

WRIT 326

March-May 2020

Living Through Covid-19

Pandemic of 2020: Journal Entries

March 10th, 2020:

At this point in Montana, Covid-19 was just really starting to hit our radar. There was obviously talk on the news by this point, but it hadn't affected our lives yet. This realization is crazy to me now because Covid-19 had already been wreaking havoc on other countries for months. Some states in the U.S. had tested positive, but Montana seemed like it would not be affected by the virus that many Montanans were still joking about. On Tuesday, March 10th our professors told us that some universities in the United States were closing their doors and doing classes completely online due to the virus. However, at that point they could not imagine Montana State University ever making that decision to do the same. *It was unprecedented.*

I had given very little thought to the virus at this point. My college friends' had their Europe trip canceled, and though that was a huge bummer, it was because of the threat overseas. It made sense because the virus was primarily in that part of the world. Or so I thought.

March 12th, 2020:

My teachers couldn't imagine that our school would go online at all during the semester two days prior to March 12th. And even still, two days later, during my second class of the day, I received the email telling me that I would not be returning to campus after spring break. This felt extremely bizarre, and my mind wasn't able to fully wrap my head around this yet. My thoughts immediately went to the well-being of my mother with a compromised immune system and the possibility of graduation being pushed back for me. As an education student, does this mean we will not be able to do our in-class work requirements? Does this mean our graduation date will be pushed back until the virus has been "cured?" What does this mean for our future plans?

At the end of my classes on this day, I went to my locker in the Strand Union Building and removed all of my books. It was at this moment that I realized, I would not be able to properly say good-byes to my dearest college friends or professors. This is my senior year and after this I am supposed to student teach. I will not have another opportunity to see all of these people in the same place again.

March 13th, 2020:

I went to work the day after my college closed its doors to regular classes. I knew things would be different, but I didn't know exactly what that would look like. We had new cleaning procedures in place. At our spa we did not have any cancelations this day, but we had almost no foot traffic in our retail area. Because of our new mandate at work and lack of customers, myself and my co-workers cleaned the same surfaces over and over again for 10 hours. Our hands were cracking and our concerns for the future grew.

March 14th, 2020:

As the manager on shift, I was the one to put out any “fires” that might arise. When my support staff arrived at noon, I quickly realized it was going to be an emotional day. One of my co-workers came in clearly frazzled and I was sure it was because of the news from the college and our country about this new virus. She quickly became emotional and I had to try to comfort her very real fears, while trying not to bring concern to our guests. At the end of this shift we had an all staff meeting. Our boss decided to close down the service side of our spa for the time being, until we know more about the threat to our community.

Spring Break, 2020:

I was supposed to be on a trip to Cut Bank, MT teaching their students for an entire week. I was planning on learning more about my profession, while also learning about these amazing kids in rural Montana. But this trip was canceled in precaution of the virus, that I still knew little about. After March 12th, I received daily emails from the college, professors, and the news stations about new developments with the virus in our country and state. I truly believe there was a new mandate every hour regarding this virus for over a week.

March 16th, 2020:

By the end of the day on March 16th, our boss decided to close down shop completely. We were told that we would re-evaluate at the beginning of April. We are some of the lucky ones. We closed down sooner, by our own choosing, and our boss vowed to continue to pay us at

least for the two weeks of shut down. Many people were not that lucky to continue to receive payment despite their place of work being shut down.

March 18th, 2020:

My husband's job decided to cut down hours today. The fear of our financial stability in the near future is growing more and more distressing. Would we lose all of our income in the next couple of weeks? We didn't know and still do not. Social media, texting, and television were all flooded with fear, as well as joking about this virus. Many people were angry at the "ridiculous precautions" being taken by our country and community, while others were hoarding all household goods in preparations for the worst. I was stuck in limbo not knowing what to do with myself. In less than a week, I lost much of my connection to my college community, had shortened responsibilities at work, then had my work close down completely, my husband lost hours at work, and I was on social-isolation from everyone except for my husband. I would say that escalated quite quickly, without very much of a warning. My family began group chats that would begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 3:00 a.m. every single day. They were talking about their fears, frustrations, and new updates in response to Covid-19. My world completely changed in less than a week. I would no longer continue teaching middle school students for my practicum requirements, I would not be able to study late with my peers, or watch a movie at a friend's house, nor am I able to even work.

My wifi connection has also gone out twice since the news about online classes was announced, creating great unease within me about my ability to complete my (now) online courses if this problem continues.

