

The Family Divide by Alexandria Kirsch
October 4th, 2021

March of 2020 was a month that I will never forget. On the 8th, my mother traveled from Alaska to Arizona – a trip she made only about once a year – to spend time with me and her other daughters. Her and I enjoyed the evening at a large outdoor restaurant and brewery, chatting pleasantly and with no particular worries on the mind. My older sister, however, opted to stay home that night. What were initially whispers of a mysterious novel virus across the globe began to morph into a threatening, thunderous song. My sister was becoming increasingly anxious about the potential dangers ahead. She eventually felt prompted to stay in for the night. My mother and I dismissed her concerns, not thinking much of the fuss. A week later, the gravity of the situation would reveal itself, slapping us in the face with an intensity that none of our family could have anticipated.

March 17th was the day I was directed to pack up my company computer and set up shop in the dusted, vacant corner of my bedroom. Life as I knew it had come to a screeching halt. Restaurants and bars bolted their doors. Basic housing supplies disappeared like lighting from department store shelves. Entire office buildings were plunged into darkness. It was as if the entire world sat still in rotation. We grow up studying from loaded textbooks about all sorts of dramatic, life-altering incidents of the past: wars, famines, pestilences, revolts, revolutions, and the like. It is easy to read of such events in disconnected fashion. That is surely how many of us were engaged with the subject of history before coming to the alarming realization that we were, in fact, the next chapter to be written.

With work lives upended, schools unsettled, healthcare access indeterminate, and bank accounts strained, my family experienced with the world a collective mortal chaos. This was all just the beginning, however, as the damage was not limited to externalities. The emergence of COVID-19 and the stranglehold it would have over society would serve to generate an abrupt and polarizing rift within the walls of the very homes we were confined to.

My childhood had already been rife with familial conflict, particularly along religious and political lines. My parents, siblings, and I never saw eye-to-eye on government policy, social issues, or spirituality. Our grievances would explode to unprecedented proportions with the stress brought on by the pandemic. My mother, who had always touted that “God will never give you something that you cannot handle”, veered further towards faith-based solutions and shunned the manufacturing of a vaccine. The divide only widened concerning politics. My mother and a few sisters developed an almost religious zeal for their presidential candidate of choice, an enthusiasm not nearly as expressive just the year before. Civility in debate and discussion transformed into a seemingly impossible, almost fantastical feat. Ideas of conspiracy flourished out of control to the point that one sibling contemplated the construction of an underground shelter to hide from the “establishment”.

We are now two years into the pandemic, and little seems to have slowed down. I have been increasingly alienated from the people I care about. Fears about the “malicious” healthcare system continue to be stoked. One sister joined a new church and now aggressively writes on social media about God and the fight against the “Communists” who promote “deadly” COVID vaccinations and eventual government takeover. The situation has continued to worsen, and not just for my family. Countless stories have been told to me from friends and acquaintances who have also been ostracized within their own households due to new and frightening religious-political rifts. March of 2020 sparked theatrics never before seen in my generation. None of us

know how society and life as we know it is going to pan out, but one thing feels assured; we have entered the next wild chapter in global history, of which the pages we cannot turn back.