

Most of my holidays didn't differ from previous years. The most notable exception was the 4th of July. My family loves to attend shows and events, but because of Corona the only show we saw last year was the Disney Broadway production of *Aladdin* at the Bass Concert Hall at the University of Texas at Austin. Usually, my parents, sister, and I grill out for the 4th of July, but starved of shows, we eagerly jumped at the chance to attend a Country music concert by local singer Granger Smith at the Dell Diamond Baseball Park in our hometown of Round Rock Texas. The 4th was two days after Texas Governor Greg Abbot had ordered a statewide mask mandate, and this was the second outing where we had to wear them (masks had not been a requirement before that time, so we had not worn them). The staff and entertainers at the Dell Diamond was determined to prove that public events could be held safely, and the event planners organized groups into 4-person spaces called "Pods" to provide for social distancing. Everyone was required to wear a mask except when they were in their seats or Pods and stay six feet away from people outside their group. The whole event was meant to be an uplifting experience that would allow attendees to recover a sense of normalcy and community while maintaining necessary precautions. Granger Smith told the crowd that he wanted everyone to follow the all the requirements so that we could show that was possible to resume normal activities while being mindful of COVID-19. I had a wonderful time, and my family and I hope to go to a similar event when we have the opportunity.

The Christmas season was largely unchanged for me as well besides the obvious cultural differences. For example, stores sold Christmas themed masks and hand sanitizer. Even this late in the year, products like toilet paper and paper towels could be scarce in some stores. In lieu of its normal stock of toilet paper, my local Walmart filled the top shelves of its bath issue aisle with children's slides because it needed space to store its extra December stock. One of the things that amazes me is the comprehensive way COVID-19 permeates our lives in unthinkable ways. I was shocked but not surprised (and somewhat elated since I would get a historical picture) that Santa and Mrs. Clause sported purple masks on Google's Santa Tracker. There is honestly no area of our national life that is not affected by COVID-19 or a place where we can go to avoid seeing something related to it. As for me personally, Christmas was unchanged. My family normally goes to my grandparents' house for Christmas dinner and gifts, and that's what we did. Despite the strong encouragement from state and federal authorities to avoid Christmas or holiday gatherings, my grandparents didn't mind our company as they felt confident they would not get sick from us since all of us regularly took all the proper precautions. I had a wonderful dinner surrounded by my family, and it was a welcome break from the constant reminders of our altered world.