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History 129A

Professor Ruiz

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Surviving a Global Pandemic

I will never forget March 11, 2020. That afternoon I entered my Organic Chemistry lecture for a two-hour exam. I would have never imagined how much my life would have changed over the course of those two hours. I exit the exam and glance at my phone, only to be bombarded with texts and notifications. Among them, the entire NBA season has been postponed indefinitely, important public figures such as Tom Hanks announce that they have contracted COVID 19, large areas preparing to announce stay at home orders. It all happened so quickly. It's difficult to describe the fear that filled the Los Angeles air that afternoon. Coming home and reading the large headlines on the news only made me more anxious about how real this situation was. As much as I didn't want to believe it, my life and reality were about to change for a long time. It had begun to feel like the life we are living is a real-life movie. The city of Los Angeles and the world as a whole has completely halted and the worst part is, we still don't know how long this will continue. I have seen this pandemic have a great personal impact on myself, my friends, and family in a variety of ways both academically, socially, and financially, but most importantly, I have seen my philosophy and viewpoints towards different aspects of my life actually improve with time. This pandemic has awarded society a great

amount of time to reflect, reorganize priorities, while we are also learning to make connections to similar pandemics of the past.

I find the story behind the COVID-19 outbreak similar in a sense to a lot that I have learned about the diseases that ravaged indigenous peoples with the arrival of the Spaniards during their colonization of the Americas. While previously these vicious diseases were brought on as a result of a nation's efforts to colonize and expand, in my opinion, the COVID-19 outbreak is the result of the world becoming more internationally connected than ever before. In today's day and age, it is easier than ever for a small strand of the virus to make its way from Wuhan, all the way to rural America, and it speaks to how much the world has changed over the past couple of centuries. Although this pandemic differs in a historical context from Spanish smallpox spread, we can compare the "indigenous people" who suffered at the hands of the Spanish, to the inhabitants of countries such as America and Italy, who have greatly suffered as a result of the quick spread of the Coronavirus (Ruiz 28).

I think it's fair to say that this virus has had an impact on every individual in some sense, some more than others. Personally, as a UCLA transfer student, it saddens me that a quarter of my 2 years at UCLA will not include the on-campus interaction that I had become so fond of over the past couple of months. At the beginning of this pandemic, it was hard to reflect on the reality of how much interaction I was going to miss out on, at the same time I felt bad for some that were even less fortunate than myself. The class of 2020 will likely never get to walk the stage of Pauley Pavilion, hear their names called, and receive the diplomas, a culmination of decades of stress and schooling. Graduation is a date that I like many students look forward to. It has been painful on a national scale, to hear how disappointed some of this class's students are to

learn that they won't be having graduation, not only at UCLA but institutions across the globe. I am hopeful that this won't be the case for myself next year. This was just one of the many early developments that really helped me understand the seriousness and intensity of this virus outbreak.

Furthermore, I have found that my life has been consumed with the exclusive use of the Zoom application. With the implementation of Zoom in every class I am taking this quarter, I myself am surprised to say that I miss the feeling of taking an in-person course, and truly took the daily in-person interaction that I was spoiled with for granted. At times, I almost feel ridiculous at the fact that our educational system has consisted of various video chats throughout the day. While Zoom offers some convenience, I now realize how valuable the in-person experience is with regards to the amount of enjoyment we get from our college experience. With all this in mind, the stress that has been placed on American students such as myself during this pandemic is great, yet the impact that this pandemic has had on the world extends far further than just academics.

Personally, I have learned to become more appreciative of those that I have become accustomed to interacting with on a daily basis. After spending so much time with my friends on a daily basis and visiting different family members on a daily basis, it's difficult being told that we can no longer see these people for our own health. What I have come to realize from the time that I have spent away from my peers, is how much we all rely on each other. It has been around two months that I have not had the opportunity to visit my grandmother (who is considered a high-risk individual), and to see many of my friends in person and this has given me a greater appreciation for the life that I used to live. It is in these trying times that I like many have

realized the true value of companionship and comfort that interaction with others brings to us on a daily basis. Once this is stripped of you, it's definitely difficult to adjust. An interesting observation that I have made during this pandemic, is that although physical contact is limited, social media has allowed us to stay as connected with one another as ever before. However, as I previously stated, while this technology can be seen as convenient, there truly is no substitute for the satisfaction that comes with interacting with a loved one or friend face to face.

