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School, Work and Life: The Profound Effects of COVID-19

Today, scenes that would normally only be depicted in post apocalyptic movies have become the norm. Wearing a facemask, standing six feet away from one another, food and water shortages, and even refraining from shaking hands or hugging your loved ones has become a standard protocol that divides the line between life and death. It is interesting to see the evolution of society from the beginning of the pandemic with factors such as panic buying, mass hysteria, and over compensation of personal protective gear (PPE) to how everyone is dealing with it today. It is clear that for the majority of society, the extreme fear exhumed in those first few weeks has subsided and things are beginning to shift in the direction that will appropriately deal with the hand we have been dealt, however, there are extremists on both sides of the fence. On one side, there are those still hunkered down in complete isolation with fear of leaving their house and on the other hand, there are those who believe this to be a mass hoax produced by the media and, in some cases, by governments internationally. Whatever the individual cases may be, I stand somewhere in between. I do believe that this illness is not something to be taken lightly and proper precautions are necessary. Much like the introduction of smallpox during the conquest of the new world, COVID-19 is transmitted through close contact. In an article written for PBS, it is noted that such diseases “flourished in dense communities and tended to explode in sudden, overwhelming spates of infection and death” and that it is “Transmitted via coughing

[and] sneezing” (Guns Germs & Steel: Variables. Smallpox). It is stomach turning to see the parallels of diseases, then and now, that create pandemics. Despite my own personal belief in the situation and the beliefs of others, everyone everywhere has had to adapt to the new and fearful environment. Whether it has been for the better, or more commonly, the worse, every aspect of life has been affected by COVID-19. From schooling to work to life, COVID-19 has had a profound effect on me.

I remember seeing footage on social media of individuals in China stooped over, crippled with pain that would eventually collapse in the streets. It looked like something straight out of a horror movie. However, as horrifying as the footage and captions stating “New Virus Taking Over China” was, I can honestly and embarrassingly say that I really did not think anything of it. Yet, this type of footage began to surface more and more, gaining the attention of various news outlets and eventually becoming international news. Before I, or anyone for that matter, could really comprehend what was unfolding before us, panic had already set. Stores were selling out the aforementioned items as well as canned goods and baby wipes. I had walked into my local grocery store for my week's supply and walked out almost empty handed. It was hard to comprehend what was happening and I could not imagine what the next few weeks and even months would have in store, yet it was the first few days that left me fearful for the future. Little did I know that this virus would leave me fearing for my educational career in such a way that I would find myself in a position of dropping out.

When the terrible effects of COVID-19 became known, UCLA took decisive actions in order to keep the staff, students and community safe. While I commend my school for doing what they did, it put an academic strain on me. When the administration decided to move all

classes to online only, I understood completely that this was the only option available, however, taking classes that were not designed to be taught online and teaching them online has proven to be difficult for me. I know completely that no professor, staff, or administrator is at fault, in fact, it is no one's fault, but that does not take away from the fact that it has created a rift in the educational experience I expected from a school of such high caliber as UCLA. I am doing my best to overcome the obstacles that have become apparent, but it has been a very difficult road. Not being able to attend courses or have one on one in-person meetings as well as not being able to engage in lectures has left me feeling lost for a majority of my spring quarter. Another major issue is how graduation has been affected. Because of COVID-19, graduation will be a virtual ceremony. When this was announced, I and the entire graduating class of 2020 was heartbroken. Having a virtual graduation is simply a tease of what we truly want. Having the ceremony taken away from us, to me, is like taking away the celebration of all our hard work and dedication. Yet, through surveys and letters to the dean, our voices have been heard and a decision has been made to have an actual graduation ceremony at a later time when it is deemed appropriate and safe.