March 22nd, 2020:

More of the public is beginning to be cautious to the warnings of social distancing and the real risk that Covid-19 has on our communities. I cannot open my phone, click on my computer, or turn on my TV without some reference to this virus or isolation. Some people cope by joking about it. Others cope by crying and posting their woes. And still others cope by buying toilet paper and ammunition. At this point I have become very uneasy. I have tried to get out everyday and walk outside. Because staying inside is driving me mad. I am able to continue social distancing while doing this because my campus and community has become a ghost town. Every non-essential building has closed its doors and very few people are leaving their homes. Covid-19 has become a very real fear for my family and not only because of our frail grandparents. My mother has begun to develop cold-like symptoms in a place with confirmed cases. She is a smoker and a diabetic. Her risk factors with this virus could be catastrophic. We are just taking it day by day praying that she is healthy and remains so. Because of the extreme shortage of tests for this virus, we do not know if they will allow her to be tested. I understand the predicament of the medical personnel across our country with its limitations and extreme pressure. However, on a very personal level, I worry that the shortage of tests and man power could be detrimental to my family. I know that in many ways this virus seems like no big deal to some. For those between the ages of 15-70 in good health, they should be fine. But how joyful will our lives be when many young children, older generations, and anyone immuno-compromised die around us. My bet is our lives will become extremely bleak. I hope that people begin to take this seriously so that those in charge can help those in need. I do not

know if we will be able to continue to pay rent or our other bills, I do not know if we will be able to move like we were originally planning, I do not know if I will still graduate this year, nor do I know if I will be allowed to even continue my daily isolated walks outside. My future is uncertain, as is the future for those all around the world.

March 24th, 2020:

I have been struggling to get homework done. With the stresses of life and not being able to focus in my normal studying locations, my mind is not quite in the right headspace for critical thinking skills. With that being said, I am giving it my best effort. I have two semester long projects that are seeming so impossible to complete. My work space is not my home. My home is my place to relax and take care of my family. I need to change my mindset and somehow make this a productive work space.

March 25th, 2020:

Today I received a call from my boss. She was hoping to re-open this week, but called to inform us that we likely will not open for a long while and that we should all file for unemployment. I filed for unemployment online immediately after our phone call. The process was not particularly easy and some of the questions seemed inherently confusing. I am worried that I may have filled something out incorrectly based on lack of knowledge in the process. After filing, I read the unemployment handbook. It appears that my chances of qualifying might be in jeopardy due to being a college student and a part-time worker. I am just holding onto hope that I

qualify and that we don't lose several hundred dollars in income a month. True fear has set in for our well-being and how to pay our bills.

March 26th, 2020:

Today our state governor issued a Shelter in Place. Genuine fear of our future has set in. This likely means that my husband will be losing his job, though we have not officially heard yet. We have started looking into alternative housing options. We are not sure what the future holds with student teaching, my graduation status, or our financial well-being. If the pandemic interferes with student teaching placements for Fall, it is quite possible that they will push our graduation and placements back a semester (or even a year). Because we live in Family and Graduate Housing that could cause problems with having the minimum college credit requirement to stay in this housing situation. We are trying to figure out whether to stay where we are, and risk being asked to leave due to this possible minimum credit crisis; or take a gamble and move to a different town, hoping that *if* I get placed for student teaching, that is the town we get placed in. No one knows how this situation will unfold and either choice has equal hope and consequences behind them.

March 27th, 2020:

My husband has officially lost his job as well. We are still unsure if unemployment will cover any of my lost wages. We know that he will likely qualify, but the waiting to get approved and the amount of time before our first check is far away. We are hopefully awaiting the

government assisted income, as well as (hopefully) an unemployment check (or two). Just hoping we will be able to financially survive this quarantine.

March 28th-31st, 2020:

I have been scrapbooking and walking every day to keep my mind sane. I have also been trying to do at home workouts as often as I can, due to the extreme drop in kinesthetic activity with the shelter in place. I miss being around people. I am so grateful that my husband and I have each other through this strange situation, but I miss being in groups. It is now Day 19 of me being isolated from society and this extrovert heart is struggling.

April 1st, 2020:

I feel like I am having a more and more difficult time to find words for this situation. I feel like nothing is changing at this point and everything is still changing. The comedic relief surrounding this situation is beginning to lose its sustenance. There are more articles and blogs all the time documenting the horrible losses from families due to Covid-19. Young people, old people, healthy people, sick people—all victims from this virus. It is hard to laugh at the craziness of the situation as much when you are reading about people being separated from sick loved ones, pregnant mothers alone in delivery rooms, school-aged children struggling to have full-meals, and medical staff being beyond exhausted—this reality makes it hard to laugh at the toilet paper shortage and bored quarantine videos online anymore.

