

March 2020

I think the most surprising thing about the pandemic was simply how fast it all happened. In the beginning of March, I had been working constantly for events like National History Day and Science Olympiad. The Student Council was working on our school spirit event and prom. We even had a school gala to prepare for.

March 7th- This was the day of the Science Olympiad competition. This was also the last normal event that I had before the pandemic. The competition, for the most part, went as planned: Arrive at the school at ungodly hours in the morning, drive for a few hours, panic-glue together projects before the impound, and get ready to compete. The next 10 hours were filled with pictures and laughs and a few juvenile games of hide and seek.

March 10th- Many students in band class at my school were also enrolled in Honor Band (a state wide band of some of the most accomplished musicians) and we had a rehearsal that night. One of the pieces was meant only for the string players, so the rest of us moved to the commons while they played and, while it may only be 20-30 minutes worth of a break, it was one of my favorite parts of the second semester. You have to know, my school is rather small so our band is typically about 20 students. There were four of us flutes and all of us made it into the honor band. Having so little people with so much free time together meant that we all started to grow some type of bond. It was on this day that we decided to perfect our horrendous pet project: The Flute Centipede (4lute, if you will). Everyone took off the head and foot joints of their flutes and put it all together into one five foot long flute. We only have one video about 4 seconds long of what the flute sounded like and, as you probably guessed, it wasn't pretty.

That was our last full band rehearsal for the next year. It was also the last time I got to play with one of the other flute members. Of course, none of us knew it then.

March 11th- Everyone walked into AP Government getting ready to put the final touches on their projects before the upcoming competition only to be told that we were not allowed to be there in person anymore. We were all to just drop off any physical materials and email the rest. My friend and I had made a documentary which meant that we only had to send off an email, but it was strange. The two of us had been briefed on the ins and outs of the presentation and what we had to do to earn all the points. And now that was all just... gone. It was relieving but also not, in a way.

We just had a concert for the band so the day following it was usually just time off for us. Everyone sprawled on the band room floor to play various computer games when we heard the announcement. I can't recall the exact words that they used since the room was immediately thrown into disarray afterwards, but this was the announcement that told us that spring sports were cancelled. Many students who played found sports as a safe haven. Others saw it as an omen for the rest of the school events. Everyone broke off into small groups and were simply just sad together for the rest of the period.

March 13th- Ah yes, the day everything ended. Fridays were usually laid back days at school, but this one was completely filled with an air of uncertainty. They announced that day that we were only going to have a two week spring break while the Administration watched what was happening on a global level.

About an hour into school, they also made an announcement that the annual gala that was scheduled for the next day was cancelled. About an hour after that they announced that all concerts for the rest of the school year were cancelled as well. In another hour there was news from every club and activity letting everyone know that all current projects were to be postponed. That night I had a meeting with my french teacher since we were all to make a school trip to France in June. This may not come as a surprise to you, but that was also postponed. That night my family also had to cancel our spring vacation plans.

I want so badly to sum up how everything during this day felt into one word for you, but I can't. It was so hard because I understood why they had to do it, I really did. But it was just... disheartening. Not once in this whole pandemic was anyone outright told "No," instead, we were told "In the future," or "One day." Now that I'm writing this more than a year later, I can tell you all the things that I was told was going to happen "soon" that ended up dying off completely. It's more than you would think.

March 14 - 28 The "two week" Spring Break- With everyone's schedules freshly wiped clean, you became one of two people: Those who panicked and bought every single necessity there was off the shelves, or those who laughed it off and made plans with their friends anyway. My parents were much more cautious with the whole situation, but my extended family was the latter. There were many heated discussions behind closed doors (and through phone speakers since, you know, social distancing and all that) over what precautions to take- especially around my grandmother. My grandfather had passed a while back, so everyone made extra time to spend visiting my grandmother- a wholesome act that no one wanted to end. I wasn't really involved in the conversation since it was assumed that I was to go back to school in 2 weeks (spoiler: I most certainly did not. In fact, it has been 14 months since then and I still have not) so they narrowed it down to just her children. It was almost sick to watch them prioritize each other based on the potential exposure from jobs, proximity, and general willingness to deal with the - ahem- *unsavory* outcome in case of disaster.

