

How The Pandemic Has Changed Me

Living during a world-wide pandemic was an experience I never thought I would have. Things like the plague and the Spanish influenza were covered in history classes, but never felt like modern problems that we could face. I was obviously wrong. Before the pandemic, it feels like I did not have a care in the world. There are so many things that I did then that I can't imagine doing now and vice versa. To think, just two years ago, I did not own a face mask, and now I have them in every corner. While the pandemic as a whole has been incredible tragic and detrimental for so many people, honestly, the quarantine had a really positive impact on my life. In a time that felt like the world shut down and we were separated from everyone, I was really forced to prioritize my relationships with people. I also had the much-needed time to better myself, time I would not have had otherwise had the world kept moving.

I have been extremely fortunate enough to live in close proximity to my friends my entire life. I have only had a few friends here and there move away, so I have never had an issue seeing people. While it has been a great thing, my ability to communicate and keep in touch with people who are not nearby has not fully developed yet. I have never been one to text or call a lot and once we went off to college, my friends and I have always had the ability to just "pick up where we left off" after not being in touch for a couple weeks or months. When the pandemic hit and I was not able to simply just go see people, this became a very difficult thing to deal with. It would have been very easy to hole up and lose contact with a lot of people, and while a month or two has always been fine, not talking to someone for what ended up being over a year would have been extremely detrimental to my relationships. I learned that I really had to force myself to keep in contact with people, in any way possible. I may not have texted my friends every day to recap our days, but we did send fifteen Tik Toks to each other. I may not have facetimed people to talk about life, but we did have Netflix parties to watch shows together while on Zoom. These unique ways of communication have taught me that I can keep in touch with people and put more effort in upkeeping relationships in non-traditional ways that are just as effective.

Thinking back to the past couple of years, I am someone who has not had very much free time. I think many people can agree with this, but I feel like life is moving so fast and there is always so much to do that I never feel like I really have time for myself. What were my hobbies two to three years ago? Besides watching television and movies, listening to music, and hanging out with my friends, what did I do; more specifically, what did I do for myself? The time we had at home felt like the perfect time to finally start developing hobbies, and so many people started doing things for themselves. Many people went through a bread making phase, others went through a crafting phase. At some point, though, there

was almost a pressure to develop these really cool hobbies where it didn't feel like people were doing it for themselves anymore, but rather because they felt like they had to take advantage of this time they had. So, while I did take up embroidery and that has been nice, I decided to focus that free time and energy within. After years of struggling with my relationship with food and finding nutritiously balanced food that I actually enjoy, I feel like I have had the time to truly work on that without too many other external stressors in my life. I've had the time to experiment with cooking and workout routines without feeling the pressure of a specific timeline. It is almost like this year has allowed me to go with the flow a little bit more, and just focus on myself rather than everything else.

It is undeniable the loss and heartbreak that this pandemic has caused. It has even further divided our country, it has caused many relationships to end, threatened many peoples' livelihoods, and, of course, taken the lives of far too many. It feels wrong to say that I have come out of it better. I recognize how incredibly privileged I am, not only to have not lost anyone close to me to the virus, but also to not have my life turned upside down. I am grateful to have had the experience that I did during this pandemic, I was able to change my life for the better and develop habits that will stick with me. There is still a lot of uncertainty; I do not know how long it will take for life to get back to normal, or if it ever will. What I do know, though, is that my own life will never be the same after this pandemic, and I am incredibly thankful for that.