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Reflections of Life During a COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID- 19 pandemic halted the world and everyone's plans in sight. The adjustment to quarantine and social distancing forced institutions to adapt in order to thrive along with everyone as well. The new living situation brings new problems as well as a time to reflect on how our current system was not up to par in aiding and protecting its most vulnerable citizens and community members. My own personal realization on how we interact is changing in front of our eyes when I had to go to a funeral right before quarantine was enforced. My cousin had just died and for the wake and the funeral only 15 people were allowed in the church with two people per pew six feet apart. The rest of the family members that were not able to enter the church were given a link to see the service livestream. When it came to the burial most of the family had to watch the ceremony from the inside of the car. At the last minute, our family was told the Catholic Priest was not able to make it due to the archdiocese of Los Angeles canceling all in person events. The whole situation was peculiar, saddening, and created constant anxiety placing the same emotions that would envelop my family and I as we live in new parameters during a pandemic.

Covid-19 has affected many aspects of my life, such as academia, opportunities, relationships, and my mental health. The realization that the Covid-19 situation was finally taken seriously was when my winter quarter classes during week ten were held online. Most of my professors used the opportunity to test drive the schematics of classes online. It of course had

lulls, technical delays, and a bit of tinkering on the professors behalf. That spring break felt more like a transition period for everyone to realize that social-distancing and quarantine was our reality. Though the jokes continued to stream from social media platforms of the different types of activities people occupied themselves, life seemed emotionally draining on the aspect of waiting. I was first saddened by my tangible plans that were decimated in the wake of the pandemic. I was planning on presenting research at a conference in Santa Cruz, but that was postponed. My future job opportunities and internship for the summer were delayed. It was a new aspect in the interview process while applying for these new roles. Right before the quarantine was declared I actually had an interview. The second interviewer did not show up and resorted to working from home. I ended up getting the job, however, what was meant for my start date to be in March ended up being pushed to mid-June. Nevertheless, I was quite happy that these opportunities decided to continue on or simply delayed the start date. I am quite fortunate in my case that my job and internship still had a start date, since many of my friend's summer internships or summer programs were cancelled. My then current internship got shut down earlier than I expected due the focus going towards how the department will adapt. That became a common theme for any work, seminar planning, or volunteering aspects I was a part of, how do we survive and adapt. The adaption in any institution or project truly revealed the ethics and actions people took during a time of uncertainty. This disappointment in action came in the form of my university not supporting their students as best as they could have. UCLA did not offer refunds on the resources students were unable to use due to the shelter in place order. The incompetence and lack of transparency led me to take action.

The stirring effects of cabin fever started in the beginning of Spring Quarter pushed me to take action or most importantly the need for me to do something. My professor in my Labor Studies class shared a volunteer opportunity where I can help union members of Unite Here Local 11 apply for unemployment insurance. Understanding the application and process truly brought clarity and frustration on institutions that weren't properly funded or prepared. While navigating this process in helping people apply for unemployment insurance, it became irksome to hear celebrities chime in on morning shows continuing to use the phrase, "We are all in this together". The frustration continued when Forbes predicted that Jeff Bezos would become a trillionaire in the coming years when his own workers were not being properly protected or supported during a pandemic. In this time of frustration, I continued to do my best to help out. I also started volunteering for UCLA's chapter C.A.L.P.I.R.G. also known as California Public Interest Research Group. I focused on helping with the New Voters Project. Since elections were coming in November and it appears the social distancing order will be well into effect in the next three to six month. It became important to me that people who are eligible to vote will not face barriers. We pushed for mail-in ballots and were successful in doing so! I was content on doing the work, but knew deep down this was my way of coping, burying myself in work. I personally felt if I was not working or being productive, I would face what I feel many of my friends and family were facing, depression.

There were many days that I just felt utter sadness. The sadness would range from not getting the opportunity to hangout with classmates from last quarter to the fun plans I had with my graduating friends were indefinitely cancelled. Many of my relationships that were tied to

the UCLA campus truly hurt. There was no spontaneity that you would feel when on campus where you would run into someone you know, that was gone. The pandemic brought the need for effort in reaching out to friends. Luckily in some cases the bonding in misery brought some relationships stronger. I was also able to reconnect from friends that I had not been in contact with. There were old friends that I missed and simply wondered how they were doing and got in touch with them. These small and short conversations whether over phone, facetime, or text truly became the highlight of my week. However, the dependence on technology to communicate became quite straining. Beyond the average aspect of doing regular studies, attending zoom lectures, and having multiple meetings over zoom, constantly being on the laptop for work and leisure became tiring. Much of my own family felt the difficulty.

For my own case since I live at home and commuted to UCLA there was not much change simply less money spent for parking this quarter. However, new roles and spaces were developed when my entire family was home. Both my brother and I had to get new laptops for school. With zoom my old laptop burnt out and I had to spend the money I had been saving on a new one. As for my younger brother, my parents fortunately were able to afford. Both my parents were not fired and considered essential workers. My father is a contractor that works from the cable company. His hours began to change due to the high demand for wifi and cable services. My father would work 40+ hours and be on call in case of any emergencies in the Los Angeles area. As for my Mother, she is a high-school teacher that is teaching advanced placement government. Seeing my mother's work while transitioning her whole class online, I understood what my professors were going through and sympathized. As for both my siblings, I made sure to

help out when they needed me, especially my brother. My brother who is in fifth grade has severe dyslexia and is autistic. Much of the resources and assistance that he usually gets in classrooms was gone. Therefore my sister and I would do our best to help out. With everyone home there was much more home-cooking and bonding. Everyone would collaborate on the grocery list to make sure everyone's cravings were fulfilled. However, when it came time to go buy the groceries the experience was quite stark about our new reality.

Since I live in Long Beach we tend to follow and adopt the same protocol from Los Angeles. Both Long Beach and Los Angeles have a high homelessness crisis, high cost of living, and areas where the population is dense creating a potential surge for Covid-19 diagnoses if we as a city do not abide by the suggestions from public health officials. Due to the current political climate and neoliberal policies enforced the health of the community and the worry of COVID-19 feels as though it was fad and everyone is now concerned about the economy. Though I pride myself for living in Long Beach that has more progressive ideologies and organizing being done on the ground, it does not escape me that a couple miles away there were protests in Huntington Beach and in Orange County. It truly shows how some minor inconvenience and adjustment some people's daily lives is perceived as oppression.

The arrogance and ego continues to unfold at every level. The unimagined pain being done that ravages other existence can only be described when Hernan Cortes invaded Tenochtitlan. Like a pandemic this is not a whole swipe of killing and many waves of pain and death done by people who are greedy and arrogant. Our past living dynamic is not going to be the same, how we interact going forth will bring new norms in the time we try to rebuild. The frustration and disparities being felt around my community and beyond will bring people to

rethink our current capitalistic system and how it neglects to help the proletariats/working class.

However, my one hope that I see is that there is more connectivity in working together. My hope is that through the World Health Organization researchers across the globe use science and research to come together find a solution for COVID-19 and beyond.