

A COVID-19 Journal

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Ever since I returned from Spring Break, I have been struggling to find a routine. I'm in Bozeman, alone, because my roommate moved out to return home. Over Spring Break I traveled to Utah, and upon my return due to COVID-19 related closures, I stayed in Bozeman.

It's a strange existence, staying inside all the time.

I've been having a difficult time writing about my quarantining experience because I don't feel as if I'm doing anything of importance during this time. My time has mostly been spent cooking, painting, reading, playing piano, and doing homework. I've been learning to cook—I'm not good at it. Mostly, I just try to pass the time.

My partner returned from Texas, where he was interning for the semester, upon the closures of all non-essential businesses, and has moved in. It makes the fact that my roommate is leaving easier to bear. I can't go home; my parents have expressed concern about my travelling out of state for Spring Break. My parents are older and my dad is asthmatic, and they don't want to take any risks. I understand, but it's still hard to be away from them, especially in these troubling times.

Right now, the daily goal is to accomplish something as I wait the days away. On the good days, I accomplish some online classwork—a difficult adjustment. I'll do laundry or the dishes, and go for a run outside. But more often than not, I spend most of the day willing myself to accomplish just one of those things. Living life in quarantine will hopefully get easier over time.

April 2, 2020

Coronavirus is everywhere. Even before Spring Break, it seems as if there was no such thing as a normal conversation anymore, and that every conversation included the virus in some way. Now, no matter what website, commercial, or email I see or read, there it is.

Online classes are in full swing. Texts and Critics, the honor's freshman seminar for which I am a student assistant, meets twice a week over WebEx, an online conferencing platform. This class in particular has been interesting to observe because the shift to online meetings caused the talkative students to even talk more, and the quiet students to speak even less than when we met in person. Sometimes, people attempt to talk at the same time, then both back down so the other can speak, leaving the class in an awkward silence. Everyone mutes their microphones when they are not speaking so there is no unwanted background noise, and the need to unmute oneself in order to speak is just another step in a seminar course that keeps quiet students quiet. The more confident ones speak up more often to fill the silence. The chat-box on the side is a separate discussion entirely. It is a strange way to communicate, through a screen.

Everything that was planned for the next few months has been canceled as we cannot gather in groups larger than ten people. I volunteer at the VOICE Center on campus, and though I can no longer volunteer in person, I have been trying to promote our messages against sexual assault and relationship violence online. Everyone is stuck inside, and it's hard to know how domestic violence is being influenced. Now more than ever, there are people who need advocacy, yet it is difficult to provide resources and support from home.

In this time of uncertainty, I can't help but think of all of those who are stuck inside with an abusive partner, who have lost their jobs, and who have lost family members both from the virus and not. My own grandmother is stuck inside an assisted living center on hospice and with

failing memory and health. We thought we were going to lose her the other day and we can't say goodbye. She made it through and is doing better now, but it still makes my heart hurt to think of her alone. I know my family isn't the only one going through this situation, and I feel for others in similar situations. It's a hard time for everyone.

April 8, 2020

My partner, his roommates and I went to my partner's cabin last weekend. It's been years since I've been on a snowmobile, so it was exciting to snowmobile twenty miles up a mountain on a maze of snowy logging roads, racing sunset to get there before dark. We made it, and spent several days alone in the woods, and for once, it felt like a normal weekend. Being so far from other people helped me forget the world and all its troubles for a moment, and allowed me to embrace nature and solitude. It was a welcome break.

The planet itself isn't harmed by this virus. In fact, the opposite is true. Air quality is improving around the country and the world. Waterways are clearing, there is less pollution, and people are noticing. Unfortunately, it is safe to say that this brief recovery of our planet from our misdeeds won't last. Eventually, everything will reopen and our daily lives will return to the way they were. But hopefully, this whole ordeal will set forth an inspiration to not only work towards recovery of the economy, but the environment as well.

April 15, 2020

I'm going home this weekend. For the past three weeks, I've been in Bozeman, at my apartment, alone. I haven't seen my family in months, but I did find a new roommate and, thankfully, I haven't been entirely alone.

This has been my routine for the past several weeks:

In the mornings, I'll wake up. It takes me so much longer to get out of bed now that I have nowhere to be at any given time. I'll lounge around until nine or ten, instead of getting up at seven like I used to, and make a good breakfast since I have time to now. For the last six days, my partner and I have had French toast, pancakes, crepes, pastries from Wheat Montana (for two days straight) and pancakes again. Breakfast is an hour long ordeal at the least, and once we're finished, it is eleven-thirty. We'll play a game of cribbage while we finish our coffee and tea.

Then comes classwork. I try to plan my day by creating a list of everything I need to do for class that day, but it is difficult to prioritize. It's been three weeks, and I still struggle to find a routine. I think it's because I don't have anywhere of importance to go that makes finding importance in necessary tasks extremely difficult. I have no motivation to do anything but trying to pass the time with things I enjoy to make me feel better about being stuck inside.

