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Summer 2021

Capturing Quarantine: Student Pandemic Experience Journal

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Martin French

Public History

COVID Timeline

March 2020:

COVID Catches steam in class- Early March, one of my instructors tells the class that we should gather food and water in our apartments in preparation for what's coming. I, like everyone else in that class, thought that this was catastrophizing. I went home and complained to my friends that this teacher was stirring up anxiety in the class.

Rudy- March 11, Rudy Gobert, French basketball player for the Utah Jazz, tests positive for COVID. In a press conference Gobert was asked about COVID and his infectivity. He joked by touching all the microphones in the room. Soon the NBA would suspend the season in response to the pandemic. The multiple time defensive player of the year becomes synonymous with the beginning America's surreal experience with the shutdown. The NBA shuts down March 11, two days before President Trump declares a national emergency.

Toilet Paper- The US panics as cities shut down and there are toilet paper shortages. At this point, classes have been suspended and I am quarantining in my apartment.

April 2020:

Living Alone- I've spent a month alone in my apartment. Everyone is experiencing major depressive episodes as we cope with a new threat of death. PJs stay on all day. But the novelty of lockdown creates weird communal moments. People are gathering online in support of each other. Refrigerated trucks are being used to house bodies in NYC. I start thinking that I should use this time to record music.

To Pay or Not to Pay- The federal government agrees to send out stimulus check on March 27. \$1,200 checks go out to Americans mid-April. The stimulus checks fuel debates as conservatives want to give out less money, while President Trump insists on putting his name on the checks.

May 2020:

End of the Line- After a little over two months of pure isolation, I go to my parents. School had started back up remotely.

MURDER HORNETS- May 4, Murder Hornets are reported in the US. While conservative states are opening, nature gives us another reason to stay inside. Luckily, this would not pan out to be as catastrophic as the name suggests, but at the time this felt like the 18th sign of the apocalypse.

Floyd- May 25th, George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. In the wake of national shuts downs, 100,000 Americans dead from COVID 19, a crisis on the Mexican-American border, and MURDER HORNETS, an American cop reminds us of daunting racial divide in America. This spark protests across the nation and violent responses from police and President Trump.

Memorial Day- May 25th, people flocked to beaches and lakes for Memorial Day weekend. Images and videos from the Lake of the Ozarks show hundred of people partying with no COVID precautions. There are COVID outbreaks across the country.

June 2020:

The Blur- I don't remember what I was doing during this month. In hindsight there are huge chunks of time that I've forgotten over this year.

July 2020:

Coping- At some point this month I start seeing one of my friends again! The NBA creates the bubble at the end of July to finish the season. 150,000 Americans are dead from COVID. The death toll ceases to be an understandable number.

Michigan Ave- July 17th, amid unrest and other peaceful protests in Chicago, Michigan Ave is looted and vandalized. I walked through the scene on the 18th to see it. The city feels like it is angry. I go out to protests and am attacked by cops at Wilson and Broadway while walking home with other protesters.

Hope- July 27th, two vaccines are in the final phase of production. Whereas normally vaccines take years to make, with the backing of the worlds governments two companies are close to having a COVID-19 vaccine. The national conversation starts to include vaccine distribution plans.

August 2020:

They Closed Down the Beaches- August 8th, Mayor Lightfoot threatens to shut down Chicago beaches again after images of a crowded lake front circulate online. I write a song about this news story.

Opening Up- Schools begin to open up including many colleges. The issue of putting hundreds of 18-21-year-olds into dorm buildings together comes up as dorms become hot spots for COVID outbreaks. My cousin Henry catches COVID in his freshmen dorm at University of Indiana (he's ok) in late August. Teachers protest the reopening.

Wuhan- August 18th, there is a festival in Wuhan, China. The place where the COVID-19 virus was first found is open back up after an extremely strict lockdown by the Chinese government. The virus continues to rage in other countries.

September 2020:

Supreme Court Rules- September 26th, Amy Coney Barrett is nominated to the Supreme Court in the wake of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death. Barrett's nomination was criticized by democrats after republicans had blocked the nomination of Merrick Garland by saying that President Obama cannot nominate a justice in an election year. Barrett pro-life and has been critical of the Affordable Care Act. She is considered a republican victory to influence laws by packing the courts with conservative judges. Some democrats saw her nomination as part a plan to use the court to influence the 2020 election.

