

A Fluid Jail Cell

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I never expected to be a prisoner in my own home, but on March 14, 2020, the final words were tweeted. “All schools in the Wake County Public School System will be closed beginning Monday, March 16 through at least Friday, March 27.” At first, it was a dream come true, however, when Governor Roy Cooper announced school closures for all of North Carolina through at least the end of May, we knew all hope was lost for the rest of senior year.

I vividly remember the last normal Friday when I went to Dunkin Donuts accompanied by the foreign exchange student that I was hosting that year, Raquel. We ran into a girl from my school who was adamant about school closures, saying we just had our last day. Sipping on her bright green iced matcha latte, she started droning on about her upcoming trip to Switzerland at the end of April. Safe to say, that sure didn't happen, but we all believed it would.

After the school closed, the excitement started to fade and hopelessness started to shine through. We could leave our houses, of course, but there was nowhere to go, nothing to do. Grocery trips became the highlight of my week and getting takeout to support local business was a weekly routine. Even the slightest hope we had for senior season diminished along with the last days I thought I could spend with my high school friends.

Months all started becoming unified as my family and I started forgetting the days. Our home was a prison that we wanted so badly to, and could, leave but there was nowhere to go. We painted the house as the dull grey walls seemed too plain; we needed to do something with the insane amount of free time we were newly rewarded. I helped remodel my brother's room and design a pattern for our dining room wall. Shortly we ran out of home improvement projects.

As the pandemic got worse in North Carolina, a mask mandate shortly followed. It was protocol to keep your distance and constantly remember to try and touch as few things as possible. The bubble kept growing bigger and still is between people. I started wishing for things as simple as a hug or a handshake. When I graduated, I couldn't smile at my principal who had seen me grow over the past four years. I couldn't high-five my teachers. It was almost as if there was no celebration, no reward, just a swift pat on the back saying, "good-job kid." I know I wasn't the only one but at some points, it felt like it.

Moving into college soon came upon my family as we discussed which parent was the one allowed to help. Separating families at one of the most momentous times in their lives was depressing, to put it simply. I took a long road trip, saying goodbye to my sister and brother who wouldn't be able to see me off or where I have the opportunity to live the next four years. My dad had to sit and wait in the car while my mom and I basically dumped all my stuff into the room. The rest of my unpacking was done alone and mostly in silence as I sat in quarantine and waited for my test results.

The past few months have been redundant, depressing, boring, and something the future population should never have to go through. The class of 2020 shouldn't have been known as "the quarantine class" and should be the only class to go through what we went through. It has not been easy, illness never is. I can only hope my part of this story can be told to show that this was a time of hardship for many people, especially the young population, as milestones in their lives became overshadowed. I'm glad to have been part of the community that could help do what we can to support others and keep us connected as we are separate, and to keep each other safe.