April 2nd, 2020:

I received a letter in the mail stating that I do not qualify for unemployment. It did not give a reason, but I assume it is because of my college student status and the small amount I make annually. This did not come as a shock, but I was just hoping for a different outcome. I do not make very much as a part-time worker and full-time student. However, the amount that I do make every month means the difference between being able to buy food and pay rent every month. I'm not sure what we will do.

April 3rd, 2020:

I sent a letter to the unemployment agency requesting that they reconsider me for unemployment benefits. I explained our situation and I am just hoping it makes a difference. Now that my husband and I are both laid off, our days consist of deep cleaning, walks, homework, video games, movies, and FaceTime calls. I have decided that I need to have a different outlook on this entire situation. I have been stressed and anxious about everything, but we have so much more than some people. We have food, we have entertainment, we currently have a roof over our heads, we have the ability to walk in the fresh air—we are okay and we are surviving. I have allowed fear to creep into my mind and that is not something that helps anything. I realized that I need to be clinging to my faith more and that has given me so much more peace. I want to ride out this situation with more peace and patience.

April 4th-5th, 2020:

Micah and I decided to get breakfast through the Wendy's drive-thru. Not a good choice. I got food poisoning from the chicken. Not much more needs to be said for this weekend.

April 10th, 2020:

Our sleep schedule has been drastically affected since becoming unemployed. Now that we do not have to work at a certain time, meetings to attend, classes to join, ect our schedules have been flipped upside down. We have progressively gotten worse, but it has now seemed to hover at about the same time as of late. We finally fall asleep by 4:00 am now and wake up regularly at noon. I am embarrassed by this and have been trying to change it, but the motivation to get up earlier isn't there and the need to go to bed at a decent hour has disappeared. Besides turning in assignments at random times, no one else expects or is asking anything of us at this current moment in our lives. It has made us quite sad and we have realized much of our identity is in being needed, being productive, and working. However, we know that this season won't last forever and are just trying to enjoy this extra time together. The day when we have to change our sleep schedule back will be painful, but welcomed.

April 11th, 2020:

We have decided to take a leap of faith and move. Packing is hard in a small apartment. I'm sure it is hard everywhere, but since we still have a month left before moving, I have run out of places to put packed boxes. We still have so many things we need to be using and nowhere to

place the things we can pack. We have decided to sell some of our furniture to make room.

Moving in a pandemic will prove to be interesting, of that I am sure.

And good news has arrived! The Unemployment Agency accepted my letter and is now allowing me to receive some payment for being laid off due to Covid-19!

April 12th, 2020:

Happy Easter! It was bittersweet not being able to do our normal Easter festivities. We were not able to attend church in person or have a large family gathering. But we did watch a service live online and dressed up for yummy food and games anyway. It is important to still celebrate things to remind us of the joys in life.

April 13th, 2020:

Today we threw a party! Not a typical house party, but we mimicked one. Today would have been my “student teaching send-off celebration.” But because all gatherings are canceled, it took place on WebEx. Micah and I wanted to pretend it was all still happening like normal, so we got dressed up, bought yummy snacks and take out, and made punch with sherbert ice cream. The display was placed on our table and we ate yummy food while watching the key-note speaker on the computer. I love that Micah had us do this because it gave us both something to look forward to. Some days we don’t even change out of our pajamas, so this was definitely a highlight!

April 14th, 2020:

I have spent the entire day trying to be productive with homework. I feel like I have lost ground on my semester long assignments and wanted to make headway. I'm hoping this new spark of energy lasts the remaining weeks of the semester! Doing homework on my couch isn't ideal, but I'm finally getting out of my funk and enjoying learning again.

April 15th, 2020:

Laundry. Packing. Cleaning. Organizing. Homework. I miss seeing people's faces, but now is the time to be productive!

April 16th-30th, 2020:

I attempted to write in my journal in this two-and-a-half week span, but the words just didn't come. My days continued on the same as the previous. Everyday watching Netflix or Prime Video for some amount of time. I would spend too much time on ScrabbleGo, TikTok, and Candy Crush apps. In between all of these distractions, I would spend hours doing homework and packing for our move. But rather than write daily journal entries, I decided to write my overall thoughts during this time of my experience. Rather than a day by day account, I wanted to start thinking big picture. This writing section can be found toward the end of this document.

