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My Story of COVID-19

It was February of 2020, a really fun yet difficult month for me. Winter Quarter proved to be a challenge: I had three in-class midterms in one day, found out a friend got kicked out of UCLA for domestically abusing his girlfriend, and was beginning to feel burnt out due to an overbooked schedule I dug myself into before sophomore year began. It was by far my hardest quarter at UCLA, we all have them, right? At least there was Spring Quarter to look forward to: playing Spikeball with friends at Sunset Rec, taking friends to all the different beaches across the Southern California coast, and a somewhat easier class schedule with professors and topics that I enjoyed. This was surely the light at the end of a dark tunnel transitioning from Winter to Spring Quarter; however, I would be greatly surprised at what the future held. I began hearing reports of this thing called a coronavirus that infected over 3,000 people in China. I was really apathetic and did not think much of it since this was an issue on the other side of the globe that had no impact on me or my country, so it was just a thought in the wind. Now only about three months later, I am living with a family that is not my own in my hometown of Sierra Madre, California, in a county where there are now about 1,700 dead and 35,000 infected from that thought in the wind, which has now become a thought throughout my everyday life. My name is Jack Lama, and these are my personal anecdotes, opinions, and learning experiences on how COVID-19 has affected my life and the lives of all since this outbreak began.

I remember being an incoming sophomore at Pasadena High School reading about how the Bubonic Plague ravaged Europe in the 14th Century for my summer readings in AP European History. Yet, I would have never guessed that I would be living through a pandemic as a sophomore in college at UCLA. I am an American. I live in a state that has the fifth largest economy in the world. I live in one of the most expensive suburbs in Los Angeles. What disease or virus could possibly affect me? Sure, we face our own degree of hardships as privileged

Americans, but severe diseases and viruses are the types of things that affect third world countries, well at least I thought. Fast forward, at about 2:45pm on March 10th while sitting in History 122B with Professor Tutino, my friend Max handed me his phone that said finals and classes would be going online until April 10th, and I felt quite indifferent. Next, I got a text from my girlfriend saying her parents decided not to come out from their home in Minnesota to come and meet me. A few days later, my girlfriend's father got her a flight back home to Minnesota that following Saturday. And right before what we believed to be our last Friday date night for a few weeks, we got an email from Chancellor Block stating that the entirety of Spring Quarter would be online. I began to feel numb, and I could only enjoy that Friday night to such an extent knowing that best case scenario, I would likely not see her until June. Next thing I know, it is Saturday afternoon and I am bidding her farewell with eyes full of tears, wondering how each of us were going to get through this tragedy. I would have never thought that in the span of seven days, my life would have taken a 180 degree turn for the worst. I truly felt as if this was all a bad dream, or a somber movie that only got worse. I was now faced with a virtual finals week, stuffing my girlfriend's college belongings into various closets at my Fraternity house, and discerning whether I should shelter myself at the Fraternity house in Westwood or back home in Sierra Madre.

Although I take great pride in being from Sierra Madre and the Greater Pasadena area, home is not exactly a safe haven for me; instead, it is a place where I am figuring out how to heal deep wounds from the past. Moving out of my parents house at the age of 18 made the word "home" more difficult for me to understand. Though I have been truly blessed with family friends that allow me to stay in their home with no financial obligation in return, it is not the same as immediate family, and it is unrealistic to expect it to be. So when Governor Newsom

and Mayor Garcetti implemented a safer at home order, there was no easy option for me. I ended up coming back into town in order to be closer to family by staying with my uncle who lived close by in Pasadena. I observed how much he physically and mentally declined (probably due to being an aging type 1 diabetic) and realized I could not possibly do my online quarter in his home, so I moved into a family friends house in Sierra Madre which was a healthier environment to do my studies. I would later realize that my uncle's condition was a result of a malignant brain tumor, and I just got notice that he has two years to live and will have to go into an assisted living facility for the rest of his life.