Feeling tired- September 22nd, everyone is fatigued. The news is filled with less stories of hope and overcoming odds. It feels like the national brave face has faltered. The United States passes 200,000 dead. I start a part time job.

FIRE- September 4th, evacuations begin in parts of Oregon to escape raging wildfires. I guess the world had to replace the MURDER HORNETS with something.

October 2020:

Goes Around or Comes Around?- October 2nd, President Trump is hospitalized with COVID-19. Many have to wrestle with the moral conflict around enjoying poetic justice and not wishing COVID on anyone. For the umpteenth time people suggest in vain that this will wake Trump up to the gravity of the situation.

Lakers- October 11th, The LA Lakers win the NBA championship. This concludes the NBA bubble in Orlando. The NBA completed its season by imposing rigorous COVID testing and strict quarantining 5 months after the NBA shut down the Gobert case.

USPS- Building up to the November election in late October the US Postal Service is under pressure as it prepares for a huge amount of mail in ballots. Conservatives have been quietly attempting to dismantle the USPS's abilities to handle this election over the last several months.

November 2020:

Election Day- November 4th, I stay awake for several days straight (kinda) glued to my TV. Several days later Joe Biden is announced as the winner amid conservative calls to stop counting votes. Despite Trump's attempt to overturn the results in the following days and months this feels like the first moment of recovery from the Trump presidency. I go to Boystown in Chicago to watch the celebrations in the street.

Georgia- November 4th, the Senate races in Georgia go to a special election and I personally hold my breathe for weeks while they do this.

Not Quite the Corner Turned- November 18th, 250,000 Americans are dead from COVID as American prepare to travel for Thanksgiving against officials' warnings. I personally skip this holiday. Despite the hope

around the election Biden is not the president yet and Trump continues to focus on overturning the election.

December 2020:

Marjorie and Q- Over the course of December I start to learn about Marjorie Taylor Greene and Q Anon. This had been a story for a while, but her election is what opened it up to me. I had been worried that the back lash from the November election would become violent, but after learning about MTG I became sure that it would.

Britain Jumps- December 2nd, Britain approves the Pfizer vaccine and begins to distribute it to the English population by the 8th.

The US Follows- December 11th, the US approves the Pfizer vaccine as well and begins distributing the vaccine a few days later. One day after distribution begins the death toll reaches 300,000 in the United States.

Christmas- I spend an awkward Christmas with my family. I don't see my extended family even though they live in Chicago. We are all quarantined from each other. I leave my family on Christmas day to spend some time with my girlfriend who didn't see her family at all over the holidays.

Two Steps Back- Late December, a COVID variant starts to spread across Britain sparking concerns that due to unvaccinated populations the virus could mutate faster than we can vaccinate against it.

January 2021:

Sumpter- January 6th, I turned on the news around 10:30am to watch the counting of the electoral votes. Normally I wouldn't do this, but I knew that there would be opposition to the verification of the votes. I watched some of the congressional proceedings, but then it just stopped. Over the course of the next hours, I had a full-on panic attack. I was convinced that if someone wanted to attack a major city in the United States they would do it while the capitol was under siege.

The lasting inside- I don't remember the exact date of this event. I think that is because it is a bad one. When a person stops using drugs for a period of time they lose the ability to handle the volumes they were using before. My friend Ellie tried to use her old dosage after 4 years off drugs and it killed her. I know that staying inside is saving lives more lives than it is losing, but it still is losing. It feels melodramatic, but I wrote a song when this happened.

100- January 21st, Joe Biden is inaugurated as president. He asks for 100 days of wearing masks. In hindsight it has turned out to be longer than that, but it for sure helped.

February 2021:

Another coup- February 1st, the military of Myanmar staged a coup against the democratically elected government.

Tony and Friends- Amy and I start watching the Sopranos. It quickly becomes her favorite show as I try to keep her interested in Ted Lasso instead.

Casey French- February 4th, Casey French is born. I get to have a second nephew. At this point Casey's older brother Miles has spent half of his life in quarantine.

Super Bowl- February 7th, Tom Brady and Tampa Bay Buccaneers win the Super Bowl. Normally I wouldn't so much care about football, but Tom Brady was very old to quarterback a team to a win, and the game doubled as a super spreader event.