Pandemic of 2020: Writing Prompts

April 2nd, 2020 - Online School Experience:

First of all:

"Oof."

Second of all:

Working at home is not something my mind can fully understand. It is exactly how Noelle said it in our class discussion page, this is our sacred place to unwind. I never was able to do homework at home before and my mind feels like a prison not wanting me to break out of hold habits. I would stay at the library until 1:00 am on many occasions to get homework done, just to avoid having to do it at home. Small assignments are manageable, but my long semester projects have been my number one priority for two weeks in a row, with no headway made. I am so angry at myself for not being able to do well working at home, but I really can't break out of this cycle. I think I could do online learning okay, if I could still be in my learning spaces, but we obviously cannot. I feel bad complaining, but it has been such a struggle to do the things I need and want to get done.

April 7th, 2020 - Thoughts:

I do not know what the future holds or what the coming months will allow in terms of "normalcy." However, the thing I keep imagining that reminds me of the bright and special in the world are summer days on the side of the lake. Moments when the hot sun is beating down and I can wiggle my toes in a cold Montana lake water. I don't know if society will go back to complete normalcy when all of this is done, but I imagine that nature will still be the same. I

imagine myself (hopefully in the next couple of months) relaxing and taking in the beauty of these types of quiet Summer time moments.

April 15th, 2020 - How am I feeling?:

In the beginning of this pandemic I was extremely worried about our well-being and how we would survive this thing. Now I am learning to just enjoy time with my husband. We are cooking together more and trying to do projects together. We were blessed to receive a grant from the school helping us with our basic needs, which I think has made a huge difference on my overall mood and hope for the future. It is crazy what a difference is made on all fronts when our livelihood was threatened in some way. I am still struggling a great deal with school motivation. I am trying hard, but fear that I might actually not finish all of my large projects. Hoping that is not the case. I'm hopeful for the future and my current stresses are only school related now. Wishing you all well!

April 16th, 2020 - Pandemic TikTok Watchlist on Repeat:

Worth the watch!

<https://www.facebook.com/dakota.degonia/videos/3078102402235902/>

https://www.tiktok.com/@burr72/video/6801978822104255749?u_code=dbdf3l2k7151cg&preview_pb=0&language=en×tamp=1584775365&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&user_id=6806548556251825158&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m

<https://www.facebook.com/wilma.smith.98/videos/10215514287562688/>

https://www.tiktok.com/@tuckerbudzyn/video/6777041483687005446?u_code=dbdf3l2k7151cg&preview_pb=0&language=en×tamp=1584818620&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&user_id=6806548556251825158&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m

https://www.tiktok.com/@oakleythegoldenpuppy/video/6792343534545440005?u_code=dbdf3l2k7151cg&preview_pb=0&language=en×tamp=1584818676&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&user_id=6806548556251825158&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m

https://www.tiktok.com/@meganglenn88/video/6813798543157972229?u_code=dbdf3l2k7151cg&preview_pb=0&language=en&_d=dbdf43h38ahblm×tamp=1587083663&user_id=6806548556251825158&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&user_id=6806548556251825158&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m

https://www.tiktok.com/@ollysmama/video/6816410706972314885?u_code=dbdf3l2k7151cg&preview_pb=0&language=en&_d=dbdf43h38ahblm×tamp=1587083727&user_id=680654

8556251825158&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&user_id=6806548556251825158&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m

https://www.tiktok.com/@nicole_moldovan/video/6800786105349328133?u_code=dbdf3l2k7151cg&preview_pb=0&language=en&_d=dbdf43h38ahblm×tamp=1587084155&user_id=6806548556251825158&utm_campaign=client_share&app=musically&utm_medium=ios&user_id=6806548556251825158&tt_from=messenger&utm_source=messenger&source=h5_m

April 21st, 2020 - Hope for the Future:

When I read this initially, I thought about writing about all of the things that I think will be different, that I will miss out on, and wonder how they might be affected. But then I decided to approach it differently. I have hope for the future. Even if things are different, I know I will be able to see people in person again. I know eventually, I will be able to be in a classroom with students again. I will be able to have house parties again one day. Germs and social distancing might affect these things now, but they will continue again and they will still bring joy. I am looking forward to the new ways that people will hopefully be grateful for what they have, that people will have a new appreciation for being able to work, and that we will be a healthier people. I have hope for the future. Things can certainly be worse than they are for us now. Many of us are still being fed, have a roof over our heads, and many things to keep us entertained. Some people do not have these things, so I am grateful that I have the luxuries that I do. I am also so excited to be able to hug my family and friends again. What has changed for me is an appreciation of all of the things I took for granted. I took for granted being able to walk to my classes and joke with my classmates and professors. This is something that I won't be able to do

again due to being a senior. I hope that this awakening does not get lost to me down the road. I am filled with hope!

