

If you were to ask someone who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic to explain their experience, you would expectedly receive a story filled with anguish. However, I personally found the pandemic to be a time of growth and learning.

I can distinctly remember sitting in a bright classroom, joking with my friends about it being Friday the 13th, when an announcement came over the loudspeaker that school would be canceled for two days due to the slow spread of COVID-19. We all cheered in excitement. Then, two days turned into months, as the pandemic began to claim lives around us. No one was truly sure of whether we would ever return to school, work, or activities with our friends. Face masks were worn wherever we went to prevent the spread of COVID, even though much of the pandemic was spent in our homes. In total, my town was on a strict lockdown for five months. I lost a few months of my junior year of high school to online learning and returned to in-person learning for senior year and college. Luckily, my family was never personally affected by the virus. By spring of 2021, an entire year after the pandemic began, vaccinations were approved and distributed to the public. Despite our days having yet to return to normal, restrictions are less strong, and our lives are less bleak.

The pandemic was devastating. However, I used the forced time off as an opportunity to change my life. Before the pandemic, I was hopeless and had no drive for my future. During the pandemic, I spent most of my time reflecting, and I learned to appreciate what I already had and set new goals for myself. Now, I am in a prestigious nursing program, I am a cheerleader at a division 1 school, and I just won a national championship with my team. Without the COVID-19 pandemic, I would not have risen to my full potential as a human being.

