigue that I would wake up from a three to four- hour nap, walk to the kitchen to get something to drink, and exhaust myself so much by doing that, that I would go take another nap. My symptoms only lasted five days thankfully, so I quickly recovered.

I often find myself reminiscing the life I had a year ago. How free it felt to just do my own thing and not have to worry about getting sick or getting others sick. I remember the emotions I felt and how they impacted me. Covid has been bitter-sweet to me. It allowed me to grow up and find myself, but it also prohibited me from having an easier path in order to work towards my career, but it has made me a stronger, independent and understanding person today. If I had known life would be this way a year ago, I would have called you crazy. I have learned that life does in-fact give you lemons and those lemons come in forms such as life tests; covid being one. We can’t predict what will happen in the future, but what we can do is accept every obstacle that comes our way as a lesson that was meant to make us become a better version of ourselves.