**COVID-19**

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Coronavirus was an unforeseen pandemic that made everyone sacrifice a variety of plans, specifically those made for the end of the school year. One of the biggest milestones that I was looking forward to was my high school graduation. Almost everyone in high school looks forward to walking across the stage and preparing for the next opportunity life gives them. For me, graduation was a way to say goodbye to my high school years and hello to my fresh start at college.

I have an older brother and an older sister. There is a twelve year age gap between my brother and I, and a seven year age gap between my sister and I. Although I do not remember their high school graduations, I remember the day my brother graduated from the NASCAR technical institute and the day my sister graduated from community college. It was a moment that our whole family had been waiting for. I remember celebrating at dinner after watching them receive their awards. It takes a lot of time, work, and dedication to receive a degree and having a graduation ceremony to look forward to makes all the work worth it.

My high school was a charter school that was geared toward preparing the students for college. It was quite a small school-there were only 95 students in my graduating class. I remember walking in on my first day of my freshman year and being all alone trying to figure out my schedule, but after a few weeks I made friends and joined the swim team. Starting at the age of six, I was a competitive swimmer on a club team that was not affiliated with school. I remember freshman year being my first year making it to my high school regional and state swim championships and then continuing to go every year after that. My school did not give out varsity jackets; however, they did give out four year letterman plaques, meaning that if you lettered in the same sport every year of high school you would get a special plaque at the senior banquet. Because of the coronavirus, my school was unable to have the senior banquet, meaning that I did not get the recognition in front of everyone at a special ceremony as I had worked and hoped for. Furthermore, this was not the only thing that the coronavirus had taken away from me; it also took away my senior prom, other festivities, and the graduation I had hoped for.

I was very fortunate for my school to still be able to provide a graduation for me, even though it was not the graduation I had wanted or planned for throughout my high school experience. My school had set up individual time slots for people to pick a time to graduate over the span of one week, and they allowed each graduate to have six friends and family members to watch the ceremony. I remember putting my cap and gown on and being ready to walk into the gymnasium and see my family there watching me go across that stage. When I walked in, I walked across the gymnasium and to my seat as my principal read the announcement, and then he invited me to the podium to give a speech. It took a lot of time and hard work to make it through high school, and I always knew that when I graduated, all the countless hours I spent on homework and studying would all be worth it because I got to walk across that stage and receive my diploma before preparing for college. A high school graduation is an important milestone in a person’s lifetime, and I am glad that I was able to experience some form of this. Even though I did not get to witness my friends walk across the stage, I am still glad that I was able to have my family and school staff witness my graduation.

For the class of 2020, graduation looked drastically different for each person. I know some people had individual graduations and others had drive-thru ceremonies, so many opportunities and special events had to be cancelled for the health and safety of others. The senior class was born around the terrible times of 9/11 and graduated during coronavirus. I think this shows that we are strong and are able to get through hard times and still be hopeful for the future. I am so very thankful for the opportunity of having an individual graduation and being able to reflect upon it while attending East Carolina University.