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HIS 108--Section 001

Life in the Pandemic

It was the early morning hours of March 11th, 2020, when the whispers and rumors fell over the University of Kentucky's campus. Everyone had different ideas and inferences about what was going to happen to us. It was just later that night that we found out we were going to be sent back to our homes until April 3rd. No one knew what exactly that meant, but we all thought we would be returning back to campus after April 3rd. Little did we know, our in person classes would become online classes, our in person friendships would become zoom-call friendships, our in person restaurants would be curbside restaurants, and our in person lives would become at home lives.

Life in the pandemic, however, didn't start with questioning whether we would be sent home from college like other universities around the country. When COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, first hit Wuhan, China, the world just turned up its nose and thought otherwise of China's struggle. "It's so far away and it's just another virus like the millions we have in this world today. It will never reach us", is what we all claimed. This is what the whole world claimed, until matters got worse. The virus spread to Italy, Spain, and other foreign countries, still miles and miles from the United States. We still felt as though we were in a bubble protected from this-- until the virus first hit in the US, and then in our region of the country, then our state, then our city, and now just

a handful of miles within where we reside. At first the virus was a distant, solitary issue, that was not of great concern, and was featured once or twice on the news. Today, you can not turn on a TV or get on social media once without seeing the word “coronavirus” at least a handful of times within each hour. It has become such a global issue, that the world has been turned upside down.

As the coronavirus has seemingly taken over the world, it has also turned our world into two types of people. In the US, there are the individuals who are taking action to prevent the spread of this virus no matter what they have to give up along the way, and there are the individuals who are rallying against the local and federal governments to reopen the country. Groups today will either gather to make masks for the frontline workers, or gather in front of the capitol to raise their concerns about the government’s actions. Other groups, however, will continue to hang out socially even though we are told not to. Not being able to hang out in groups wasn’t the only restriction, however.

When the coronavirus took over our lives, it took many of our daily normals with it. Most of us were used to going out to a dinner at the local Mexican restaurant on a Friday night with our family or friends. Now, we have to either place a carry out order, or get delivery from our favorite dine-in restaurants. Movie theaters, bowling alleys, malls, nail salons, barber shops, and other businesses are shut down. Employees are being furloughed and let go left and right. People are going bankrupt, and stores are closing for good. The economy in the United States is at one of its worst states right now than it has ever been. Though this virus is a serious issue with its increasing cases and death tolls, citizens and the government are worried about the country’s economy and ability

to be stabilized after this madness has passed. It will take time, but it will be a long journey ahead of us. A few weeks ago, we were not sure of when our economy would open back up, but President Trump and state governors have started drafting plans to slowly get back to a “normal” lifestyle.

“Normal”, however, may never be the normal that was before the coronavirus struck. It is likely that we will be wearing face masks and gloves for an indefinite time in public after this, and sanitizing even more thoroughly than was required before will become a mandatory process. Some citizens may even develop Agoraphobia, otherwise known as the fear of leaving your house as if something bad will happen to you. Since we have been told to stay inside for so long to protect ourselves, there will be a massive increase in anxiety disorders following the opening of the country later in the year. Mental health professionals will likely see an increase in clients, and find common symptoms between most of them. Just as 9/11 created a new normal of security and protection in airports and travel, this pandemic will create another new normal of health and cleanliness.

As the coronavirus has spread, it has shown to be more fatal in those considered to be in the “high-risk” category. Those in this category are likely elderly or have pre-existing health conditions like immunodeficiencies, and asthma. Although the majority of the population does not get filed into this category, I am one of the few who does. I am a 19 year old girl, who seems like I should be more protected from this virus than others, but I happen to struggle with an autoimmune disease, Juvenile Dermatomyositis. This is an autoimmune disease that creates a great amount of muscle

weakness, and causes skin rashes over the body. If I was one of the lucky individuals amongst the population who was not in the high-risk category, I believe I would not be as worried and anxious about this pandemic. With these being my unfortunate circumstances, however, I have a greater perspective on the fear of this virus. I have been scared to leave my house, not knowing what I will come in contact with as soon as I step outside the lines of my yard. Whenever my family goes out to eat we have to make sure to wipe down our food containers with clorox wipes extra well, so that the chances of me coming in contact with something are lessened. Throughout this pandemic, I have been living in my worst fear and nightmare; being the vulnerable one.

Life before the pandemic, I was not aware of what I was taking for granted. Throughout this journey, I have realized what I have been so blessed with before, and never stopped to realize it until now. Though these times are challenging and a struggle, I find it nice to be able to sit back and recognize what is so beautiful in my life. I miss being able to give my sweet grandparents a hug, and cook my favorite food in the kitchen with my grandma while my grandpa watches whatever college sports game is on at the moment. I miss being able to live in my dorm, Haggin Hall, and live next to my best friend Stephanie. I miss being able to study at the Willy T library with all of my friends and act like we're getting work done. I miss being able to physically sit in a classroom and ingest all of the information in person. I miss being able to open a public door handle without thinking twice about who has touched it prior to me. I miss life before COVID-19.

With all of this being said, however, I have realized that when we go back to a more normal pace of life, I will always live everyday to the fullest, and never forget what it was like to have life ripped away at the seams. When I start to think about complaining because the Willy T Starbucks line is so long, I will remind myself that I am lucky to be in that line again. When I get upset that I am in a 200 person lecture hall for class, I will remind myself that I had that taken away from me and had to take that 200 person lecture online once. After this is over, I will stop to smell the roses. I will stop to smell these roses every day, no matter how small the roses are. I will begin to appreciate the smallest things in my life that had hardly any meaning to me before.

Though this pandemic has taken so much from me, it has given me so much time to reflect. I have more perspective for situations like this, and hope that others are gaining that perspective as well. I hope that this pandemic will unite our world more than it ever had before, and we will all rejoice. We will love one another even greater than before, we will care for the weak even greater than before, we will be better problem solvers than before, and most importantly, we will love each and every normal day we get even greater than before.

Life in the pandemic has been hard, but it will possibly change our world's heart for the better.