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Spring 2021

### *Capturing Quarantine: Student Pandemic Experience Journal*

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Fiona Good-Sirota  
6 February, 2021

### Why Remember?

Last month, on Christmas night, I lost my grandfather, who was a Holocaust survivor, to complications from COVID-19. I have lost people in my life before, and when I did, I turned to the people around me for support, to family members, friends and loved ones for guidance. I found normalcy in the world around me which helped to alleviate feelings of fear, of panic and helped to soothe the overall sense of loss.

It has been seven months since I have been able to see my sister and my parents. Over the break we had many late-night phone calls, debating if it would be best to avoid taking a four hour flight back to California, discussing flight precautions, and weighing the pros and cons. “How much do you need to come home?” was a question asked numerous times, one that I found difficult to answer. Need is a difficult phrase when travelling could pose a risk for my mom, who is diabetic, and it is difficult to weigh the pros and cons when the con could put a loved one’s health at risk.

The importance of documenting my time during the pandemic is one that, surprisingly, has not occurred to me prior to this point in time. However, when I learned that the college is compiling a digital collection of students’ experiences during the pandemic, I felt a great sense of relief to know that this time would in fact leave a written mark—or many. Reading through others’ accounts of their experiences, I felt less alone. Once hard times have ended, I think that it can be easy to move on and move forward without a glance into the past. However, it is surreal to imagine my children and grandchildren reading about the global pandemic that stopped the country, and the world, in the history books to come. If we ignore the hard parts, or pretend that they did not exist, we simultaneously wipe away the stories—both hard and beautiful, that took place in their midst.

Hearing from college students in particular is important, given the fact that many of us are already in a transitional experience within our educational journeys, and because our schooling has been so heavily impacted by the pandemic. As students, it is our job to learn. One can argue, what better a time than now to be learning about the world we live in? At the same time, I have noticed that school has helped me find normalcy during a time that can feel anything but normal, specifically when I have found myself itching for things to feel the same, at least in some ways.

The hardest parts have been the grief, the loss and the missing. But the beautiful have found a way to peek through the challenges, and I think those parts are worth mentioning as well. Before I returned to Chicago in July, I was able to be home with my family after the pandemic began in March. On the days that I feel sad, I think back to morning walks with my mom, sister and our dog Blue. I think of the sunrises that we got to see, the hugs that I miss, and the afternoons all spent together, at the same kitchen table, typing away or chattering on Zoom. I think of the friends that have texted me loving words, those that I am still able to see and the FaceTimes, in the morning and at night, where I almost felt like I was in the same room as my family.

When this time has ended, when the normalcy has returned, I will never forget the hardest parts, and the happiest ones too. I will hold family and friends tighter, I will relish in the fact that my 11-year-old sister will have made it to nearly my height and I will cry tears of joy and of loss in the arms of the people who feel it too.

A short film documentary of my quarantine experience made last April, starring my sister and mom, Amelia and Audrey Good-Sirota: <https://youtu.be/sfnbxrqlJU>

Fiona Good-Sirota  
Public History  
22 February 2021

What's new in your routine since the pandemic started? What have you learned that you think you will stick with once the pandemic is over?



Me and my pet crested gecko, Kiwi, on a Zoom call with my family members in California from my Chicago apartment.

March 14, 2020 was my grandmother's birthday. I gathered with my 84-year-old grandmother and roughly 15 of my family members at a local pancake house near her home in Arlington Heights, IL. One week later, each one of the guests that came to celebrate was quarantining in their homes, and I had flown to California where I would end up spending the next seven months with my mom and my sister. The date marked the last time I saw many of my aunts, uncles and cousins and it is the last time I ate, maskless at a restaurant. During a phone call that I had with my grandmother this week, she brought up the birthday celebration that we had last year and she mentioned that she would have never expected the pandemic to have lasted until that time this year, let alone potentially even much longer.

When I returned to California, the first day I got home in March of last year (only a week after the pandemic began) my mom and my 11-year-old sister took a trip to Petsmart, one of the only local pet stores that was still open at the time. "I need an emotional support gecko," I had told my mom, after bringing up my hope to one day have a pet lizard many years before. Although most people looking for comfort and emotional support would get a dog or a cat (or possibly a small horse) I knew that a gecko was just what I needed. I wanted a small companion to sit on my shoulder during Zoom classes, a friend to take care of and a buddy to keep me company. Little did I know that, when I did end up returning to Chicago in August of 2020, it would be a long time until I would see my family again.

On the nights, the days and the mornings where I have felt lonely, through loss and through happy days and through sun and snow, my crested gecko, Kiwi, has been a friend to me. She has watched shows and movies with me, she sits perched on my laptop while I complete all of my school assignments and all-in-all, she was just the emotional support gecko I needed to get through this time. Kiwi's presence has become ingrained into my daily routine and she was even able to make the trek from California to Chicago with me when I came back last summer, where she has stayed with me in my apartment ever since.

