

The COVID-19 pandemic affected me in several ways - some adverse, some positive. I was in my second-to-last semester of college when the Pandemic hit. I live in rural Alabama, and I remember being in class the week before our Spring break (the last week of February). My friend and I were scrolling through some memes, and I saw one that said, "Y'all out here worrying about the KFC Donut sandwich, while thousands of people are dying on the other side of the world." I remember looking at my friend, confused - what was going on, on the other side of the world?

We'd soon find out. That next week, at the end of our Spring break, the United States declared a State of Emergency. It was cautioned to remain in doors for two weeks - school was pushed back for a week. I had just moved into a new house with some friends, who were finishing their own school at the time.

Two weeks soon turned into a month, as the world shut down. I remember feeling such an influx of fear; I couldn't quite grasp what was happening around me. People were dying left and right - we had a 10 o'clock curfew (which made no sense - did COVID stop after dark?) - and fear, as well as food and hygiene shortages, ravaged the nation.

I remember feeling numb, as we entered the second month of the Pandemic. I was seeing my first therapist at the time, and I remember telling her, "I can't really feel anything. I just feel numb." She explained to me that it was my body's reaction to the chaos around me; and that it wouldn't always feel that way.

She was right. It's crazy how life is split into two instances: Before Covid, and After Covid. That's how my life feels. There was the *before* - and now, there's the here and after.

COVID affected me adversely by affecting my schoolwork, social life, and enhancing anxiety and depression. We went virtual at school, doing class via Zoom. I was going for education, and I would have to create videos of myself doing "pretend" lessons to stuffed animals, turning in projects, and all sorts of things. Social life went to an absolute zero, as my friends and I were left to ourselves in our home. We couldn't go to church, none of us worked at the time, and we'd just started living together. So many complicated life transitions; and I believe this lack of access to the outside world enhanced the already present anxiety and depression I struggled with. It was also the time when I hit my heaviest weight wise - over 400 pounds - from staying in and doing nothing but eating, reading, or watching TV.

COVID also affected me positively. It taught me how to navigate an ever changing world; taught me to face fears head on. It helped my friends and I build a lifelong foundation (we'd live together for another three years). It gave me a new understanding of myself, which would propel me into beginning a health journey in March of 2021 (down 180 pounds!). It also reconnected me with my love for literature; reading, writing, and exploring the world through the eyes of art.

I also suffered some losses during COVID. My uncle, who I loved dearly, passed in January of 2021 from COVID complications after a simple procedure at a local hospital. It was a hard hit...you never think it will happen to you, until it does.

It's interesting how quickly life can change. If the COVID-19 pandemic taught me anything, it taught me that time and life is valuable...all life, all people, all things. I'm thankful that I can find some treasure in the chaos, and I hope that we, as a people, can continue to grow from the difficult things we experience, and create a better life for our future.