This became a sick and twisted trend that began to unfold in front of us for the next few months: prioritizing lives. As cases grew, the number of hospital beds and resources were stretched so thin that if you suffered in something like a traumatic car accident, they may not have a place in the hospital for you. It's situations like that where you can't just give someone a slap on the back and tell them to walk it off, but you can't kick a sick person out of a bed either.

Since half the world decided it was a-okay to carry on as normal, everyone- and I mean everyone- started to put out media expressing the need to stay home. Every major and reputable

company started to put out statements regarding how they were handling the outbreak and adding the famous “Please stay at home” speech. Which, yes- very much needed, but also that little speech became so generic that anyone could recite roughly what it said.

We just want to let you all know in these uncertain times, that there is hope. We all need to work together as a community to help balance the state of the world right now. Please, we implore you to follow the CDC guidelines and social distance whenever possible. Make sure you wear a mask When you're around others and watch out for any early symptoms. Stay safe all.

Every email and public announcement was stamped at the end with this kind of message. So much so that reading the words ‘in these uncertain times’ just turned everyone’s brains off.

April 2020

Somewhere in the mess that was March 2020, we were informed that school was to remain online throughout the rest of April. Our teachers scrambled to remake their lesson plans for the rest of their year which meant that most of our work was asynchronous. Each day of the week was assigned a day (Monday was for language arts, Tuesday was for history, Wednesday for electives, etc) where teachers would have office hours and an online lesson. With maybe an hour or two worth of school everyday, we had a lot of free time.

Now despite all the shut down that was going on, April may have been my personal favorite month. I was able to fully dive into reading, writing, and playing my flute (my burn-out-kid energy really tuned into gifted-kid energy again since social media was all doom and gloom. Bad circumstances, but nice results). All the anxiety that had built up over months and months worth of projects had subsided. While for some people this might just be like a summer vacation, I personally feel like there is such a rush to summer. People want to make the most of it which means endless amounts of activities and pet projects for three months straight. That’s all good and fun but there is something so satisfying in just being able to, I don’t know, just exist.

Now don’t let my personal well being distract you from the horrors going on at the same time. On a smaller scale, I watched as relationships of all types were put under strain. You can only talk about nothing for so long before it gets boring, so people simply stopped talking. Romantic relationships were also impacted since there was no way to safely see each other in-person much less go on dates. I can’t blame all the faults of my friend group and their various relationships on the pandemic, but it certainly exposed many of them.

My two best friends were both in their own relationships during this time and, while I don’t feel like it’s my place to describe all the issues in them, I do think it’s important to know vaguely what happened. Many of the issues started in the beginning of the pandemic because,

since no one could see each other, people wanted to find out what the other person was willing to do to be with their significant other. *Were they willing to stay isolated so that seeing each other was safe? Were they able to make time for video chats?* From there it only got more troubling. *Did they really find you as appealing when you can't do anything exciting? When stripped down to the core, do they really find you interesting? Is just you without the flare and pizzazz of everyday life actually something that they want?* These answers, while they may have been the same before the pandemic started, became troublesome as time went on.

And then, they announced that we would be online for the rest of the school year.

May 2020

May started the frenzy for AP testing. As a sophomore, I only had an AP Government test to deal with but that didn't mean that the stakes weren't high. All AP tests were done online and were severely shortened. To give you an idea, typically AP government tests were to take several hours and be composed of a large multiple choice section followed by several free response questions. My test took 30 minutes and only two free response questions. There were also several technical issues that made the whole experience awful. The test was stuck on a loading screen for anywhere from 4-8 minutes between questions for what seemed like everyone. While four minutes may not seem like a long time, when you only have 15 minutes to read several paragraphs and then write a couple paragraphs using everything you learned in the past 9 months, it's equivalent to a lifetime.

