

WRIT201

05/04/2020

Spring 2020 Extra Credit

January

I remember COVID-19's first appearance into my life. My roommate (Roommate #1, for privacy and a reference for the rest of the narrative) and I were eating in Miller dining hall, getting ready to leave to walk back to our apartment. Two different news stations were broadcasting about some novel virus that had made a debut in Wuhan, China. The big deal then was that the virus was stopping Chinese New Year festivities. Roommate #1 was terrified it would make its way back to our apartment complex in a couple weeks, because she knew someone who lives in our same building who was in Wuhan for Chinese New Year, and had recently returned. The thought of this girl bringing back the virus made me nervous.

February

After a couple weeks and into the month of February the novel coronavirus was off my mind completely. I quit looking at the news articles about it online as often, and eventually school and other factors enveloped me and became the highlights of my life. I would hear about the virus then and again, how the efforts to quarantine the virus in China didn't work, how it had spread to more places and people than officials had initially realized. How it went from cruise ships, to the entire country of China, to Europe, to California, to Seattle. It was spooky to watch COVID-19 swiftly spread to nearly every part of the globe. Initially, I did not

think about this virus impacting my life. In my mind, I had bigger and more pressing things to worry about than a virus that was in the United States but was nowhere near my location. Perhaps I was just ignorantly thinking that if I did not think about it or pay attention to it, eventually it would all just blow over, like the Swine Flu in 2009. Almost every other piece of news or information does eventually. This, however, was not one of them.

March

To say this month has been crazy is an understatement. After finally beginning to feel like I was moving forward in life, an email comes though from the governor of Montana stating all classes at Montana State University were to be moved online after Spring Break. This breaking news found its way into my Inbox on March 12th. Finally, after months of hesitantly checking the news here and there, it all seemed real.

I think almost everyone had been waiting for the day when the governor would elect to halt physical classes on campuses across the state. I know I was. I was not sure if that was what I had wanted to happen, but now I wish it were something that did not. I understand why it did, that not taking proactive measures and going about life as normal would only overload hospitals past the point they were already.

It is so hard to tell whether we as a country are underreacting or overreacting. I do not think anyone can fully know, but it makes sense to overreact since we do not know everything there is to know about the ominous COVID-19.

As Spring Break began, I started to get very nervous. I was headed out to Colorado to visit all four National Parks in the state with my best friend. My flight was on Tuesday, the 17th.

A lot of people in my classes had been saying that they were afraid certain airlines would shut down and that if they went back home, they wouldn't be able to fly back to Bozeman at the end of Spring Break. I was also beginning to see on the news that the National Park Service was closing its visitor centers at some of their parks. Slowly, hotels in the towns my friend and I were supposed to stay at were beginning to close to the public. I was beginning to feel like the trip was going to become a bust. The one stress relief I had been looking forward to seemed like it was slowly slipping out of my grasp and it was scaring both my friend and I. I do not like to feel out of control, no one does, but this time it was really driving me crazy.

The trip did end up working out. Only thing was, we couldn't get the "full experience" of Colorado and its four National Parks: all of the park visitor centers and museums were closed, every little town we stayed in was on lockdown and only essential stores like Walmart and fast food chains were open. We couldn't even go to the last park on our list because the town nearby in which we were going to stay a night was quarantined because of high numbers (and deaths) of coronavirus. It was still a fantastic trip, because it is what you make of it, but it was still sad to not get to see and experience everything. Three days after we had visited Rocky Mountain National Park, the National Park Service closed the park to all visitors.

A few days into the trip, my third roommate (Roommate #2) and her boyfriend abruptly announced that they were going back home and not coming back until August when they had to move out. I understood their decision to leave, but Roommate #2 and her boyfriend are my friends. The thought of not being able to see them every day crushed me and made me wish I had enjoyed my time with them just a little more the last time I saw them. When I found out all

classes would remain online until the end of the semester, I felt like all hope of returning to normality any time soon had been lost.

I knew I would have to quarantine myself for the recommended fourteen days when I got back from Colorado, after being in the Bozeman and Denver airports and in towns with high case reports. I am naturally introverted, but after struggling for a large portion of the semester I really wanted contact with peers, friends, and family in a physical form. All my peers around me were leaving to go back home, and I watched them go on social media. For many of my peers and friends, online classes came as a relief, making their lives easier while I sat at home staring at my laptop desperately trying to understand online college physics.

