**COVID-19**

Department of English, East Carolina University

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Dr. Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs

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Life during this pandemic taught me how to adapt. I was used to connecting with my friends during the school day and going out to public places. One of my favorite memories is driving 45 minutes to the closest Dave & Buster’s with three of my friends and placing first in the racing game and earning enough credits to buy a plushie we would rotate between us*.* Once we were in lockdown, that was not possible anymore. I had to find a new way to interact with them that wouldn’t put us at risk. We found two solutions to aid in our social life during my final year of high school.

Our first option was to find a way to see each other in person with as little exposure as possible. We rented a cabin in June of 2020 around Boone to facilitate a closed space where there wouldn’t be any other people. I was one of the main planners along with one of my closest friends, Charlie. We quarantined for two weeks prior to the trip and got tested before leaving. The price of the rental and groceries for the meals we had there were split evenly between the seven people that came, and my mother came along to supervise us. It was wonderful to be able to see everyone in person after an eternity. We made smores and watched movies while being on the same couch, we slept in the same bed as one another. One day we found a trail to walk together that led to a river perfect for swimming with a waterfall that we could go underneath. It went so well we did it again in March 2021 for a longer period. I was incredibly grateful for the opportunity to experience this with my friends before we all left for college.

The more permanent solution was online. We would use Discord, which is a messaging platform, to talk in voice calls and play online video games together. I used to play games with my sibling all the time on Nintendo Switch or the Xbox 360, so it brought back happy memories from my childhood. Games I used to play with my family were now how I stayed in touch with my friends, and it worked. I would not be surprised if I bonded with them over the past two years more than I had throughout my first years of high school. In school, I wouldn’t have classes with them, and we would only have an hour for lunch to talk. Once we switched to online, I would spend time together with them for a few hours in a row, sometimes multiple sessions a day. This also led me to develop a way to keep in touch now that we are all going to different colleges across the country.

Along with my social life, I had to adapt to a lot of new experiences and new “normals.” Even without a global pandemic, there would have been many changes in my life I would need to learn to live with, only some of them related to my college career. Although it wasn’t ideal, I am grateful for the lessons Covid-19 has taught me, and how it forced me to think creatively.