Things seemed to wind down after several lackluster Student Council events (we tried our best but also no one really cared about school spirit when the plague was knocking at their doors) and a small graduation. If only we knew that things were about to blow up.

I remember seeing a post with a video circulating around in the end of May but I had just assumed that it was another random viral video, so I skipped past it. It was only when I saw a post with a dramatic caption that I decided to watch the video out. All I can say is that it was awful.

I'm not sure how many times I saw videos of various deadly events. I mean I know I've seen numerous videos from different angles of the Twin Towers falling as well as the Kennedy assassination, but watching something like that is always strange. You see that and know that people died and that it was an awful thing to have happened, but it was years ago. And this is just one in millions of awful deadly things to happen in the past (that doesn't make the event any better, but it removes some of the heartache). But this video, it was an awful deadly thing that was happening now. You are able to see a middle aged black man being arrested by a cop against a car. Then you see the same cop arresting the man on the ground. And then you see the cop forcefully restraining the man on the ground. Then you see the man die.

Unsurprisingly, the whole country was enraged. Well actually, the whole world. African American people went online to teach everyone about the systematic racism that built the white house and how they have faced racism centuries after they “fixed” the issue. From there, minorities and allies took to the streets and protested. The “Black Lives Matter” protests it was called. And thus started the summer of revolution.

June 2020

In early June I had a bike accident which ended with a torn up leg that got infected. In the same week, my dog- a miniature dachshund- was attacked by one of the coyotes in the neighbourhood. We both were fine in the end, but the two of us spent the majority of June just hurting on the couch, and it was completely heartbreaking.

Now I know what I sound like. “Aww I had to spend two weeks just relaxing with my dog. All I could do was watch TV and scroll through my phone until my thumb grew numb. Poor me.” And yeah, it could have been worse, but everywhere I looked reminded me of the protests and hurt everyone was a part of.

Tiktok, a very popular video sharing app, was a go-to of mine, but every other video was of the brutality people faced in the streets. Police had resorted to using tear gas and rubber bullets to “maintain” the crowd. Others decided not to pretend to be peaceful and violently attacked the protesters with batons.

People were injured and killed, shops were broken into and destroyed, there was unwarranted violence, and there was video proof of it all. Even in other countries people were running into the streets screaming injustice. Although, with all the odds stacked against the public, there became power. People grew together and learned from the past. They looked to the past riots in Hong Kong and adopted their techniques. There are dozens of videos and pictures of people, namely Millennials and Gen Z, bringing things like rackets to protests and using them to hit the cans of tear gas back into the blockade of policemen. When there was victory, people would literally sing in the streets.

And there I was, unable to walk and slathered in ointments.

July

In many ways, July was like June with what all was happening in the world. There were still riots and protests that shook the world and a deadly disease that only got worse. For my family, a few things changed.

My extended family has always been more inclined to the outdoors and had previously planned a camping trip for July before the pandemic started. For them, they couldn't see why not

to go anyway just with family. And I was the one they pulled along with them. I won't get into the daily activities we did, but there was something so freeing about being able to be out in the world. I hadn't done much in the previous four months which made camping- no matter how unbearably hot- so much more exciting. Just being able to *be* outside seemed like a privilege.

On the whole people were outside much more often. Almost all the way from mid-March to the end of summer I would see the same people in my neighbourhood take walks with a friend or two. Now I'm not about to start complaining about *walking*, but parents nationwide enjoyed them just a little too much. It became a popular joke with everyone about how often mothers would walk into their child's room and ask if they wanted to go on their morning walk. Or their afternoon walk. Or their evening stroll. Or their post-dinner walk to see the sunset. Seriously, it was a lot (I said no a lot but unfortunately for my dog, she didn't have a choice. That was the most fit I've ever seen my dog in the past 10 years of her life). However, I was dragged along to a lot of these walks and so was half the other kids in my neighbourhood. A lot of people started to paint rocks that they found and left them hidden in little places around the neighbourhood park and walkways. They were nice (they were covered in tooth-rotting positivity, but still nice). All of it was a nice distraction from the disease and riots. I think every parent, including my own, saw their teenage kids just absolutely frothing at the mouths for anarchy against policemen in riot gear and the parents did everything short of deadbolting their child's bedroom door shut. We were all stuck inside and mostly away from, well really everything and had absolutely no meaning to life anymore, so you know. We made pretty rocks. Naturally.