Icey- February 13th, an ice storm strikes Texas putting huge parts of the state out of power. Texas is famously not on either large coastal power grid. Because it could not get power to it residents people froze to death or were settled with power bills in the \$10,000 range. At this time I get my first shot of the Pfizer vaccine.

Je t'Aime Earth- February 19th, the United States officially rejoins the Paris Agreement to combat climate change. This is a big deal, but after all of 2020 it felt like we were just picking up broke pieces as fast as we could.

OJ- February 26th, this is a smaller story, but OJ Simpson gets his second vaccine shot before many frontline workers can get theirs. I don't want to imply that OJ shouldn't get a vaccine because everyone should get it, but it was a big story that week.

March 2021:

Suez or Su-isn't- March 23rd, a ship named "Ever Given" turns sideways in the Suez Canal, blocking all trade through the canal. The blockage effected billions of dollars' worth of trade.

Mary to Minnesota- My aunt Mary Margaret is taken up to for surgery to remove cancer from her uterus. She stops on the way back to Mississippi to stay with us here in Chicago. She takes this opportunity, while recovering from SURGERY, to quiz me about my girlfriend. Southern priorities.

100,000,000- March 19th, the United States reaches 100 Million vaccines administered.

April 2021:

FedEx- April 15th, a 19 year old shot and killed 9 people including himself in a FedEx. There were so many shootings over the course those a week or two during April. It was hard to keep them straight.

Promotion- I got a promotion! I now help coordinate several thousand group for my work. I'm still part time and hourly, but now I get to do more and be on the line for hundreds of people... which I'm told is an upgrade.

Soccer Gone- April 18th, several of the richest European soccer clubs attempt to break away from European competition to start their own "Super League" where only the elite clubs can play. They would not have to play against any smaller clubs and could monetize high profile matches. This went horribly, and several clubs were almost kicked out of domestic competitions as a result.

Soccer BF- April 19th, I explain the Super League to my girlfriend, and she listens politely almost the entire time. It was a real test of the relationship.

May 2021:

Medina Spirit- May 7th, Medina Spirit wins the Kentucky Derby only for it to be found out that Medina Spirit was on a class C drug that was banned. This prompted former President Trump to put out a blog post calling Medina Spirit a "junky". Just a wild news story all together.

May the 4th be with you- May 4th, I have friends over for the first time in a long time. We watch Star Wars The Phantom Menace because in our DnD campaign there is a character who speaks only in Jar Jar Bink quotations. This is also my mom's birthday. I don't know if she's angry that I bring up Star Wars first usually, but she's never brought it up.

Gaza- May 11th, Palestine and Israel are in conflict again as Hamas launched rockets into Israel killing 13. The Israeli government responded with disproportionate military strikes killing maybe 260 people.

June 2021:

Blog Away- June 2nd, Trump's blog, which he started after being banned from Twitter, is shut down due to low traffic. On a personal note, I think that this blog, while being hugely damaging in the ability to continue spreading disinformation, was also very funny. See above where Trump called a horse a junky.

Work Threat- I'm finishing up a day at work. At the end of the day, I have to sit at the front of the office to answer the phones. We also operate as a help line for people looking for recovery services. A man calls and tells me "You've got a live one!" This is normal. What is not normal is that he claims to have been the guy who shot Bin Ladin and keeps asking me if I knew what it was like to kill a guy. He tells me that he might go out to kill a cop tonight and that he will be in

Chicago the next day. I try to talk him down, but when he asked for my phone number and I refused, he hung up abruptly. I spent the next weeks watching my back as I enter and leave work.

A Wedding- June 17th, I drove my girlfriend down to Dayton for her cousin's wedding. This meant staying with her mom, brother, sister-in-law, and her mom's boyfriend. Also, Amy doesn't drive so that was all me. I think it went well, but all I really now is that I was tired.

Israeli Change- June 13th, Benjamin Netanyahu is no longer the leader of Israel. A coalition different political parties ousts the long time leader.

July 2021:

Bread time- My mom gives me her sourdough starter. My girlfriend starts bullying me to make her bread.

August 2021:

Bread- I make sourdough bread... and it's perfect.