Classwork is easy, but tedious and tiresome. It feels as if I'm doing all this work—writing discussion posts, reading articles and watching lecture slides—but not accomplishing anything. After week one, which was mostly spent trying to figure out what was happening, all motivation to accomplish anything just went out the window. Since then, I've been trying to get back to my routine, and to figure out how to live a normal life while stuck inside. I think everyone else has been doing the same.

Quarantining with my partner has been interesting. We've been together for nearly eight months, but never thought we'd be living together and spending all of our time together so soon. I've definitely learned about him as a person, and how he functions at all hours of the day. We've had to learn how to handle always being in each other's spaces, and how to live through the day entirely together. Occasionally, he'll go back to his parent's house in Livingston, or to

the house he was renting before he left for Texas, where his room is currently sublet for the next two months, to spend time with his roommates, who are also quarantining together. It gives us a chance to be apart for a few hours, and to have some alone time, away from each other, which I think has been very helpful especially since we see each other so much. For the most part, though, we're in my small apartment together, by ourselves, and have needed to learn to manage that fact. The day is a sort of dance around classwork, entertaining ourselves, and spending time together. It will be interesting to see how things will be once we are able to live apart again.

In order to complete this project, I've found myself needing to set aside fifteen minutes to just write whatever comes to mind. I go back and edit later, but it's so difficult to get ideas out, that this seems to be what works. I think it's interesting because I've never struggled with schoolwork as much as I am now. Nothing is keeping my interest for long, but if I force myself to focus on something, it is easier to be productive for a short amount of time, then to take a break.

I think I've learned a great deal about self-discipline during quarantine. I've been given the opportunity to practice holding myself accountable on my own without a set schedule. Hopefully these skills will stick after this whole thing has ended.

April 26, 2020

I've been home for a week now, and it's been interesting. The whole routine I built for myself while in Bozeman was disrupted and I've had to find a new one, incorporating my family this time. It's harder to focus than ever, as I feel there's so much more I could be doing than just schoolwork all the time, but I'd much rather read or hang out with my family than do any of it.

It's nice to be back, where I don't have to cook every day, but my sister was beginning to go crazy here alone and I can see why. Being stuck inside with three other people is barely different than being stuck inside with one other person or alone, and I'm just so sick of it. I want this all to end soon, but at the same time, I know that it is important to do my part to slow the spread of this virus. I bet everyone else is feeling the same.

There are talks of beginning to open things back up again. It's been so hard to keep up with the news lately because everyone is saying different things every day. I'm thankful that Montana wasn't hit hard by the virus and that there is talk of opening up again, but at this point, I'm just so sick of it all. I want things to return to an acceptable normal, but with the necessary changes so that we're more prepared should something like this happen again.

May 3, 2020

My partner came to visit my family in Whitefish. He'd been with his parents in Livingston ever since I left, and we thought he'd been isolating enough that it would be safe for him to visit. He'd met my family before, but only briefly. This time, he got to spend several days with them, and I got to show him around my hometown—from a safe social distance of course.

I also got to see a friend who was studying abroad in Wales when this whole thing started. She heard about the coronavirus one day, but didn't think it was a big deal. A week later, she was told to pack up and return home. Upon her return, she had to self-isolate at home for two weeks. Her parents couldn't even be in the same room as her, they could only pass her food through the door. Fortunately, she didn't catch the virus and was able to make it through the two most boring weeks of her life.

Her story made me think of when my partner was abroad in China in late January and early February. He was there for a month, or at least that was the plan. But coronavirus had just

been spotted. Since he was in China without internet access or the ability to communicate with non-English speakers, he heard about the coronavirus from his parents and myself. He was there when things began to shut down, but fled to South Korea with his friends for nearly two weeks to escape the initial shutdowns. He made it back to Montana and wasn't even told to self-isolate because he hadn't been in Wuhan. He was merely given a chart to track his temperatures for two weeks since leaving China, but he'd already been out of the country for a week and a half without tracking his temperatures. I didn't think much of this at the time because coronavirus hadn't spread to the US yet, and honestly, I didn't think it would. I was concerned about it in China, and the thought of shutdowns in the US didn't cross my mind until a month later when they happened. Knowing these early COVID procedures, though, I do not believe that the US handled the situation well at all. If we were more careful early on, we likely wouldn't be where we are today—in quarantine.

Now, it's finals week and I'm almost done. This semester has been the strangest in my fifteen years of education, as I'm sure it has been for most students across the country. It's been one of the easiest and hardest semesters at the same time, in different ways. Easy as in I feel I don't have to try as hard, but hard because I have to force myself to try at all. Though online schooling has been hard, I believe it has given me skills to work with in the future.

I wonder how easy or difficult it will be to go back to my ways of life before this all happened. In all honesty, it's comforting to know that there is still something in this world that can remind us as humans that we are still a part of nature, and subject to nature's rule. Things are beginning to open up again, but this isn't over. Hopefully, we will be able to exit quarantine safely, remembering what these trying times have taught us—that sometimes, it's best to stay home.