Fiona Good-Sirota  
12 March 2021

### After One Year: How Has The Pandemic Changed You?

Over the past few weeks I have seen a plethora of social media posts pointing out the obvious: that it has been almost exactly one year since the pandemic began. The feeling that lingers from that thought is one that I have not experienced ever before and I can only compare it to a sickly feeling that exists deep in my gut. I saw an Instagram post recently that said “you would not be you right now without the pandemic”. I appreciated the positivity, but those words definitely hit me harder than expected as I asked myself if I would be the person that I am now without the pandemic, or if perhaps I would be doing better and feeling happier without it.

There have certainly been good times and hard throughout this past year and I do think that they have changed me. However, the question is if I have been changed for the better. I do think that I have become stronger through the independence, grief and the challenges that I have faced. This year I was in my hometown for the longest time since starting college but I also went the longest period of time I have ever gone without seeing my family. I lost my grandfather on Christmas, my parents, grandparents and family members contracted the virus, it has been almost eight months since I have seen my moms and my sister, I was diagnosed with both anxiety and depression, online school was chaotic and some days it was hard to imagine a world post-Covid. On the other hand, I also moved into my first apartment this year, I fell in love and found home with the people I was able to see, I completed my first internship, I had my writing published in a magazine, I went from a sophomore to a junior, I got a new pet, I learned how to use Illustrator for fashion design, I started FaceTiming my family every single day and I got nearly five months to spend with my family before returning to Chicago for school.

There are so many things to be grateful for this year: my own safety, the safety of my friends and family, the healing of those I love, the connections that I was able to uphold virtually, the loved ones that supported me and got me through this year and all of the years that came before and new experiences and a new outlook on the world around me. I do think that I am a different person this year than I was last year and a different person than I would be without the pandemic. However, I know now that I am capable of handling the unprecedented, the unpredictable and adapting to the challenges that come my way. I have learned to be the kindest to myself, that I am my own friend and my number one supporter and that I can get through anything that comes my way.

Fiona Good-Sirota  
Public History  
4 May 2021

### Personal Timeline

1. March 14, 2020
  2. My grandmother's birthday.
  3. This date marks a very meaningful date to me and my family and it also coincided with the last time I saw many of my family members prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 
1. March 20, 2020
  2. My last day in Chicago.
  3. This date was my last day and evening in Chicago with many of my friends who were also resident advisors before going home to California. We rented Divvy bikes around the city and climbed to the top of Buckingham Fountain to commemorate our last day all together in the residence halls of the University Center.
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1. March 21, 2020
  2. My flight to California.
  3. On this day I flew home to Santa Cruz, California, where I would spend the next five months at home with my family, doing Zoom calls for my classes and FaceTime calling friends, family and my boyfriend who were all back in Chicago.
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1. March 22, 2020
  2. Kiwi is adopted!
  3. On March 22, 2020, I took a trip with my family to adopt my pet crested gecko, Kiwi! She has been with me ever since and even made the lengthy trip from Chicago back to California with me later on in the year. :)
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1. July 9, 2020
  2. My birthday.
  3. My birthday this year was spent with my mom and my little sister, Amelia. It was my first (and hopefully only!) birthday during the worst part of the pandemic and we made the best of it with a road trip to San Jose where we picked up food from my favorite dumping restaurant, cupcakes and drinks from Philz Coffee.
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1. August 6, 2020
  2. My last day in California.
  3. On this day I packed and prepared to leave my family in Santa Cruz.
- 
1. August 7, 2020
  2. My first day back in Chicago.

3. This was a very special day because I arrived at O'hare airport and my boyfriend, Jesse, was waiting at baggage claim for me and I had not been able to see him for a very long time due to the pandemic. We drove to his house and I was able to stay with him for three weeks after returning to Chicago.

1. September 1, 2020
2. Moving into my first apartment.
3. On this day I packed my suitcases and Kiwi into an Uber and I moved into my first apartment with my best friend, Cande. I was so excited to finally live on my own and to settle into our new home!

1. September 2, 2020
2. Interviewing for my internship.
3. I had my interview for my editorial intern assistant at Modern Luxury Media and, due to the fact that I had no furniture in my apartment yet, I did it over Zoom on the floor! I got the internship a few days later and it lasted the entirety of the year and I was able to get my own work published and experience working my first job at a magazine. :)

1. September 4, 2020 - September 12, 2020
2. My mom and sister visit me.
3. This time period marks the last time I saw my mom and my sister until May of 2021. I was able to visit with them and see my grandma with our masks on and it was so wonderful to see them but very hard to see them leave!

1. September 8, 2020
2. My first day of Junior year.
3. This date was the start of my first semester of Junior year at Columbia College and at this point all of my classes were online and my internship was also being completed virtually.

1. October 23, 2020 - October 27
2. A trip to Wisconsin to visit Hailey!
3. One of my close friends goes to school in Wisconsin so for her birthday me and Cande got Covid tested and then took a bus from Chicago to Wisconsin where we were able to see her and celebrate her birthday and Halloween.

