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### Processing Life Through a Pandemic

Only a few months ago the world had not heard of the Coronavirus, but as of now it has no doubt impacted the lives of people all over the world. This novel virus has resulted in an alternate way of living that is vastly different in operation and will set a precedent for change for the future. I do not believe I am alone in presuming that our lives will never be the same going forward, regardless of whether we create a vaccine and flatten the curve. The pandemic and its consequences have greatly impacted not only my life, but the lives of my friends and family members, as well as millions of people across the world.

To begin, I had not heard of the coronavirus until mid February when media coverage exploded with news about a virus that had affected thousands of people in China. I remember people were making light of the situation, likening the virus's name to the popular beer Corona. I thought that because I had already lived through other pandemics such as the Swine Flu and Bird Flu that this would be no different. I also remembered the Ebola scare that we faced in the United States resulted in very minimal cases and this put my mind at ease. At that point in my life I had no reason to believe that the Coronavirus would ravage through the United States. I had conversations with friends about the situation in China and we all concluded that if it did reach the United States, that it would not reach us and would most likely be isolated to a few hundred cases or so. Looking back now, it is evident how completely naive I was to the situation but as

cases grew and traveled to the United States my thought process completely changed as our situations changed.

I can recall the first moment I realized just how serious the Coronavirus really was. As a student at UCLA, I am accustomed to receiving emails from our Chancellor Gene Block. We would often receive emails about news or events happening on campus. On March 6th at 1 A.M. I received an email from Chancellor Gene Block that students at UCLA were being tested for the coronavirus and that they were self-isolating as a precaution. I remember feeling a wave of shock and instant anxiety. I began to think of all the people I had come into contact with that week, I had just come from a strike rally on campus where I was in close contact with about three hundred or so other people. I had class the very next day as well as an event I helped coordinate for a student organization in which we expected 150 people. To make matters worse I was ill myself and had been experiencing flu like symptoms and a severe cough for two weeks at that point. I had been taking precautions to prevent direct contact with peers, but I was still going to class and attending meetings for campus organizations as usual. I decided at that point to attempt to self-isolate as much as possible, but in-person classes continued for two days.

On May 10th, UCLA students received yet another email from Chancellor Gene Block that all classes would be moved online until the second week of Spring Quarter. As it was finals week of Winter Quarter at the time, my friends and I were elated. The remainder of our finals were moved online, but we still believed that we would have Spring Quarter in-person. As the weeks progressed, we were sent more updates. Eventually we were given the announcement that our entire Spring Quarter would be held remotely, or online, and that the graduating class of 2020 would not be having an in-person graduation ceremony but instead a virtual one. I was no

longer excited about the change to online classes, as Spring Quarter was my last quarter at UCLA.

Being a transfer student, I have less time at UCLA than a traditional four year student does. Transferring to a four year college was a major highlight in my life, and living in Westwood I cherished being away from home and having my independence and freedoms. The transition to online classes was disappointing because I never got to experience my last classes in-person. I didn't have the chance to make connections with fellow peers and professors the way I would if I were taking these classes on campus. Although I lived off-campus in an apartment in Westwood, my parents decided it would be best for me to live with them during the pandemic. They felt safer having me home as self-quarantine and social distancing began. I found that living at home was not the best situation for studying. Online classes require a stable internet connection and a distraction free environment, two things I do not have access to while living at home. Unfortunately my family and I are low income, and we are forced to make due with the unstable internet connection available to us. Individual meetings with my professors have been interrupted or canceled altogether because the quality of my internet is extremely poor. I also live with my two parents, my younger brother, my grandmother and our two pets, which as you can imagine can be extremely distracting. Living in Westwood I had access to the libraries on campus, coffee shops, and countless study rooms but unfortunately working from home has proved to be extremely difficult as it is hard to find a quiet spot that is ideal for studying. Due to these circumstances I dropped one of my classes, as I found it extremely difficult to juggle four classes and an honors section while living with my family. This is just one of the ways in which the pandemic has affected me directly.

