

## **The Great Pause**

In the bustling city that never sleeps that is New York City, life was a constant whirlwind of activity, constantly darting from point A to point B without pause. For me, a senior in high school at the time who eagerly anticipated college and reveling in the impending summer vacation, every moment was meticulously planned. From the upcoming religious holidays, like Holy Week and Easter, which I eagerly anticipated each year, to the milestone of my 18th birthday at the end of the school year, my schedule was packed tighter than rush hour traffic on Fifth Avenue. I never stopped, never took a break—until "the day" arrived. Suddenly, the world was thrust into turmoil as headlines screamed of a worldwide pandemic, ushering in unfamiliar terms like "social distancing" and "national quarantine & lockdown." 2020 became the year the world hit the pause button, and I found myself caught in the stillness. My senior year abruptly ended, replaced by the solitude of my home, where my daily commute was reduced to a short walk from my bedroom to my makeshift classroom.

Two months passed without setting a foot outside my front door, and the activities I once indulged in for leisure became burdensome. What was once a refuge from the demands of daily life now felt suffocating, and the academic and physical tasks I once dreaded became strangely appealing. My comfort soon became stressful as the monotony of isolation took its toll. But amidst the darkness, a glimmer of hope emerged. Headlines shifted from dire warnings of national lockdowns to cautiously optimistic reports of stores reopening, public spaces welcoming limited capacity crowds, and Covid cases slowly declining. The light at the end of the tunnel grew brighter, illuminating the possibility of a return to what could be normalcy and reminding me that even in the darkest times, there is always hope for brighter days ahead.

With everything that I had planned for the summer canceled, I was just happy to be able to get out again, be able to work, enjoy the sceneries of the outside world, and see those who I hadn't seen in what felt like forever. Catching up with some of the things I missed out on in these months of quarantine, nothing went back to feeling the same. The pandemic became the force that showed me how to slow down from time to time, which as a New Yorker is thought to be impossible. As the summer drew to a close and life slowly began to return to what was a new semblance of normalcy, I carried with me the lessons learned during those quiet months of quarantine. Though the world around me may continue to change, I found solace in the knowledge that I could always find peace and contentment in the simple pleasures of life. This was most beneficial in the embarking of a new chapter of my life: "College".

As September rolled in, signaling the return to school, there was an air of uncertainty mixed with the familiar anticipation. For many, the transition back to the academic routine felt like slipping into a comfortable pair of shoes. However, for others, like myself, the landscape has shifted dramatically since the onset of the pandemic. My first year was announced to be fully remote, and embarking on my first year as an Architecture major, the prospect of fully remote learning presented both challenges and opportunities. The studio environment, typically abuzz with the sounds of creativity and collaboration, now seemed poised to exist within the confines of a digital realm. How would this experience of drafting and modeling translate to a virtual setting? It was a mystery that left me both intrigued and apprehensive. As the months passed and the virtual studio became your new normal, you realized that the essence of architecture transcended physical space. It was about vision, imagination, and the power to transform ideas into reality, regardless of the tools at hand.

As I stepped onto campus for the first time, despite it being my second year, I felt a peculiar mix of excitement and apprehension. The virtual veil that had shrouded my freshman year now lifted, revealing a tangible world of bustling students, towering buildings, and the energy of campus life. It was as though I had skipped a crucial chapter in the college experience, and now, I found myself scrambling to catch up. Years later, as I look back on my college journey, now that I am reaching the end, there are inevitably moments I wish I hadn't missed out on. Yet, the trials of the pandemic had equipped me with a newfound perspective. It taught me the importance of pacing myself, of savoring each moment, and of not taking the most precious things in life for granted. Coming to the end of my college career, I carry with me not just the weight of missed opportunities, but also the wisdom gained from the months spent in isolation. And though the road ahead may be filled with challenges, I walk it with a renewed sense of purpose, grateful for the lessons learned and the person I have become.