There seemed to be a domino effect in my life when COVID-19 metastasized. At first it was how I shopped and what I shopped for followed with my education. What subsequently followed was work and eventually my career. During my time at UCLA I created a small home renovation business for the sole purpose that I would be able to create my on schedule so I could work around schooling. I have been involved in construction my entire life. Both my biological father and my brother, someone I have looked up to since the day I was born, have worked construction their entire lives. My small business began to grow and I found myself working every day that I was not in school. Business was good and I was enjoying it to the fullest, but I

knew once school was up, I would want to pursue employment with a large construction corporation. As 2019 ended and 2020 began bringing with it COVID-19, I noticed that work went from plentiful to sporadic. I had a savings which I unfortunately had to dip my hands into, but being completely on my own, paying for my own education, rent, bills, insurance, and basic necessities, I knew that would not last long. Sitting in my truck after my first day of work in almost a week and a half, I reviewed my options. I could blame society or someone for my current misfortune, panic, or buckle down and continue to pursue my dreams. I decided to update my resume and send it off to various companies that I wanted to work for. It was a challenge because of my specific situation. Most construction companies hire upper level positions to those with an education in engineering, business, or construction; my major is in history. However, I have one very specific aspect that most college graduates entering the construction industry do not have. Being that I have worked construction since I was seventeen, I have over a decade of work experience in commercial and residential construction. This coupled with a formal education from the number one public university in the United States has given me the opportunity to work for the largest infrastructure company in Southern California, Sully-Miller Contracting Company. In a time of doubt and uncertainty, I have landed my dream job as a project engineer with my dream company. While I cannot help but count my lucky stars and blessings, a job like this during a time such as the one we are in, does have some challenges. The first being that it is difficult finding time to complete schoolwork as I am traveling from south Mission Viejo to Thousand Oaks, an hour and forty-five minute drive, during the week. However, I cannot complain simply because I have been given an opportunity in a time of fear and doubt.

While career wise I could not be happier, my personal life has taken some serious blows. Because of COVID-19, my family is facing some very strenuous financial hardships. My step dad owns a private investigation company for workers compensation. Due to the stay-at-home orders, the people who my dad would normally investigate are not leaving their houses. As a result, the companies that would normally hire my dad have completely stopped investigation operations. My mom has been forced to take a second job while my dad scrambles for work in order to support the family (my little brother and little sister) and it is taking a toll on her. While I am financially stable, my two older brothers and I have been working as much overtime as we can in order to help my mom, dad, little brother, and little sister stay afloat. Psychologically, the pandemic has severely affected almost everyone I know from friends to coworkers to family. My girlfriend, who would normally be found outside, laughing and having fun, is inside for fear of getting sick and experiences intense episodes of depression and anxiety. Thankfully she can work from home, but this leaves any tasks involving leaving the house up to me. I shop for all the groceries and necessities that we need. Things are beginning to get better for my family and my girlfriend. Between my older brothers and I, enough money is generated in order to pay our parents rent as well as food when they need it. For my girlfriend, she is recovering emotionally and mentally and beginning to see the good in things again. Her smile is becoming more frequent as well as her laughter and that warms my heart to no end. All I want is for my family to be safe and happy.

COVID-19 has had profound effects on my schooling, work, and personal life. Whether positive situations have occurred during this time such as landing my dream job or negative such as the trials my family has had to deal with, everything has been affected and how I now view

the world has been impacted. We have become so accustomed to the way things are now, it is difficult at times remembering what it was like before COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the globe. I am interested to see what the future holds. There will be obvious changes such as greater sanitary measures and people being more aware and self conscious of what they are doing when they touch things or sneeze and cough, but I wonder how people will react when the quarantine and stay-at-home orders are lifted. Will people go to their favorite restaurants right away or will it take time? Will people suffer from post traumatic stress disorder? How long will this go on for? These are questions that cannot be answered just yet. I just hope that when this is finally over, we learn from it and become better people. The last thing this world needs is any more sorrow.

Works Cited

“Guns Germs & Steel: Variables. Smallpox.” *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 2005,

www.pbs.org/gunsgermssteel/variables/smallpox.html.