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My Pandemic: What I've Learned So Far

Ah yes, I remember my first pandemic. No, I'm not talking about the Bubonic Plague, or the Spanish Flu, I'm talking about severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 or SARS-CoV-2 or as it's more popularly known, Covid-19. This modern virus originated across the globe but made its way into all our lives in a few short months. My whole life changed in a truly short amount of time. From experiencing a new way of learning, dealing with social injustice, to receiving life altering news, this pandemic forever changed the way I go about my life. Whether I noticed right away or not, I went through a historic event which will eventually be talked about just like the pandemics mentioned earlier, I just hope it's in person and not through a Zoom call.

All was going well as I was in my final semester at my local Community College. There were murmurs among my professors and my fellow peers about concerns following the news of a virus making its way around China. At the time, I wasn't too concerned, as this was happening halfway across the globe. I even remember joking with one of my friends saying, "oh, this won't reach us," I was very wrong. Within weeks, the virus was sweeping through all of Asia, Europe, and eventually the Americas. Just three months into 2020, The World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus a pandemic. At this point, my classes had fully transitioned to an all-online model, and it's safe to say that no one was prepared for the transition. I have never been so stressed. On one hand, we have a deadly virus that is spreading faster than anything we have seen in recent years, and on the other hand, we have an underprepared educational system

that has lost all forms of communication, leading to mass confusion about assignments and the entirety of the class. I specifically had one class, my digital publishing class, where we just fell apart. At one point, we went through a whole week without hearing from our professor. We were on our own at that point confused and anxious without guidance. When he finally did reach out to the class, he sent out a full timeline of what was due and on what date. Because there was no knowledge of zoom during these few weeks, we resorted to email communication. It appears this was a whole school endeavor because I ended up receiving the same type of timeline for the rest of my classes. I have never sent out so many emails in my life, but this was the only line of communication we had to the class, so it had to be done; I felt like a true desk jockey. My worst experience was with my typography professor. I was working on a template for a report that was about fifty pages. This was my first time working with such a long document, so of course, I had questions. Unlike before, where all I had to do was raise my hand and the professor would come over to help me, I now had to send a long chain of emails to solve an issue that would've taken less than five minutes in person. I was so frustrated I had to walk away from my computer. Out of this frustration came something good. I progressively got better at sending emails, saying what I had to say in a manner that was clear and to the point. Since working from home is becoming more the norm, emails don't scare me anymore. So, when the time comes where I am working for a firm, I know this experience prepared me to work efficiently and independently.

But, before I ever see my name in a firm office, let us not forget the name, George Floyd. May 25th, the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis rang throughout the country. His unjust murder at the hands of police sparked a wave of unrest that led to protesting and rioting. I was shocked and appalled as to why, and how, his life was taken. I remember having to reinforce the doors at my work because our corporate office was scared, we were going to be looted. Working

at Menards, we used empty skids and bundles of our lumber to block off certain entrances. The looters never came, but the discussions did. I was never one to really get into politics or to bring up current issues, but the death of George Floyd changed that. One thing that comes with being in a pandemic is the immense amount of time spent indoors and on social media. I was so disturbed to read the many comments that blamed Floyd for his own murder, bringing up his past to justify his death. I knew then, where I stood, I wanted to be a part of the movement to support our black community. I reached out to one of my co-workers who was regularly active in the community to ask where I could help. Before I knew it, I was standing outside my local police station in Elgin, protesting for police reform, always with a mask on, of course. Along with the death of George Floyd, our hearts were with the family of Decynthia Clements who was shot and killed at the hands of the Elgin police in March of 2018. Being on lockdown helped me get out and do something I once never would think of doing. These events have influenced how I view society and I began to demand change; not just sit idly like I once was.

Sitting might be the last thing I think about for a while, a new beginning is approaching. Just days after Christmas, on December 27th I woke up feeling a bit odd, I went it to work but left early. It turned out; I had contracted the virus. My heart sank and I began to panic. The next few weeks were hard and stressful, but luckily, I had a minor case; what a way to start 2021. Quarantined in my room, locked up with my own thoughts and fears took a toll on me. Nothing like a deadly virus to make one think of their own mortality. Feeling weak and gloomy, I needed to cheer up. Come January 3rd, the day that my life was forever changed. As I was coming out of this sickness, my girlfriend brought me a gift, the gift of parenthood. My heart sank and tears started flowing as she showed me the pregnancy test. I have never been more excited, and I knew I had something to look forward to, I was going to be a dad! Within just a few days I received a

new outlook on life. With all the bad that has come from this pandemic, I was at least able to receive one bit of happiness.

This pandemic has altered my life in ways I don't think would've occurred prior to it. I was able to change my way of handling heavy workloads, by setting up a new workflow that I think will help me thrive in my professional career. I was also able to have do something that was bigger than me. It was so powerful seeing people come together to demand change in the community. I am hoping to keep this kind of energy and continue to help wherever possible. But I think the most important thing that happened to me during the pandemic was learning about my son. I no longer have the same mentality as a college student. There's nothing like having a child to make you grow up. My priorities and way of life have changed forever, and I have SARS-CoV-2 to thank for that.