It was also in this month that I finally got my drivers license. My birthday was in December but with everything shutting down and appointments being booked months and months in advance, it took a while before I got all my instructor driving hours and my drivers test (I only got one point off on my test. Please let me brag just this one time I was really proud of myself). We were lucky enough to have gotten an appointment at the DMV early enough that I didn't have to wait 2 months for my license like my friends did. Although, they did make me go into the building without my parents to try to limit numbers (I saw like 3 other teenagers in there with their parents. Yes I'm still mad about this) which freaked me out since I had no idea what to expect. In the end, I made it out just fine and only embarrassed myself twice (don't ask).

August

School picked up in August and it was completely online. At first, I didn't mind hopping onto Zoom for my classes since it meant that I could wake up thirty minutes later and only dress-up my top half. Although, it became immediately obvious that classes were going to be much more awkward. The ice breakers that would have been uncomfortable in-person were so much more accentuated online. The silence would stretch for far too long and, while people

thought they were being sneaky by raising their phones to just below their computer camera, you could still see the fluorescent glow on their faces while they mentally checked out of class.

There's usually this surge in school enthusiasm in August where people take their classes seriously and dedicate themselves to their work, but that didn't really happen. None of the classes really asked you to submit the notes you took daily so everyone had a very similar thought process: "My notes are looking a little sloppy today and I feel like I'm missing a few things. Oh I completely don't understand this part. Well, no one really knows that I don't understand this part, now do they? I mean, I'm exhausted and the teacher never sees me raising my hand on Zoom so I'd probably be better off figuring it out on my own right?" Spoiler: You never figure it out on your own.

Everyone's enthusiasm had one foot into the grave, and motivation was looking around nervously knowing that it was next. You can preach all you want about how unmaterialistic you are, but watch how quickly that changes when you work for hours upon hours on a project just to turn it in by taking a few blurry pictures and hoping it does it justice. This was really an issue that just lasted all throughout online school. There was such a great sense of disconnect in everyone's perception of school since many of us had never met any of our teachers in real life. Saying "I have a really big test on Friday" felt real, but only in the same way saying "One day I'm going to become a billionaire" feels real. Because, well yes, there is a possibility that you get very lucky and come into a great deal of wealth, but it doesn't feel like a real goal.

As time went on, more assignments went missing. It was so hard to care about that fact that I didn't do all the reading chapters when everyday a new kind of Hell was being raised. Having these huge nationwide moments was interesting, but it grew harder to care. Everyday we were told that we were "living through history" and watching these "life changing moments" every single day and, to be honest, no one wanted it. It's like you finally understand all those cheesy rom-com movies where the super-successful-16-year-old-pop-star tells the incredibly-smart-and-introverted-student who goes to the same school that they wish they were just a normal kid instead of a global sensation. Well, not quite like that, but close enough.

The real issue though is the guilt that came with it. People still cared that other people were hurt and dying, but it just got so goddamn exhausting doing it everyday. Yelling in the streets *everyday*, spreading the word *everyday*, trying to find relief *everyday*- it all just blended together; all without any significant change. That's why things ever got destructive in the previous and coming protests- because people were exhausted and angry from living how they were.

Everyone wanted to keep fighting for everything to "go back to normal" but we all knew deep down that there was no going back. The pandemic had exposed all the weaknesses in government, trust, and each other. So instead we just sat at home and teachers did their best to teach us something worthwhile.

Morale was low, but grades were even lower.

