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### ***My Pandemic: What I've Learned so Far***

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic I grew so much as a person. I feel that I have aged faster than the years have passed. The social isolation that accompanied the pandemic created a new level of alone time that I wasn't used to. Having an abundance of time by myself helped me to become more independent and think more critically about my life and the people in it. Prior to the lockdowns in Chicago, I was living with my best friend. I was going to school and working. I felt that life had its track, everything I planned for was set up. I was planning on staying in Chicago till at least I graduated, getting an internship, and a job in my field. These plans were dramatically shifted when Covid-19 came into the city. I was all the sudden not living in my apartment anymore, not in school, and not working. The pandemic happening taught me that nothing is truly set in stone, no matter how much preparation is done. There are always outside issues that can interrupt a fully thought out plan. Through a very difficult time both personally and globally, I was able to change in a positive direction.

Since the pandemic, I've learned how to enjoy my alone time. Back before the shut downs, I would struggle with any form of alone time. My mind would feel too loud with unwanted thoughts. Instead of addressing what was truly at hand, I would fill all my time up with socializing. My friends felt like the most important people, even above myself. Constantly distracting myself in this way made me not prioritize my own time. When the pandemic first started to force me to be alone, it was really hard for me. I would constantly try to call my friends and keep up on my distractions. Eventually it

became more difficult to be in constant communication, and I began to have true alone time. This type of alone time was foreign to me. It was uncomfortable and made me really sad for a while. Over time, it got easier and I stopped feeling so uncomfortable. I started to enjoy the silence and peace I felt with myself. I worked a lot on journaling what I was thinking instead of putting them on other people. I now know the real value of letting my thoughts flow and spending time with myself. This was a very valuable lesson to learn, and the pandemic helped force me to learn it.

Going along with the struggle of spending time by myself, I also struggled to believe I had the abilities to learn things on my own. When Columbia announced that they were going to be doing online school I was really nervous. I did not know what all that meant. The idea of teaching myself was terrifying. I did not think I would be able to do it without a real classroom and teachers to help. As the zoom classes began, I struggled to self motivate myself. I was getting overwhelmed easily and not remembering when assignments were due. There was a real learning curve revolving around online learning. It was difficult to dedicate the right amount of time to each class. The balance between personal time and work time felt off. I tried to remember what all was happening and when but it felt impossible. I started keeping a very detailed planner with everything I had to do in a day written out. This was really helpful in feeling like I accomplished everything I needed to. Starting this habit made online classes not feel as bad. I was able to keep up on assignments and not feel like I was missing things. These skills helped me to feel more in control of my education. I was able to slowly learn that I was capable of doing any assignment and teaching myself anything I wanted to know. I

learned that I am actually very good at working online. Now I feel that I am able to keep up on deadlines and learn anything I want to know.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I have learned a great amount about myself. I have learned that I need to value my alone time in order to have a peaceful life, and that I am great at staying organized. An overall theme I see within myself is that I have become way more independent than before. I have learned that the things that feel hard and awful in the moment can teach me things I need to know. I struggled so much in the beginning of the lockdowns, but as they continued and I kept trying, I was able to learn so much.