

Dear Past Self,

Right now it is January 6, 2020. It is Winter break. You're in Hawaii, under the island sun. In a few days, you'll be back in Montana for the start of the spring semester at Montana State University. You'll go to class, meet professors, write papers, and enjoy basic human interaction, not knowing that in two months, a pandemic will have swept across the world. From your future self, here is a heads-up about what's to come.

One day, you'll read a news article. A new virus has been discovered in China, a novel coronavirus, so it's called. Normally, this wouldn't worry you too much, but your boyfriend is in China for a month. This article is slightly unsettling, but nothing to be too concerned about, right?

Two weeks later, you're tracking the virus non-stop. It seems to be spreading like wildfire across a region in central China. He isn't in that area, but the situation is escalating in places like Shanghai, the city he's traveled through multiple times. He tells you he's going to South Korea instead of staying in China for another two weeks. You're relieved he's getting out of the country.

A week and a half later, he's back in the country and staying at your apartment. He says he feels fine, but is supposed to quarantine for fourteen days, although no one explained what this means. He doesn't have a cough or a fever, and is supposed to start a job in Houston in five days. So he stays for two nights and then leaves again, across the country. In Texas, he has to be tested for the virus, but without using actual tests because they are not available. Other than a few scattered case around the world, the majority of the case are still located in China. The outside cases are slightly concerning, but they were caught early. It can't spread here, right?

Five weeks later, you're on Spring Break. You've just found out that classes aren't going to resume in person after break. Everyone is confused. Everyone is unsure as to what is going to happen next. Cases in the US and Italy and other countries around the world are beginning to spread. You go to Moab with your friends. The shelves in the store are out of toilet paper.

You leave Moab a few days early. They shut down the campsites, and you've caught a cold. You return to Bozeman. Many people don't. In the next two weeks, your friends leave, your

roommate moves back home, and your boyfriend returns from Texas. He doesn't have a place to live right now, so he moves in and you're not alone. But your family is on the other side of the state, beginning to quarantine themselves, and you want to go home, but you're still a little sick and are worried. You stay put, but you've missed your family this much before.

Classes are online, and you're struggling to keep up. Some are meeting weekly over online conferencing platforms such as WebEx or Zoom. Others are merely online, and it's difficult to keep track of everything. You're worried about finding a new roommate since you can't afford the rent alone. You are sick of being inside all the time, and try to hike and run outside as much as possible without putting other people at risk. COVID-19, as the coronavirus has been named, is successfully shutting down the United States and countries around the world.

Three weeks later, you finally get to go back home. You've quarantined long enough to feel you won't expose your family to anything, and you've found a new roommate. Things are looking up in your personal life, but for the rest of the world, it is impossible to know what will happen the next day.

You return home and suddenly, the routine you've developed over the past three weeks is disrupted again. You have to figure out how to exist at home with your whole family, and it is difficult to find the balance between home life and school. Time you've set aside for classwork is interrupted by your mom asking you to do the dishes, your dog barking at the door, and your sister barging in to raid your closet. You have to lock your bedroom door whenever you have to meet for a class on WebEx so you aren't interrupted. It's lonely and tiring and you need a change.

You don't know what you're going to do this summer. Should you stay in Bozeman or move back home? Will you be able to find a job? There is so much uncertainty, but there is comfort in knowing that you are not facing this uncertainty alone. No one knows what will happen in the coming weeks. It is as if everyone is holding their breath, waiting for whatever will come next.

The news tracks the number of cases in the country. To find the facts, you must dig through a pile of false reports. As people stay inside their homes itching for the outside world, the outside world begins to heal. Yet the economy has taken a blow and no one knows how to recover.

The world has never seemed so isolated yet so connected at the same time. You know you're living through history.

A week and a half later, things are beginning to slow down. There are talks of opening up shops and restaurants again. Maybe things will return to normal soon, but no one knows for sure.

Around the country, people are rioting. Some want everything to return to normal as soon as possible, others want to remain in quarantine so a second wave of this virus doesn't emerge.

It is now the beginning of May. Every plan for the summer and maybe next fall has changed and you don't know what you're going to do. The world is uncertain. This is the world I am writing from. The world that changed so drastically in a matter of months due to a pandemic for which no one was prepared.

Who knows what the future will hold. When I find out, I'll let you know.

Sincerely,

Adia