As we learned from this pandemic, older individuals are considered high-risk as they are more likely to have complications and the death rates increase as age does. My grandmother is extremely high risk, as she not only suffers from diabetes but she is also a stage four breast cancer patient. We as a family have taken extreme precautions so as not to put her at any risk of contracting the Coronavirus. I am thankful that stay-at-home orders have greatly reduced the necessity for my family to leave our house. My mother was granted the ability to work from home, even though her work is considered essential business. My parents are the only ones who leave our house to get essentials so as to lessen the risk of bringing the virus home. Although we are keeping my grandmother safe, it has taken a toll on my mental health. Although it is recommended that people still walk outside while taking precautionary measures like wearing facemasks and keeping six feet away from anyone else, my parents are still very paranoid. I don't really get the chance to walk outside of my house, as my parents are afraid that I can still contract it and bring it home. I am extremely serious about keeping my grandmother safe, but I wish I could have the ability to walk around outside without scaring my parents.

These consequences of the virus on my life and the lives of my family members are extremely minimal in comparison to the lives of others. This pandemic has cost people's jobs and lives. Friends of mine have lost family members such as parents and grandparents to this virus, which is extremely upsetting. The safer-at-home order has forced certain businesses to close and has left people jobless. In California, people have begun to protest these orders and state that their rights are being infringed upon by having to wear masks in public and not being able to get haircuts, a non-essential business which has been unavailable since March. I certainly feel for those who were left in compromised financial situations as a result of the pandemic but it is

extremely upsetting to witness these protests. In my opinion, to make it through the virus we have to recognize the lives at stake. If we value capitalism over human lives, then we are only furthering the problem at hand. Non-essential businesses like beauty salons, gyms and shopping malls are not detrimental to our health and therefore, in my opinion, should not open until a vaccine is created and the death rates drop. It has also become extremely apparent that our healthcare system is flawed. To improve the situation regarding the pandemic, I believe that easier access to healthcare would be necessary to prevent the spread of disease and outbreaks such as the one we are currently experiencing. Healthcare is not a right, it is a necessity. Everyone should have easy access to healthcare regardless of wealth or citizenship status and as soon as we improve upon this notion we will improve the situation regarding this virus.

It is clear that our lives will be completely different from now on. The Covid-19 pandemic is a pivotal moment in history. Hopefully people become more aware of the possible ways that germs are spread, more sanitization stations in public would be a great improvement. I think that people will not travel as freely as they once did, and that the people will take more precautions when visiting other countries or foreign environments. I believe that the way people function in public spaces will be quite different, as more people will be accustomed to wearing face masks and focusing on maintaining a safe distance from strangers. Doing things like having dinner or going to the gym might change, as some have talked about doing fever checks and not allowing those who are sick to eat in restaurants or be in close contact with other patrons to prevent the spread of disease. Lastly, and most importantly, I hope that the healthcare system changes for the better. Everyone should have access to affordable and reliable healthcare and hopefully policy makers and politicians will include this in their agendas going forward.

The Coronavirus pandemic is of course not the only pandemic which has caused great turmoil across the globe. In Bernardino de Sahagun's *Florentine Codex*, he describes the terrible outbreak of smallpox on the indigenous Mexica peoples of Tenochtitlan. After contact with the Spaniards, the Mexica began to fall ill and contract painful sores all over their bodies (Sahagun, page 125). Sahagun provides in great detail the death that ravaged the city of Tenochtitlan and ultimately leads to the fall of the great city at the hands of the Spanish. What is interesting to note is that Sahagun recorded the spread of the disease, stating that by the time the indigenous people had become aware of the disease itself, it had spread to far off regions (Sahagun, page 125). Putting this into context today, it is interesting to note the parallels between this account of smallpox in Mexico in the sixteenth century and the Coronavirus pandemic today. We were largely unaware of the cases of Coronavirus in the United States until the first victim had already passed away. In fact, only recently did we discover that the Coronavirus had been in the United States weeks earlier than we had originally thought. But, similar to the outbreak of smallpox in Mexico, we came to the realization too late and by then hundreds of people had already come into contact with the virus.

The Coronavirus has proven to be an important moment in history. Living through a pandemic has affected not only my life, but the lives of everyone around me. In retrospect, I wish I had taken the virus more seriously beforehand and been more concerned before it reached my community. Covid-19 has made me more aware of the faults in our healthcare system and I can only hope that universal healthcare is in our near future. I hope that we come out of this pandemic with a new appreciation for our lives, but I also hope that we have a better understanding of the ways in which our personal actions affect the lives of those around us.