

## Life During a Pandemic

Brooklyn Howlett

The past two years have been unlike anything we have ever been through before. What started as a normal year like those that came prior, changed seemingly overnight. The first time I heard about the virus, it was December of 2019, and I was going through a tough freshman year at Portland State University while also working at a very popular family-owned restaurant in the city. Coworkers were discussing the virus that had started on the other side of the globe and was still unknown for the most part. As the discussions became more and more serious, I remember distinctly a conversation I had with a fellow waitress one night. We were discussing what might happen should the virus end up in the states.

“I guess there’s nothing to do about it,” she had said while we were preparing a plate of bread and butter for a new table. “If it is inevitable that the virus is going to spread around the world, I guess we’ll all inevitably get it one way or another”. I think back to this conversation and just want to cringe. At the time there wasn’t much known about the virus and seeing where we are in the world now, I know there were things we could have done. We could have been better at quarantining, we could have taken better precautions, and we could have been more considerate of those around us. In the end, a lot of people did end up keeping that view, but it seems ignorant now. Sure, plenty of people contracted the virus and ended up okay, but a large amount of people was not so lucky. This virus took so many people away from their families and friends and the life ahead of them. In that moment, if I knew what the world was going to look like in the matter of only a couple of months, I would have been speechless.

By March, the restaurant was completely shut down, school was remote, and I did not see many of my close friends until late into the summer. Life during a pandemic is not fun, or easy for that matter. People lose their jobs, people miss out on each other, and the way we function in public is changed drastically. After the fact, I am grateful for my situation and how myself and many of the people around me have made it all the way to being fully vaccinated without any real scares. I am one of the lucky ones. Many people are still struggling with work and paying their rent, they are unsure of their safety and there are still people all around the world denying the fact that the virus was ever a real threat.

That’s the thing about this pandemic; far too often, it was turned into a debate. 2020 and 2021 has been a year of standing up and speaking up for what needs to be changed in society. In this time of duress and need for action, people were fed up with the way that judgement, slimy politics, and ignorance has ran wild for far too long. People lost their lives standing up for what they believed in. Some lost their lives standing up for their basic human rights. Personally, I learned far more about myself and the world around me from this past year or two than I ever knew before. Many people had their eyes opened by these actions and the pandemics wrath across the globe. In these times, it is fascinating to see the ways that people either come together or shut themselves away from the rest of the world, and I don’t mean by quarantining.

Science teaches us the nature of a virus. The way that they transmit themselves into a host and wreak havoc within the body. Science tells us all it can about how we can try to keep ourselves safe, and when the time comes, science gives us a hand in the fight. When the vaccine was released, it was inevitable that the doubts would follow. I will resist the urge to make this letter very personal by complaining about some of the doubts, and instead say this: the vaccine was tested thoroughly, as it should be, but it faced harsher judgement by a political wrath that

was never involved so heavily in health and public safety. I understand, this vaccine was released at a record time and many people are unsure of its safety. However, we will continue to feel the effects of this global pandemic without a herd immunity barrier. Herd immunity is a common topic among biologists and is commonly taught in high school biology; but it is still not quite there yet for a lot of communities. As this pattern continues, we see things like the delta-variant rear its ugly head and we will continue to see such variants until people feel comfortable enough to get vaccinated or put their doubts aside for the safety of those around them.

Life during a pandemic showed me who I really was. We take for granted the things we get to do daily. Seeing a classmate every day, visiting loved ones who may be at a greater risk to something like this virus, gathering for a religious practice, traveling the world, and seeing new things, working without risking health and safety of ourselves and those around us, and so much more.

Occasionally, I revisit the very beginning. The conversations with coworkers, the call that informed the staff we were closing for good, the worries about school suddenly transferring online, and the family members who I was not able to see for months on end. Again, I am lucky to be happy and healthy and in a completely new stage of my life nowadays. I began my education at Arizona State University in the winter of 2021 and have started a life in another state with a new job. I am lucky to be surrounded by a support group and to be able to see family members and most of my friends more often and lucky to have never contracted the virus myself. I am lucky to have received the vaccine and to be going about my days in an almost normal way, whatever normal means now. Things change in the blink of an eye throughout life. I understand the ways that I need to stand up for what is right better, I understand the ways that I am privileged and how I can become a better member of society when I recognize those things. People all over the world have had it far worse than I did. Life is hard during a pandemic, but good things come out of it too. You become closer to friends and family in ways that you never even thought about.

Most important, I learned how creative humans are. People are resilient in these times. Never in my lifetime, had I experienced something like this before. Now, I see a new kind of beauty in the way that people find ways to overcome their hardships and struggles. I see the ways that people come together for the benefit of their communities or to help one another in ways that they might not have before. I see the empathy that spread amongst cities and towns as people begin to understand the severity of something like a global pandemic. Creativity and curiosity cannot be pushed out of the human spirit. These traits will live forever, and someday, when all of this is over or at least subdued, we can come together like we used to and remember the days when this all started. Life during a pandemic is change. Life during a pandemic is harsh. Life during a pandemic is resilient.