September 2020

Early September was when everyone was getting ready to run for Student Council. In a normal year, we would have had people come together in the school gym for a few hours at the end of the school day to hear everyone give their speeches and voting would be done in the next 24 hours. While it is fun, the energy level drops *quickly* because there are just that many students running and, as it turns out, listening to people make empty promises is only interesting for so long. Anyway, this year we got to make videos of our speeches and basically make a whole virtual campaign. With this came more freedom for creativity (I personally just copied Pedro's campaign idea from the movie *Napoleon Dynamite*) but there were also less people running. As long as you put your name on the sign up, you were very likely to get in.

This was another thing that happened throughout the pandemic. People just didn't participate. You would think it was the opposite since everyone was so soul-crushingly bored that we would've jumped at the chance to do anything. Being forced to spend months alone I suppose really made people sit back and re-evaluate what they really wanted to do but it also killed motivation to do anything regardless of what you wanted.

Anyway, my friend and I decided to take advantage of being online and went out to take campaign pictures. It was supposed to be a really short and easy day, but we made it into a whole ordeal. First we invited two other friends and we went out and got drinks, which we just had to have on the curb because there still was no indoor seating whatsoever. It took us a while but we finally got to work with buying the materials and assembling everything for pictures. But drawing on posters dissolved into drawing onto each other which dissolved into play-fights and laughter which dissolved into even more games and before you knew it, 5 hours passed and the posters were long forgotten.

Now you and I should both know by now that I wouldn't tell this story if it didn't have some type of depressing reflection. So here it goes: That was the last time I got to hang out with those people. There were 5 of us who were taking pictures and having fun throughout the day and now, I only regularly talk to one of them. One of them moved schools because of Covid and I drifted apart from another. In a few months, another's fathers would pass away and nothing would be the same there. In all honesty, I highly doubted that the five of us would be a great friend group, but there are just so many unexpected "lasts" that none of us were prepared for.

October 2020

So there I was, a freshly elected class vice president, (yay for me! I mean I was running unopposed so if I lost then it really would have been depressing, but still yay) with about a thousand things to plan. Our school had a tradition for what we called a “Coffee House” where twice a year we would have coffee and baked goods in the library while people went up and performed music, poetry, or anything that they felt like sharing (I once saw someone interpretive dance to a rap song on a dare). However, with the pandemic we had to come up with something else. Our idea was to make it like a drive-in where people would park in front of the school and listen to the performances by tuning in on their radio (I know I said I was only going to brag about the license thing earlier, but yes, this was my idea). The rest of the Student Council would hand out pamphlets that had a list of drinks and snacks that we would bring out to the cars if they decided to order something. Everything ran perfectly and we had our first successful event of the year.

The second successful event was later that month with Homecoming. We couldn't have an actual dance, but we were able to vote on Homecoming Royalty and make a video for them at the school. Two of my best friends and one of their sisters won for their respective classes, so we all drove to take pictures and then up to the school together (It was like I was the Secret Service destined to serve all my life for the three members of the royal family in the backseat of the carriage. Well in our case it was my parents' sedan, but same vibe). This was just another one of those things that was supposed to last an hour or two at best, but quickly turned into a whole day affair. I don't want to bore you with all the fine details, but let's just say that the day didn't end for another 10 hours after we met up with 5 of our other friends and decided to hide at one of their houses because we were being followed. Anyways.

That friend group was really the best thing to come out of the summer of 2019. It just gave everything so much life. But we aren't talking about 2019 now are we? At this point there had been 4 rejections and 2 breakups (some advice: don't date within your friend group) and some people were taking it harder than others. Our friends group also fought just as much as you would expect 11 people all from different religions, political views, and ethnicities would- but all the breakups and tensions of never seeing each other just made it worse.

Of course all of this came together in our Halloween plans. We all just decided that with Covid it was in our best interests to just spend some time together in someone's basement, but the day before there was a small fight and then people took sides. Long story short, we ended up having a few less people than we originally were planning for. Now one of the people who decided not to go was one of my two best friends, but I still went.