Doing Spring Quarter online has been anything but easy. There is a great lack of motivation and passion that comes from watching previously recorded lectures online, especially for an extrovert like me who gains energy from speaking with new classmates and Professors. I have luckily been able to keep my research position for a research center in the UCLA Graduate School of Education, and I now have first-hand experience of how online learning is nowhere near as effective as in person learning. From a financial standpoint, trapping students in their homes while still paying the same \$15,000 in tuition and not having on-campus issues sounds like a dream for Chancellor Block, but not for us students. One thing I have surely learned from COVID-19 is that online learning does not work for the majority of students. Not everybody has a safe or quiet place to work, good Wi-Fi connection, or a home in general. This is intersectional with the higher rates of abuse, domestic violence, anxiety, depression, and suicide that have come from the virus and the legislation that has been passed to try and limit its spread. I, as well as the rest of the world, have learned about how little control we have over our lives, and how fragile our lifestyles truly are. Sometimes, I truly feel as if there are more important things happening right now compared to Medieval Spanish and American West History. Do not get me

wrong, it is a joy to have those moments throughout each day where I am able to forget about the terrors of the world by focusing on a good book I am reading, having many impersonal phone calls with faces over a screen, so on, and so forth. But at the end of the night, I come back to the reality that we now live in and sometimes weep, feeling as if I have lost a great part of my life, freedom, and liberty.

During my first few weeks of splurging on every news source to try and discern the implications of COVID-19, I could not help but be frustrated and ashamed with humanity. I watched people throw elbows at the elderly for a package of toilet paper, others hoarding sanitation supplies for the “betterment” of their family business, and the media instilling unnecessary fear into the hearts of those who were already fearful. I have always disliked politics, but the political discourse from COVID-19 made me dislike politics even more. The finger pointing, the awful exchanges in words to one another, the financial greed, the status. I mean, what happened to working together and wanting the best for our nation and the world? That seems nonexistent in all of the things that I read and watched about COVID-19, as if there is not enough negativity going on in the world right now. In this rare time where the world is somewhat united and all focused on eliminating the same enemy at hand, I hope this unification can continue once we beat COVID-19. But then again, what do I know? I am just a nineteen year-old trying to figure it all out.

Although I previously stated that it is hard to find passion and motivation to excel and learn in my classes during this time, it is fitting to be taking American West and Medieval Spanish history since both of these time periods have a focus on how disease disrupted the functions of society. Beginning with American West, Professor Stephen Aron for his second lecture posted a multitude of slides that identified all of the historical information that tracked

every disease Native-Americans suffered from Europeans in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Seeing the never ending list of the specific diseases and their mortality rates on different Indian tribes across the New World affected me much deeper since I am now living in my own pandemic. Moving onto Medieval Spanish History, there were also many periods of unrest, whether that was from disease or from the persecution that religious powers executed against others. For example, when speaking about the impact of the Black Plague, Professor Ruiz stated, “In England and Castile, many of the villages wiped out by the plague and by other factors such as famine or violence were never repopulated, and these ‘lost villages’ disappeared from history,” (Ruiz, Pg. 28). Now I am not saying that COVID-19 compares to the severity of the Black Plague from this passage, but I do believe the pandemic we are facing now will change the perspectives of many on what gives meaning to their lives, while being more grateful for the many privileges and liberties that can be taken away instantly.

Across the world and in the United States, there have been many talks about “what now,” as the beginning shock from this has begun to settle. Socially, people are growing tiresome of quarantine, simply because we were created to be social beings with other people, and those privileges have been taken away from us to such a great extent. Economically, over half of Los Angeles has filed for unemployment and millions more across America have as well. Also, America’s economy going silent means job loss and starvation for people in the developing countries whose economies are dependent upon ours. The growing unemployment as a result of COVID-19 is now exceeding unemployment levels of the Great Depression. Politically, it is mayhem; I do not know what or who to trust for valuable information on COVID-19 because there are so many different responses, arguments, and conspiracy theories that instill fear and frustration into my mind. The only news I watch now is the daily count of cases and deaths in

Los Angeles county, and I feel troubled because there is still conspiracy about whether such people truly died from COVID-19 or not.

I would like to conclude this book on a positive note, because I believe that there is both beauty in the struggle and ugliness in the success in every situation. It is May 13th, 2020, as I write this part of my paper, and I am surviving this virus. I have gained a greater sense of gratitude for large group settings, hugs, handshakes, and speaking with many people from different upbringings and backgrounds each and everyday on campus. I have also been inspired by our frontline workers who have been working tirelessly to contain this virus with all their might, as well as organizations like Dream Center LA that have served all who come to their doors with meals, joy, and the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus. There are beautiful things that can come out of a tragedy like this: a way to reflect on what is most important in our lives while uniting to serve those in need. There is no guarantee whether I will come out of this virus alive or not, but I hope this paper can be a primary document that serves as one of billions of testimonies on my perception of how this virus has affected my life, and the lives of those around me.

References

Ruiz, Teofilo. (2011). *A History of Spain, Spain's Centuries of Crisis: 1300-1474*. Blackwell Publishing, Pg. 28.