As of March 31, 2020, I am still choosing to self-quarantine. It has been a week and a day, and I feel as if I am going to explode. Wednesday, April 8th is the day I can go back home. My mom told me she does not want me home any earlier than that because of the virus. I completely understand her thinking, so I am not sure why a part of me feels a little sad over her request.

I also found out recently that the reason Roommate #2 and her boyfriend left was because they were afraid I would bring back the virus from Colorado and didn't want to be here when I got back. This news was delivered to me by Roommate #1, who was supposedly staying in Bozeman until April 7th. I was not offended that she had told me, I understood that they were only leaving because they were concerned about their health (and Roommate #2's boyfriend lived in the dorms). The times just feel so strange.

Roommate #2's boyfriend texted me a few days after they had left. He told me that not having his group therapy sessions on campus anymore made him feel worse than he had before. He also comes from a household that is not supportive and neglectful, so being at home for him is most likely extremely tough, as it probably is for other students who are facing the same thing. He confided in me and said that Montana to him was like a fresh start. He is a freshman and has only been here for one semester. No one was expecting to have their lives uprooted like this, and it is tough on everyone.

I also utilized Counseling and Psychological Services on MSU's campus, but now I have my appointments over Zoom. It is just not the same not being in the same physical location as someone else, it just feels so impersonal, but it's better than nothing. My appointments are now more spaced out, thus now my thoughts are more all over the place than they were before and it is hard to balance classes with mental health.

My best friend's dad and grandpa both said that we should prepare for a huge economic recession that will make going to school and getting a job in our career fields (my best friend is majoring in Geology and GIS, and I am Conservation Biology but our job searches and outlooks are pretty similar) right out of college extremely difficult and emotionally and financially expensive (My family does not believe this, I have no opinion because I have no idea what is truly going on, everything changes every day now it seems). However, my friend got a job in Bozeman (he is from Boulder, Colorado) over the summer doing GIS work for the Forest Service, and coronavirus will not affect his job because it is technically considered remote. After this summer, if the Forest Service likes the work he has done, they will hire him on fulltime after he

graduates next spring. In other words, he will not have to deal with the competitiveness that comes with a career in the natural sciences. I will, especially now.

There is a job that I applied for through the Student Conservation Association. Positions with the SCA are extremely competitive and hard to get into. I applied for several positions with them and heard back from one at the beginning of March. It is a Youth and Visitor Services Internship; in the state I have had a fascination with since I was small: Alaska. In a perfect world, I would be working in Alaska, doing natural resource/ conservation work, or being a worker in visitor services, such as at a national park or a wildlife refuge. This position is perfect for me, I have experience in everything they want me to have experience in, and after contacting the coordinator, she told me I was at the “top tier of her piles” of applicants (there are twenty-seven, it is quite competitive). I can’t believe I am being possibly considered for this position; it is literally a dream job. However, there is one thing standing in my way: COVID-19. All federal agencies have closed their visitor centers and youth programs until further notice. This position was projected to start mid-May. I have become increasingly terrified that my dream job, a once in a lifetime opportunity, will slip away from my reach and be cancelled. There are even two positions being funded for this internship, making my chances of receiving a job more likely if I am seriously considered and given an interview. I would do anything to receive this position, but it feels like everything I do and everything I want keeps getting shut down by this virus. When things start looking up a little more, COVID-19 takes it back.

I cannot believe I am currently living through a pandemic. This part of history will appear in textbooks one day, and we will all be a part of history. This pandemic has led me to realize that I took all my necessities and personal interactions for granted. If I had known I would not

be in physical classes again until five months from now, I would've enjoyed my class projects a little more, enjoyed my interactions in class meetings and discussions more. I miss seeing people each day, quarantine is driving me crazy. Getting out and going on walks does not satisfy the need for daily interactions with others. I have not been to a store in a week and a half since my mom does not want me to go anywhere before coming home. In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting me in Bozeman by making me feel super isolated and so far away from reality. April has yet to show how it will affect me back at home with my family.

April

I decided to go back home earlier than anticipated, after receiving the distressing yet expected news. I missed my family, of course, but I really do not know where I belong right now.

