In the spring of 2020, I contracted COVID-19 from my workplace and was hospitalized for ten days. I was one of the fortunate ones who survived but I did not walk away scott-free. I required supplemental oxygen for an additional four months, which limited travel. My first oxygen-free trip was to our family cabin in the Upper Penisula of Michigan. Our cabin is close to Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and I have fond memories of the activities that we would partake in as a family, such as hiking, visiting waterfalls, swimming, etc. Unfortunately, that first trip proved eye-opening to the lasting damage caused by COVID-19.

Not only was that first trip filled with frustration but also with fear. In hindsight, I can recognize my feelings were due to post-traumatic stress disorder. I avoided all locations that would draw tourists. We only made limited trips to a small, local grocery store off the beaten path. The only restriction at that time was masking indoors, but I wouldn't even allow my husband to take the children out hiking because I was terrified they would run into someone COVID-19 positive, bring it back to me, and that I wouldn't make it out alive. We did not take another vacation for well over 6 months.

Even now, three years later, I still have limitations, as I have what is being called Long Haul COVID, which continues to impact both my physical and mental health on a daily basis. While our first vacation as a family was very eye-opening to my new limitations, it was also devastating to me because it forced me to recognize that COVID-19 stole something that I would never get back, my health. I have permanent heart, lung, and brain damage. While I have adapted to my new "normal" as best as I am able, it still stings that I will never again be able to hike the trails along the lakeshore with my family, take in the spectacular views of a thundering waterfall, or feel the wind on my face as we race along the dusty trails on our side-by-side.