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Remembering COVID-19: Perspectives of a Graduating College Student

It was like someone hit one giant pause button on life. Everything just stopped, ceased, halted, was cancelled, with nobody knowing when that button would be pressed to resume normalcy again. Phrases like “social distancing,” “work from home,” “the new normal,” “quarantine,” “remote learning,” “essential workers,” or even “Zoom” all rapidly became a part of our everyday vocabulary in a split second. Some of these words I started to detest as days of quarantine grew into weeks and then to months of living in lockdown. Perhaps the greatest fear that the world all shared was the idea of not knowing when this would all be over. The littlest things in life, I began to miss immensely. My commute to work, going to the gym, going out to a bar with friends, eating at a restaurant, going shopping, going to the movies, spending time with family and friends, the sense of a regular routine, or even being surrounded by thousands of humans on the streets of New York City. The list could go on of things we all took for granted prior to when COVID-19 tragically made its everlasting impact across the globe. The disease leaving a substantial and destructive affect on society that might be near impossible to repair to what it once was.

When reflecting upon my experiences and thoughts about COVID-19, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what I wish to talk about. There are an abundance of topics I have deep emotion about it that have crossed my mind during this time. One of the greatest gifts that living in quarantine has given me is the value of self reflection. I have learned and worked tremendously on improving certain aspects of my life. From reading more, focusing on developing a healthier lifestyle, to being more aware as well as educated of the worldwide and global news. Building more healthy, sustainable habits has been the best and most rewarding goal to achieve during these trying times. If anything my work ethic and drive to achieve the highest of success in my future has grown rapidly.

Perhaps one of the most difficult personal struggles I have experienced is coping with the loss of my final semester of college. It sounds incredibly greedy when others across the nation are experiencing far worse and I could not be more in awe of all the dedication that essential workers are contributing to our country. All the unique, wonderful activities and recognitions that come with the spring semester of senior year were taken from the class of 2020. No spring concert, no senior pub nights, no more spending time with friends that you are accustomed to seeing everyday, no more walking to class on the most beautiful campus, no senior week, no graduation. It is unfortunate knowing that our graduating class along with high school seniors, will not get to have these opportunities that I believe

so many took for granted. However, it helps me remain optimistic when witnessing all the exceptional work that people have done across the country. Many are helping students in this position still feel special and acknowledged for their accomplishments. Professors and administrators across the globe came together to properly honor their graduates as best as they could through virtual ceremonies. Numerous influential figures shared their praise through digital platforms as well through livestream services.

My personal favorite was my at home graduation I shared alongside my boyfriend at his house, organized by his mom. On May 9th, 2020 (the weekend of what would have been graduation) we walked along his rooftop to the tune of Pomp and Circumstance Marches as our closest friends and family sat 6 feet apart, wearing masks cheering us on. To top it all off in true New England fashion, it snowed that day...on May 9th. I wouldn't have traded that intimate, fun experience for the world as it was just as festive as walking across the stage at Webster Bank Arena.

Gratitude has become extremely important to me during this time. Practicing it has provided me a sense of clarity to the complete chaos that we are living in during the year of 2020. I have a canvas in my bedroom that reads, "Enjoy the little things in life for someday you will realize they were the big things." That statement has never been more applicable to my life than today. If this pandemic has taught me anything, it is to appreciate all the little things. I believe society needs to use that message as a key takeaway from living through this period of isolation. Or maybe appreciate that giant pause button that was hit back in March 2020. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and reset your life and its values by practicing more gratitude once we get out on the other side.

We will remember this time period for its numerous devastations that COVID-19 struck across the globe. The lives lost, the grueling hours of work healthcare professionals lived through, the sweeping high numbers reached in unemployment. It is also a time period where racial inequality still remained an issue in America. This brought along powerful and moving protests across the nation to maintain equality and justice for all citizens. This pandemic has been eye opening, and without a doubt the most reeling experience to encounter in our lifetimes. It is important to remember that nothing is permanent and we have the capability to write our future history with open minds, strength and positivity.