**COVID-19**

EmmaLee Oliver

Department of English, East Carolina University

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Dr. Cheryl Dudasik-Wiggs

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During this pandemic, I have adapted to being alone. Whether that is a good or bad thing depends on a couple different factors. Because of social distancing and wearing masks, it is very hard to feel connected to anyone these days. I understand and fully believe in the idea of masks and social distancing, but that does not take away from the impacts it has had on my social life. From increased anxiety and periods of depression, to learning how to communicate in socially distanced and safe ways, this pandemic has been a roller coaster of emotions to say the least.

When the pandemic first shut down our country, I was a senior in high school. I remember hearing the rumors going around school that we might be going home for two weeks because of the coronavirus. I had not heard of the virus until this point. I grew up in a very fortunate and affluent area, which has its benefits, but it also meant that I never paid too much attention to what was happening in other places of the world. I ended up getting two weeks off school, which at first looked like a blessing, but then we never went back.

This was a very upsetting thing for me because I had been looking forward to the last semester of my senior year for my entire high school experience. All the fun activities that I had watched my older friends get to experience during their senior year, I did not get to partake in. No senior parade, no senior skip day, no senior breakfast or award recognition, and most importantly, no senior graduation. At this point, I thought this was the worst it could get. That was before I had to stay home for the entire month of April and not see anyone.

I did not see my friends or my boyfriend for almost four whole weeks. Then when I finally did see someone, it was my boyfriend for one night, a couple hours, for a surprise prom he had set up for me. But then after that, it was right back to staying in my house for another three weeks. That was the longest two months of my life. I had absolutely no motivation. I completely stopped doing my schoolwork and resorted to using the pass/fail option for my last semester of high school, rather than my actual grades. Then over the summer, I started working a lot because I needed to save money for the upcoming fall so I could attend ECU. Starting to work after not being able to leave my house for months was like an amazing breath of fresh air after you have been holding your breath for a while.

I got to meet some new people at work, and it gave me a reason to leave my house. As I worked to earn money for tuition, I started to get nervous about attending school in the fall. All my classes were scheduled to be online, and I did not know how anything worked. It felt like I was being thrown in the deep end of a pool without knowing how to swim. Once I got on campus and my classes started, I felt more comfortable and knew what was going on. Now I am finishing up my freshman year and I am very hopeful for the fall!

The hardest thing about being online this year was not meeting or seeing people. I had good classes and amazing professors, but I did not get to meet a lot of them in person. I did not get to form that face-to-face connection with them or with any of the other students in my class. This made it hard to make friends. I have grown okay with being alone, almost to an unhealthy point. Now I no longer want to go anywhere or hang out with people, I just want to be alone. Hopefully, this summer I can make a transition back into a social life like the one I led before quarantine.

While quarantine was uneventful and boring, it gave me a lot of time to reflect on myself and change some habitats I was not proud of. My self-esteem has had its challenges, but I am learning to be kinder to myself because in the end, the only person we can truly count on to be there 100% of the time is ourselves. As things start to return to a new “normal” I hope everyone can keep a positive attitude and keep making good decisions so we can stay attending classes in person as well as doing other social events like we used to before COVID.