1. October 31, 2020
2. Halloween
3. This year's Halloween was a lot different than last year but I had a really fun time with my boyfriend (who was dressed as Eeore from Winnie The Pooh) and Cande who was dressed as an angel. We spent the evening watching scary movies, playing card games and eating candy.

1. November 25, 2020 - November 29, 2020
2. Thanksgiving break.
3. I received a break from both school and my internship and I was able to spend quality time with Jesse, my grandma, my aunt, uncle and cousins and my roommate after being Covid tested.

1. November 26, 2020
2. Thanksgiving.
3. This year's Thanksgiving was very special to me because I was able to spend it with my grandma, aunt, uncle and cousins with the help of masks and social distancing. My aunt made a Covid-safe "bistro" where my grandma, me and their family had our own tables and we were able to still spend the holiday together and could even Zoom with my moms and sister back in California.

1. December 19, 2020
2. Winter break begins.
3. I received a three-week break from my internship and school and, after careful deliberation, I decided to remain in Chicago to avoid putting my family members at risk by flying during a busy time when many people were traveling. I was able to FaceTime with my moms and sister every single day which helped with the homesickness I felt.

1. December 24, 2020
2. Christmas Eve celebrations.
3. On Christmas Eve my aunt, uncle, cousins, me and my grandma were all able to spend the holiday together at our separate bistro seats once again. I felt so grateful and lucky to get to see them all and we did a family Zoom all together to see my family back home and our extended family as well.

1. December 25, 2020
2. Christmas and a very hard day.
3. On Christmas Day, 2020, I lost my grandfather William Good to Covid-19. The loss was one of the most difficult I have experienced in my life as we have been extremely close for all 20 years I have spent on Earth and he was a huge inspiration to me and will forever have such a positive impact on my life.

1. December 31, 2020 - January 1, 2021
2. New Year's Eve.
3. I spent New Year's Eve with my boyfriend and we counted down the start of 2021 by timing the explosion of the Death Star in Star Wars so it burst into flames when the clock hit midnight.

1. January 2, 2021
2. My grandfather's funeral.



3. On January 2, 2021, I attended the Zoom memorial and funeral for my grandfather. Over 100 people attended the virtual service and we shared our favorite stories, sang prayers and honored him with other friends and family members. It was really hard not to be there in person but I was so grateful that we were still able to all be together and Covid-safe, even through a virtual format.

1. January 4, 2021
2. The start of the spring 2021 semester of my junior year at Columbia College.
3. I began classes for the spring semester of my junior year of college on this date and I received a new set of classes for this semester.

1. January 21, 2021
2. Jesse's birthday.
3. Me and my boyfriend, Jesse, spent the day together and we were able to have a small, socially-distanced bonfire with the two of us and some of his close friends. It was so nice to get to celebrate him and spend time together.

1. February 14, 2021
2. Valentine's Day.
3. Me and Jesse spent the day together on Valentine's Day and we exchanged presents and he got me chocolates and a beautiful necklace. I got him a back massager that I ended up using quite a bit myself.

1. February 19, 2021
2. Going blonde!
3. Very unexpectedly and completely unplanned, I woke up on February 21 and decided to bleach my very dark brown hair with hopes of it turning out beautiful and shiny. Instead, it turned out bright orange which prompted my first visit to the hair salon the next morning to get it fixed!

1. February 20, 2021
2. Guiliana's birthday.
3. After getting Covid tested, me and Cande were able to take the train to Downers Grove, IL to celebrate the 21st birthday of our friend Giuliana with a girl's movie night, popcorn and a little wine.

1. March 14, 2021
2. My grandmother's birthday (2021 version!).
3. This date marked a turning point in the pandemic the year before and this year I was able to celebrate with my grandmother several days later because she was receiving her first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine on her birthday! She went on to receive the second dose one month later.

1. April 8, 2021

2. Randy Baker passes away.
3. My closest family friend and childhood friend, Rumiana, and her sister Naia unexpectedly lost her father the morning of April 8, 2021. They lost their mom several years earlier so the loss was incredibly painful for them and for our family as well. I spent the next few weeks FaceTiming her every single day and doing my best to be a source of support even though I was across the country.

1. April 11, 2021
2. Randy's Zoom memorial.
3. I attended my second Zoom memorial during the pandemic to honor the life of Randy Baker and to share our favorite stories about him. It was so hard to make sense of such a senseless and sudden loss but I found comfort in seeing friends and family virtually.

1. April 23, 2021
2. My first dose.
3. I received my first dose of the Moderna vaccine on this date at a Walgreens across from Jesse's home in Downers Grove. I was so happy to get vaccinated and I am looking forward to getting my second dose this month (May, 2021). I was very lucky that I did not have a reaction other than a sore arm.

1. May 13, 2021
2. My family will be visiting me!
3. Although this date is in the future, I am incredibly excited because my mom and my sister will be visiting me from California for several weeks. I have not been able to see them since last September and I cannot describe how much I have missed them and how excited I am to be reunited with them both! :)