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Coronavirus Pandemic Reflection

Nearly two months ago, I was celebrating my 21st birthday. I had been looking forward to March 16, 2020 for years. To me, it marked an important milestone in my life, one that all college students across the United States yearn for in their own lives. More than anything, I was most looking forward to the elaborate celebration with close friends at school. As my birthday came closer, it was all I could think about. My roommate and I had birthdays on back to back weekends and had planned a joint celebration at our apartment with all our friends. Along with my birthday, I had also been looking forward to my spring racing season as a member of the men's crew team at UCLA. On February 29, we had our first race against top-ranked Cal Berkeley in front of hundreds of spectators in Newport Beach. The following weekend, we had our home-opener race against Orange Coast College in front of a similar crowd in Marina del Rey. We narrowly lost both races, yet we were hungry to win against these teams again later in the year along with our race the next weekend against the University of San Diego. Rather than gearing up for a race that Saturday morning, I was packing up my apartment and moving back home. Within a week, the pandemic known as coronavirus shut down all collegiate sporting events, classes, and large gatherings and brought about a strict stay-at-home quarantine order throughout all of California. I did not feel immediately saddened by the end of my season and time at UCLA for this year. I was more confused and shocked at the quick turn of events. While

I did eventually feel saddened by these events, spending my time with friends and family has made me cherish these relationships more than ever and find the beauty in life during this hectic time.

It was nearing the end of winter quarter and I was looking forward to spring. California Governor Gavin Newsom had declared a state emergency in early March and I had not given the coronavirus half a thought after it's introduction to the United States. Rumors spread around campus like wildfire. Within my friend group especially, we all shared differing opinions on the virus and its outcome. Some thought it would be just another mild case of the flu and others promptly isolated themselves before the state officially recognized stay-at-home quarantine. Everyone was talking about how the virus began in the open markets in Wuhan and spread to Europe with remarkably deteriorating affects in Italy. Students started wearing masks to class and I kept hearing more news and the worry in my peers' voices. The height of my rowing season was only beginning and finals were around the corner. I had other things to focus on and I did not think that this virus could possibly end my season and that of other sports. I believed that the coronavirus would be just like the swine flu from years ago. It would come and go just as an ordinary virus. I started hearing of other schools suspending their athletic programs for the year along with moving to online instruction and I was still hesitant. With all these rumors floating around, I was waiting to see when UCLA's turn would be next. Right after I finished practice one day, I received the notice that my season would be suspended indefinitely and instruction would be online for the remainder of the quarter. My coach was optimistic that our season would be back on before year's end, but in my mind, my hope and passion for the season and my sport dwindled right away. This virus immediately postponed my goals for the season until another whole year which made me reevaluate my purpose in my sport for the remainder of this year.

Right as school transitioned to online instruction and my season ended, I packed up my apartment and moved back home. My parents were thrilled to see me and have me home but the abrupt end of my season and time at school started to bear down on me. I continued training for my sport, logging mind-numbing miles on the rowing machine in my garage but without any true reason. This virus started to make me feel a variety of emotions. I was feeling sad for the end of the year and angry because I was feeling as if I was in the best shape of my life and could not be stopped by some virus. Ultimately, I had to accept that there could be nothing to do to reverse the quarantine and go back to the way things were. This virus changed the dynamic of my family along with my entire community and I needed to focus my energy elsewhere rather than being in a state of worry.

Both my parents' occupations were affected by the onset of coronavirus. Fortunately, my mom was able to keep her job at a reduced salary and at the same time, my dad picked up a job at the local supermarket for some extra household income. For my dad, he enjoys being out of the house and being able to work but putting himself at risk for catching the virus in public brought concern to my mom especially. My mom had a very long commute to work of over two hours both directions into Century City, and the work from home order proved to be a blessing in disguise. She was finally able to spend more time at home with family and do the things she loves without the stress of her office building. My sister graduated from university last year and was able to keep her job despite many of her peers losing their jobs as a result of the virus. With unemployment rates in the United States rising the highest since the Great Depression, it's safe to say that worry personally hit home and every household in America. Worry not only for the safety of an occupation, but for the safety and health of oneself. For me, worry began to fade away on my birthday which marked a turning point for me during this hectic time.