Now months have gone by and not much has changed, although people are becoming accustomed to this way of life. With more and more people becoming accustomed to a quarantine lifestyle, recently I have observed a great amount of support within my community, which has offered a small amount of hope. Many masks have been donated, and there is massive support for our healthcare workers. These gestures have filled my heart with warmth and made it easier to navigate through these difficult times. I often reflect on the difference that healthcare professionals have made in communities around the world, and this has restored my faith in humanity to come together and support one another. Inspired by this, I took it upon myself to offer my assistance as a young individual, and shop for the high-risk elderly citizens in my neighborhood that were in need of groceries. While my assistance doesn't make an enormous difference, I feel satisfied knowing that I have helped at least a couple of families navigate through this uncertain period. I've learned during this period that although we must socially distance from one another, it is easier to get through the pandemic if we all work together.

This pandemic has also had a great effect on millions of people globally, as the economy struggles to adjust to the world and workforce coming to a pause. Personally, I have been greatly affected by this halt in work. I never thought that I would need to apply for unemployment

benefits in order to support myself and this was a scary feeling. As a student working a job with many different UCLA students, all of us were confused as to how we were gonna pay any of our bills without a paycheck. While we have been offered some relief in a variety of different ways, I think I speak for most people when I say that it will be difficult to recover from this pandemic financially. Most bills that I owe have not been forgiven, but only delayed, due at a different time, yet I have no income to pay for these pending bills. This pandemic has put me under a level of financial security that I honestly never thought I would experience, particularly at such a young age. To make matters worse, like most college students, I do not qualify for the stimulus checks that have been sent out to millions of citizens by the government. I find it so surprising and saddening that there are so many students like me, who will see no support from their government in the form of a check during this period. Many would argue that we are in need of these funds the most.

My family has also been greatly affected financially by this pandemic. Both of my parents have been forced to stay at home as their business operation has been deemed as non-essential, and this certainly creates a great sense of financial uncertainty for them. The sad fact of the matter is that nobody knows what the future holds for them. This unknown is what ultimately creates so much fear. As a family, we have slowly learned how to budget our finances in an attempt to get through this difficult time. My heart breaks for small business owners, some of which must even break laws in order to make ends meet out of fear. They risk their health and livelihood in order to ensure that there is a future for themselves. The world economy will take a long time to recover from the effects of this pandemic. Billions of dollars have been lost and people definitely feel it, I only hope that it won't take long for this recovery to occur.

While what I have described thus far, seems to describe a dim reality with not much to look forward to, this pandemic has definitely had some positive impact as well. More specifically, I have realized that this pandemic has really “slowed down” my life and brought some sense of peace and balance during a stressful period in my life. Some may even argue that this pandemic, while saddening, can present itself as a blessing in disguise in the most philosophical sense. During this pandemic, I have found some free time to find what I truly enjoy in life, to remember what makes me happy and that it’s okay to sometimes take in life and the beauties that it has to offer. The first week of this pandemic was the first time that I had gone out for a walk around my neighborhood in at least two years, the first time in years I rode my bike near the beach, the first time I went hiking in years, and this is a sad revelation. I learned what it means to stop living such a structured life and trust impulse. I learned to reassess what's important to me in life and to give attention to what truly matters in life. Our health, the connections we make, etc.. This pandemic has also given me the opportunity to spend time with my family more than I ever have before. I have reflected on how little time I have spent with them leading up to this pandemic and how I truly took their presence for granted. I don’t think that I am alone in having these thoughts. For the first time in my life, I have looked beyond financial uncertainty, and despite the fact that my financial situation is not healthy, I am able to keep my head up and smile during these trying times. I was shocked at the fact that I have experienced such feelings, yet I decided to welcome this change for what it is, and I am grateful for doing so.

Reflecting on my experiences during this pandemic, COVID-19 has been a trying time for me but I have also learned a great amount. Looking back on the impact that this virus has had

on not only the world but myself and my family, I am actually very grateful for the growth that I have experienced and the positive that I have taken from this negative experience. I have learned to look at my life with a new outlook that removes a lot of the stress associated with day to day tasks, while also learning to appreciate all that I have in this life and removing the strain that financial burden puts on daily life. I only hope that the world recovers soon from COVID-19, while also experiencing a rebirth, as we learn to cautiously return to normal life.

Works Cited

Ruiz, Teófilo F. *Spanish Society, 1348-1700*. Routledge, 2017.