Things between us had gotten weird mainly because she started to have a really weird friendship with a guy in our group who I had dated in the past. So much so that she decided to not go because the two of them had matching costumes and she thought it wouldn't have been worth going to see all her other friends if he didn't go. I'm going to pretend it didn't weird me

out (My god I can't stress this enough, never date in your friend group). During the Halloween party, the group of girls went to a little area underneath the stairs and just talked about the whole situation. We talked about everything under the sun. It was me, my best friend, a friend's new girlfriend, my other best friend's ex's new girlfriend that she did not like (seriously, don't make me say it again). There was so much that we found out about everything in the friend group and it really solidified the "us" and "them" of the group. With everyone knowing different sides of the same story, it just became clear all the times that other people had said something behind your back or lied directly to your face. I know that the divisions within the group had started long ago, maybe since it started, but now the truth was just... out there.

November 2020

I'll be honest, I don't remember much about November. I know that we did not have Thanksgiving with the family (that fine. That's actually great. Family get-togethers always get weirdly passive aggressive and personal the longer it goes so I was happy to keep to myself this holiday season) and I did not go Christmas shopping. There was also a nail biting election which dragged on for like a month that had everyone simultaneously pooping their pants (online voting + a president with more ego than credentials who decided to sue because he was losing = painfully long election). I could sit here and tell you that being a minor in an election is all fun and games, but this election in particular really had everyone on the edge of their seats. This election really determined what flavor of Hell I'd be living in for the next four years and, to be honest, neither option sounded particularly fantastic. Either way, everyone picked their poison and suddenly a certain someone was out of office (Thank God).

Anyway, that's all I could tell you about November.

December 2020

December usually is a big month for me but this year, as you may have guessed, was nothing like that. School midterms were, well, midterms. No one learned anything all year and no one cared enough to try hard enough to study. Anyway, my birthday is in the middle of December which means that I usually test through it and celebrate when winter break starts. Except I couldn't see anyone or make plans, but I did get a gift or two in the mail so... not awful I guess (My friend was able to have a lake party for her birthday, but there was snow everywhere on my birthday. I also only have like two friends so yeah. No party).

Christmas is the only other big thing that happens in December for us and this year it was extremely different. We usually host Christmas at our house and never once has it gone smoothly. My aunt always comes early to "help set up" and instead just steals all the appetizers

for herself, something breaks and my brothers and I have to fix it, people forget to take their shoes off so snow and mud track through the house, some kid knocks the wine over onto the white carpet, and the house is trashed by the end of the night. This year, we didn't have all 65 of our family members (Dear family, please stop having so many kids. Sincerely, the one cousin that babysits and cleans up after them during every single holiday) over. Instead, we just had my brothers and their long time girlfriends over to the house.

For months we had been ordering games from Hunt-a-Killer and have come together to play every few weeks. If you don't know, that company sells monthly boxes with mysteries that you can solve as a family. Now normally for Christmas we would have a talent show for the little kids, but this one we decided to find a serial killer (nothing screams "Christmas" quite like murder). The night went smoothly and there was no drama or catastrophes at all. Covid sucked for a lot of people because of the separation it caused between family members, but sometimes it was really nice just having space from them.

January 2021

For some reason people were of the idea that, if we just got to a different year, everything would go back to normal. It definitely did not. Anyway, that was to be expected. People breaking into the Capitol for the first time since we officially broke up with Great Britain however, not so much.

At the time I was following an independent reporter online who was able to actually go to Washington in-person, so that was where I got the majority of my information. Now I know there must be hundreds of articles about the break-in, so I won't get too deep into the who-what-when-where of the day. All I know is the personal afflictions everyone at my school felt. Well, at least what my friends felt. Apparently other people had extremely different views.

For hours I remember constantly refreshing the page and clicking on new videos of people actually there in Washington and every single time I saw their anger and their calls I thought *where was this energy six months ago?* They were the same people that targeted others who fought for equal rights in the Black Lives Matter movement and said things like "Back the Blue" in support of police brutality. Now here they are violently fighting against the same police officers that they claimed to stand by. And months ago peaceful protests were met with tear gas and rubber bullets, but here people waltzed into the capitol building without any resistance. A video began to circulate a few days later with a single officer at the front of the building who was armed with nothing but a baton. No one's surprised that he couldn't hold back literal hundreds of protesters.

