

COVID-19 Story – Primary Source

As I imagine it is for many other people in the United States, particularly in the northeast, the emergence of the Coronavirus, and the subsequent panic and declaration of a global pandemic, was surprisingly quick. The first that I heard about the virus was from a news article during Holiday Break. At this point, my thinking was that because it is in China, it was not that big of a deal. However, the picture of doctors in full protection gear carrying a body bag was disturbing. Being a person with contamination fears that accompany my obsessive-compulsive disorder, I immediately Googled the symptoms of the disease. I was slightly comforted that one of the symptoms was not nausea and vomiting because my main phobia is vomit.

A few weeks after this initial introduction, I was back at Bates College for my Winter Term. Coincidentally, I was enrolled in a course called “China in the World.” Part of this course was to analyze media relating to China and connecting it to our core concepts. The first week that we got into small groups to share our individual pieces of media that we chose, most of my classmates choose news articles about the novel Coronavirus. In the weeks following our initial discussion about COVID-19, the virus was present on everyone’s mind, but it did not seem as an eminent threat. People would bring it up in conversation, but we were told not to worry. We had our winter break during the week of February 16th, and many people traveled with friends or went home. I went back to my home in Connecticut. Being that we live an hour away from New York City, my dad commutes into the city every day, and we visit the city often. My mom planned for us to go into the city and watch the Broadway show, *Hadestown*, before I left to go back to school. At this point, I saw some people taking precautionary measures, but the majority of people did not seem to be worried. My sister brought hand sanitizer, and we all used it before eating and after touching handles or anything else.

After break, I headed back to school. During the next two to three weeks, the nation saw the confirmed cases of the virus rapidly increase. Once it became prevalent in the Boston area and colleges started to shut down, it was only a matter of time before Bates closed. The last week before we were sent home—the week of March 8—things started to change each day. Each day brought cancelations, new dining protocols, and a lot of uncertainty for both students and professors. I found it hard to concentrate on getting the work I needed to accomplish completed. By the time it got to Thursday, the high school in my town—where my sister is a senior—had moved to remote learning, the preschool that my mom works at had closed down, and many other colleges and universities have sent their students home or asked that they stay home after spring break. Thursday, I tried to spend a good amount of time with my friends, assuming that we were going to be sent home and not going to be able to see each other for an unknown period of time. Friday morning, around 10am, Bates College President Clayton Spencer announced that we would need to pack up all of our belongings and leave school by the following Tuesday. Subsequently, we would begin remote learning. My 11am class was canceled and very few people showed up to our last in-person *China in the World* class. During this time, our professor put up the live stream of President Trump’s address to the American public declaring a national emergency. We all sat there pretty quietly. The whole situation still felt so surreal. One invisible entity was causing mass destruction around the globe.

My sister and my dad drove up to Maine and picked me up Saturday the 14th of March. It was quite difficult to say goodbye to all of my friends, especially since I wanted to give them all hugs. I said goodbye to the vast majority of people I wanted to see and we headed to Portland for the night. It occurred to me as we were driving by the historic quad at Bates that this would be the last time I would be there for a while; I was planning on going abroad in the fall before the chaos of the virus. Arriving at the hotel, I was feeling pretty down. I am such a homebody, so I never thought that leaving school and spending the rest of the semester at home would be upsetting. It truly was. The week after being sent home, I got an email saying that I was exposed to the one individual who had a confirmed case of the disease on Bates campus. It was a little alarming feeling like I might have exposed my family to the virus. However, my sister happened to be talking to her best friend that night and her friend confessed that her whole family had the virus. Therefore, we had been exposed to the disease twice. We all quarantined for fourteen days, and luckily no one developed symptoms.

Over the last month, I have been trying to stay busy and focus on my schoolwork. As more and more people perish from disease, it has been difficult to get up each day not dreading the worst. I have tried to limit the amount of news that I have watched in order to decrease my anxiety. I have tried to ignore some of the “news” presented on social media sites that provide misinformation about the disease. I wish I could help with the crisis more than I have already because, honestly, it feels like staying home is not enough. It has helped to talk to my friends and family over Skype, Zoom, or FaceTime. Now that school is over, I am going to focus on doing things for my mental and physical health. As I mentioned before, having contamination fears during this pandemic has been challenging. Through therapy, I have been taught to limit my hand washing and other compulsions having to do with my phobias. During the pandemic, though, it is necessary for everyone to be extremely cautious and wash their hands pretty constantly. All of the precautionary measures have been triggering, but I am proud to say that I am handling the pandemic a lot better than I would have imagined I would have a few years ago. I am extremely grateful to be able to be living at my family home safely, and having access to food and other resources. I feel extremely privileged being in the situation I am in, and sincerely feel for others who may not find themselves in a similar circumstance.