I turned 21 on March 16 amidst the stress of finals week and the new way of quarantined life. While I felt sad about not being able to celebrate back at school with friends, I was able to see the joy from my entire family about being able to celebrate with me. Hours before Ventura County shut down all bars and sit-down dining in restaurants, my dad and I were able to share a shot and beer together at a local and very empty restaurant bar. A short moment, but it meant the world for my dad and I to celebrate my birthday together. Later, my god brother and sister's family came to celebrate with me for dinner at my house. Through all the uneasiness of this pandemic, being able to gather together as a family and share laughs that night made me realize how important it is to cherish family during this time. Especially because it seemed as if I could not go a single hour without hearing about the virus through word of mouth or over the television and radio. Being quarantined at home during that time gave us all a sense of comfort as we were able to live together once again.

There are certain things that I miss about school, but I feel lucky to have a home away from school and have all my family members healthy. One thing I found most interesting at home was the amount of people walking around the neighborhood and local parks. Before the pandemic, I would see the occasional passerby and the park as open as can be, but every day during quarantine it seemed as if all my neighbors flooded into the park. This was a great sight because my neighbors could enjoy the simple pleasures of the community without the stress of a workplace or driving to an office. My time spent at home reminded me of how much my family means to me along with my community. Something as threatening as the coronavirus should not be taken lightly; it takes an entire communal effort of practicing good hygiene to limit its fatal effects. The beginning of spring break in March brought about another chapter in my quarantine experience.

After finals week, I spent spring break back at home when I would normally begin a training camp with my rowing team prior to our important spring races. I was fortunate to have one of my teammates, Max, spend the week with me at my house rather than at the deserted UCLA campus. As I arrived at his resident hall, I got a glimpse of the quarantine's impact on my school. There was not a single person in sight. Spring is the most vibrant time of the year on campus and not seeing the bustling mob of students walking to and from class made my school seem more dead than ever. I could not imagine being able to isolate in a dorm room for the remainder of the school year. Max and I talked about this for the entire drive back home and we came up with an idea. To keep the sense of team culture and friendships close to home, we decided to look into renting a beach house in Newport Beach. We chose this location because of its beautiful, relaxing scenery and community during this hectic time along with its proximity to our mentor, our coach who lives close by. After planning for the majority of spring break, we found a spot on the beach with five teammates and moved in the following week. I was disappointed to be leaving my family, but they urged me to enjoy this time with my friends. It was a unique opportunity that I could not refuse.

After we finally settled in, we were able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life right outside our house. With the beach across the street, we all managed to spend all waking hours of the day surfing, relaxing on the beach, or studying. Being able to enjoy these new activities made us feel like a greater part of the beach community. From watching the sunset every day to spending time with my friends, the global stress of the pandemic started to bear no visible effect on me, my peers, and our new community. Something about the ocean and the sea breeze revitalizes the body and mind in my professional opinion. One recent notable event that occurred was the localized beach closures for all of Orange County by Governor Newsom after an overcrowding

of people at the beaches. The pushback by the community along with local law enforcement has proven to demonstrate the importance of the beach in Orange County with slogans such as “Pound Sand Newsom” being heard up and down the coast. Several people still flock to the beach while keeping a safe distance without punishment from police. Personally, I still choose to go to the beach as my friends and I have remained healthy throughout our entire stay. From an outside perspective, our actions seem selfish but we would rather live our lives out of pure enjoyment rather than fretting about potential dangers of the pandemic. We practice good hygiene and the beach has provided us a crucial outlet for us to relax. Currently, countries like Australia and New Zealand have survived the wave of coronavirus and lifted their quarantine regulations. I see the same thing happening in the United States and other nations globally over time as a vaccine gets developed and more antibodies spread. Many of my peers have become pessimistic during this time by stirring up obnoxious conspiracies and rumors. It seems as if they want the virus to continue its rampage on the American population. With more optimistic changes and time in general, I see the virus passing through the United States within the year.

The events occurring throughout the coronavirus pandemic relate to those of the conquest of Tenochtitlan by Hernan Cortes in the 16th century. Upon arrival, the Spaniards immediately exposed the natives of Tenochtitlan to smallpox (Ruiz, lecture 10). With symptoms beginning up to ten days after contact, the infected persons would experience body sores, pain and fever. These symptoms are similar to those of the coronavirus in that symptoms appear after nearly two weeks from exposure to the virus. While natives did not have today’s vast medicinal resources, the mass spread of coronavirus demonstrates the unique nature of this virus to tear through whole populations despite modern medicine and the potential for more outbreaks to come.