We talked about the whole matter in my AP United States History class (which was apparently much better than the standard class. Our teacher decided that we could say anything

that we wanted as long as it was backed by facts. The standard one didn't want to hear anything unless it was in support of the people who broke in) and the whole thing really brought the matter into a new light. We all tried to keep from comparing the break-in to the BLM movement because just because one might be considered wrong, it isn't justified because another is wrong. From that conversation I found that everyone felt this sort of betrayal since we all knew that there was an intense division especially considering the different views on every major event to happen in the last year. They also were not quiet. Everyone knew that these people were violently mad. As teenagers with limited attention and time, we were able to figure out that something bad was going to happen, yet the government did the bare minimum. With a new president about to take office, they called in the National Guard to occupy the building (Pro-tip: If you want to see people panic, call in heavily armed military personnel on the off chance that there might be a premature assassination. Just a suggestion).

I know I've mentioned it before, but I feel like now is another good time to bring it up since the Capitol break-in is something that I don't plan on writing about for very long. My generation, especially in 2020, saw life-changing events every goddamn day. We saw death and destruction with a lot of nothing happening to fix it all. It's hard to care about thousands of people who are hurting everyday. There is only so much love that we have to give. It's events like these that bleed us dry and just let us know that all those cries and efforts we made amounted to nothing. Yes we were angry and yes we wanted to do something, but in the end we were all tired and had little faith.

Anyway, let's move on to the next depressing thing of the year. January of 2021 was the month that my friend group officially broke apart. We all saw it coming. Near the end of the month was someone's birthday so his girlfriend decided to throw him a surprise party. My best friend and I went out to shop for it the day before and morale was so low that you could trip on it. Everything we found was either really expensive or something that he wouldn't like. Eventually we gave up and got him a joke gift (which we spent a good amount of money on and he only kind of enjoyed).

The actual day itself was a bit of a mess. First off, we could only have a max of 10 people because of Covid guidelines which meant that one person in the group couldn't go. Everyone thought it was obvious who shouldn't go, that is, everyone except the person who wasn't invited. There had been a long standing rivalry between them and the birthday boy that had resulted in several fights throughout the years, so we all just assumed that they did not want to be friends. Then, a few days before the party one of my friends got exposed to Covid and decided not to go. So the one who was not invited just assumed that this was because the rest of us did not like either of them (which like.... We didn't really. They were rude to everyone else. But don't tell them that). This just spiraled until everyone was at a stalemate.

February 2021

I don't remember a thing about February. I'm thoroughly convinced that it did not exist. All I can think of is the friend drama. One by one people started to leave the friend group chat or just only used the groupchat meant for homework help. It's sad to look back at all the funny pictures and screenshots, but ultimately, I wasn't a happy person anymore. The group wasn't something that was healthy that was healthy for everyone and I think everyone is better off being where they are now.

Other than the group breaking up, February is just another one of those months that I could tell you absolutely nothing about. Nothing more really of note happened.

March 2021

Now March had picked up a lot more than February. Early in the month my father was able to get his Covid vaccine. Now my dad, an ex-military man, refused to admit that the shot hurt even in the slightest, so I really knew nothing about the experience.

We all celebrated (and by celebrated I mean cried over) the one year anniversary of the Coronavirus shutting everything down in the US. One year previously my family and I had planned to go on a trip and they were all hellbent on making sure it happened this time around. The trip actually went pretty well and no one got sick, but to say there was a little tension is an understatement. My family had different views on the pandemic which meant that they approached it very differently. Now we have had these views for my entire life, but it has never been a life threatening difference before. We made it out alright, but not without controversy.