April 29th, 2020 - Pandemic Haikus:

Rona Haikus

Mmm, frozen pizza

Cozy pajamas all day

Rona, you got me.

TikTok Pandemic Haikus

CORONA-VIRUS!

Baskins, killed husband, wack'd him

S'body, come git her

Pandemic of 2020: Overall Consensus

“What a strange time to be alive.”

“These are such trying times.”

“It is just a waiting game at this point.”

“No one knows what the future holds.”

“The only thing we can do is wait, and see what happens.”

“We need to take care of one another more than ever.”

“Jobs and future planning is just so uncertain in these times.”

These are common and frequent statements I have read in texts or emails, or even sent myself during this two month span. There are just some sayings that everyone is adopting during this pandemic—and they are all true. No one really knows what the future will look like and these are trying times.

At the beginning of the pandemic I was truly just in shock and grieving my daily routine. I know that online schooling is an honorable and doable way of education, but not having a separate space to do schoolwork outside of my home, really did a number on my psyche. My home space is where I relax, cook, clean, and host. This is not where I work, and my body and mind did not make this transition easy for the first four weeks at least. It has only been in the last couple of weeks that I have found my groove with school work again. Something I like to call flow.

I think my husband and I both suffered from a severe and temporary mourning period of being needed. It wasn't that we couldn't bear to take some time off from work. But once our jobs were gone, person-to-person classes were canceled, and socializing was forbidden, we struggled to find our purpose. Not in a loss of life way. But we did not feel needed by anyone or anything in the way that we used to be. Because of this our sleep schedule has suffered greatly. Going to bed at four in the morning and waking up at two in the afternoon became our usual schedule for over a month. That sounds ridiculous and terrible, but there were no external forces needing us to have a set schedule, so the technology in our procession took control of our schedules.

If we had been among the population that could work from home, I know this would not have been our routine. We are normally motivated and disciplined individuals, but that just chanced with everything going on. We are both extroverts that receive our energy from human interactions. Though we were and are extremely grateful for each other's company, the loss of other people around us was very difficult to come to terms with.

In the midst of trying to fight the loss of normalcy and trying to finish my final course semester of college, we also decided to move. It was a decision that was kind of made for us, but we chose to leave sooner than we had to. In the Fall of 2020, I am scheduled to student teach before graduation. After much anticipation and worry that this would also be affected by the pandemic, I finally received my placement in Kalispell, MT. This was exciting news as this is my hometown. A place that we are very excited to go back to again, even if it is just for a time. We decided to leave the lovely town of Bozeman, where my college is early because all of our relationships and obligations keeping us here, were taken away with Covid-19. That sounds dramatic, the relationships we created here have not disappeared, but they certainly were taken away in a sense. Many of our peers moved back to their hometowns. Of those that remained, we could only converse through phone, email, or video chat. We were not able to say proper goodbyes and thanks to our beloved professors and bosses.

Moving during a pandemic is different than other times. Businesses offer discounts to movers because they are in desperate need of the business. Trying to find jobs beforehand is nearly impossible as many businesses still are not allowed to bring their current employees back on, let alone hiring new ones. And attempting a moving or loading party is highly discouraged,

even with the phase 1 of reopening set in motion. So we will just quietly and independently leave our apartment in Bozeman of two years without the much anticipated farewells. But that is okay.

What I have learned through all of this, is that it is okay to be sad about the things missed out on, and to also be happy about the small victories. My mindset is so much more joyful and healthy now than when the pandemic first began. I have hope for the future and have realized that I have been so fortunate not to have lost any loved ones during this time of extreme fear and illness. As Christians, my husband and I cling to our faith, trusting that we are not alone during this crisis. I can look at the sunshine, the roof over our heads, and provisions and see the extreme blessing in it. This season has been difficult, but we are surviving with a strong love and hope. One day things will get better even if they are different. I have decided to embrace the now and be excited for a future of social gatherings again.

To whomever read a portion of this or all of it, thank you. This journey was not neat, but it was real. I hope and pray for prosperity and health for everyone in the near future.

This is the conclusion of my two (almost) month journey living through Covid-19 as a college student. Hoping for a safe and joyful re-entrance into society.