I miss having the freedom I had in Bozeman, to drive anywhere, do anything, eat anywhere, study anywhere, walk to campus. But being in Bozeman now makes me feel stuck, a feeling I had also felt for years back at home. I am hoping being at home will help me figure myself out somehow, but I do not know. Frankly, I do not know anything. About the future, about how I feel.

I just feel so lost. I am just so sad, for everyone and the situations we are all going through, and some recent news has really had me gone.

"Three of you are receiving this email" she wrote in her email, sent April 1st. "In regular circumstances I would be setting up interviews with each of you. But as of right now, I am sorry to say that I can no longer move forward in this process. The future is too uncertain". Three

people were chosen to be interviewed for this internship in Alaska, the state I have wanted to be for as long as I can remember. To put this into perspective, thousands of college students applied for this position. Two hundred- and thirty-five-people's applications were passed on to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, where this position will be located. Eight people were chosen as back-ups. Three people were chosen for interviews, and two people would be selected. I was one of those three.

The one time I wish someone had pulled an April Fool's prank on me.

I think to call the loss devastating sounds dramatic, yet that is exactly how it felt. I do not cry to express my emotions, instead I overthink. When I got the email and felt all my high hopes drain away, I called my mom and cried. My dad told me to get over it, that it was not that big of a deal and that I would not make enough money anyway. Embarrassed of my outburst I tried to do exactly that. It did not work.

My heart goes out to those who had an internship, or a job opportunity lined up for the summer, or those who lost their jobs. I keep feeling like I am the only one who keeps getting the short end of the stick, this entire year has been straight trash and just when it seems like it may get a little better it gets much, much worse. My best friend's Forest Service job in Bozeman is secure because it is considered remote and not at high-risk of endangerment. Everyone else I know is not affected at all; they also have secured jobs. I cannot help but envy them greatly, that they can have something I cannot.

I can barely focus on school. Classes are basically in the backburner of my mind right now; frankly, I don't want anything to do with them. I know I cannot think that way, school is

extremely important but even at the beginning of the semester I could barely find the motivation to complete assignments. I keep telling myself that I will figure it out, but I'm not getting any grand ideas quite yet.

My best friend sent me a text tonight. His dad and stepmom are breaking up. After living together for years and sailing smoothly with little problems, COVID-19 has split them apart. His stepmom ran her own little store in downtown Denver, and his dad also ran his own business. Both have gone under, and for financial reasons they are splitting apart. Because of the virus. Is this how it was during the Spanish Flu?

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I am nervous to see how the rest of the semester is going to pan out. I received the lowest test score I had ever gotten in college physics a couple weeks ago. Some classes I can get ahead in, but STEM classes are extremely difficult to complete online. Good thing the Pass/ Fail option is available. I am ready for the semester to end and am looking forward to (hopefully) having physical classes in the fall.

Despite this, I made my way back to Bozeman almost three weeks after I had left. I was starting to get frustrated at home and was not doing as well in school as I had been wanting, therefore I decided to come back. All the summer jobs and internships that I had applied to either fell through or someone else was selected. The position in Alaska is still uncertain and there has been no new news, so I contacted the lady hiring. She predicts that the position will be cancelled and will happen next year instead. I had foreseen this coming for a while and decided to just try and let it go. I feel as if I have gone through the five stages of grief with this

job, it feels ridiculous. There is no definitive idea as to what will happen with the job, but the odds are looking slim and I know I cannot hold on hope forever. Besides, I am trying to look on the bright side of things and know that the position will be up next year just as it is every year, I can always apply for it again.

Thus, I plan on staying in Bozeman for the summer and working at some place in town deemed “essential”. I applied for a field position with MSU, and I am trying to remain hopeful for that. Phase One of reopening the economy will begin very soon in Montana, and though I know that this will probably cause another spike in cases and more mass hysteria, I am happy that life may start to return to “normal” soon.

Amidst all the uncertainty of our current times, I realize now that remaining hopeful is more important than it ever has been. It is hard for everyone, and knowing that my problems are not unique actually makes me feel a bit better and reminds me that we are all in this together. As things begin to open back up, I am hoping something works out with a job, and maybe with it will come new friends and new opportunities. I must try and see the bright side of things, try to find the silver lining. We all should.