For some reason people also chose this month to get particularly violent towards asian people because, well, I'm not entirely sure why. Beyond the typical racist reasons, they only seemed to attack because they blamed asian people for Covid. Now I'm not saying that it was dumb for them to attack people who didn't have Covid or had ever been to the country where they believe Covid started, but I'm definitely not saying that they're smart either. I'm half asian which meant that this violence hit close to home. I had family members cancel plans because going outside meant risking your life on a whole new level. So here officially started the Protect Asian Lives movement.

At the end of the month, I was able to hang out with one of my friends. Although it was one of these hangouts that she told me that she was planning on breaking up with her boyfriend (it was really about time). Once the split was official, he went back and became best friends with our old friend group. Now if I thought we divided between the "us" and the "them" before, this was something else completely. Between her ex and all the other members of the group, rumors started to spread through their respective groups which meant nothing good for the rest of us.

April 2021

In April I was finally able to get my Covid vaccine. Now I'm really not a fan of needles, but it wasn't nearly as bad as I had built it up to be (good ol' irrational fear doing its job). I got a sore arm for a few days with my first dose and some minor chills with my second dose a few weeks later, but that was the extent of it.

As a junior in Student Council, it is my job to plan prom. Typically prom is open to all upperclassmen, but this year we could only have one for the seniors to keep the numbers down. I came up with the theme "Mask-erade" (you get it? I really hope you do because I fought for that pun), so we really just had tulle and candles as decorations. The day of prom, about five of us went to the location to decorate and do our respective jobs (sell tickets, hand out drinks, count prom king and queen votes, hand out favors, clean up, etc) so we were out working on prom for about 10 hours. Afterwards we went to the after prom party at the school and ate our first real meal of the night. All in all, the whole thing took about 12 hours (mmmh service hours) and everyone was half dead the next day.

A few days after prom was SAT testing for the juniors which was just a lot of unnecessary stress. Most of the schools in the country had gone tests in the past year because of Covid so the SAT score was really useless. Although, I still wanted to do as good as I could (I brought an SAT book and studied during prom. Yeah I'm *that* person). Going to school for the SATs was the first time that I actually saw everyone in-person all year. I did not enjoy it. Everyone had become very different and ran with different groups. Everyone's hair was either a foot shorter or a foot longer (no in-between) and I don't even know what to think about the different style choices people made. They weren't bad per se, but these were people who I had known for 10 years who just changed in less than a year. In December they put out an option to go back in person for the second semester which I decided not to do and I stand by that decision.

May 2021

May was filled with AP testing and college planning. I chose to do an online AP test which went *a lot* better than it did the year before. This year they made an app that will lock your device and will automatically save your response even if your internet connection fails which was leagues better than it did for my AP government exam. There was also an increase in meetings about college plans (which I still think it's crazy to ask a 17 year old to decide what they want to do for the rest of their lives) and no one really cared too much about it during Covid. Most of the people who I talked to said that they had changed dream careers (including myself. I found out that I apparently can't add numbers together. Go figure) and not have a

whole new direction. Being left alone with yourself and going through all these new challenges really forced people to look at what they wanted to do.

So here we are: the end. Writing this has been my AP United States History final and I honestly thought that it wasn't going to be longer than a few pages, but here we are (7800+ words and counting). Looking at this whole pandemic all in one really brings a lot back. It was awful and people were sick and afraid even while trying to bring about revolution. There was great separation between democrats and republicans and it's still getting worse. Just last week they announced that you no longer have to wear a mask in public if you are vaccinated, but it still feels too soon. There are still immunocompromised people and the majority of the population still need to get vaccinated. My immediate family and I plan to continue wearing masks (I like people not being able to see half my face), but I do feel more inclined to go out into the world and do more things. We're healing, albeit slowly and only in regard to the pandemic, but healing nonetheless.

Well I'm sorry to leave you on a Shakespearean-level depressing ending, but that's reality for you. Death continues to knock on people's doors whether it be from disease or hate. People are separated and confused. The future is just a questionable abyss. The world is still sick, both literally and figuratively.