

# My Pandemic: What I've Learned So Far

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Before the pandemic, I found it hard to try new things and take time to do what I enjoy. My life mostly revolved around classes, and I felt I had no headspace for anything else. I did love going to museums, cinemas, and traveling when I had a chance, and the pandemic only deepened my appreciation for those things. Once the lockdown happened, I felt the need to find a “new way of living” by creating a different, more intentional routine. I remember the days leading up to the lockdown. The first covid cases in Illinois had already taken place in the previous months (dating back to the first confirmed covid case in the state - on January 24th). However, on March 9th, four additional cases were announced in Cook County, making the total number of confirmed cases 11. While today, 11 covid cases in an entire state seem like a very low number now. But at the time, it felt meaningful. It became clear very back then that the virus didn't just spread - it doubled and tripled in case of numbers after interactions. It made me feel very determined about focusing on my health and making the most of that time.

In hindsight, I also learned that crises tend to act as accelerants. For example, businesses that were struggling before the pandemic had crashed entirely, and those that were doing well saw exponential growth. It seems to me as though a similar process happened with people and their personal qualities. I would generally describe myself as organized and a planner. Still, I think I took it to a new length when I reorganized the furniture in my apartment, made a sanitation station, and signed up for five weekly zoom workout classes with my gym in the first week of the pandemic. I made a point of being available to the friends and family whom I love. Some of my oldest friends and I reconnected and had zoom calls to make dinners together. Later in the spring of 2021, I was able to shoot a small but very heartfelt documentary about my grandma. Like myself, she was living alone, and I wondered if she had ever experienced an impactful crisis when she was around my age. As it turns out, when she was twenty-five, she moved to a small village in Khabarovsk Krai, Russia, on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. They had only been there for one week when my grandfather left for a work trip. The very next day my grandma, and my

then 5-year-old uncle realized there was an extraordinary flood. The water filled the roads like a river and had enough force to knock down trees on its way. Shooting the documentary was a blast. I am so grateful I had the opportunity to work on something together with my grandma. She found her old diary and wrote 11 pages of notes for me in the pre-production. I put together some questions to structure the interview and asked two friends – one in Chicago and one in Moscow to come and film us while we have the interview over zoom.

I recently heard someone say that people made so many changes in 2021 because people are reminded of their mortality in an event like the pandemic. I think that's true, and I hope that it gives a helpful perspective to others as much as it has to me. In the spirit of learning more about what's fascinating in this world, I took every chance to dive into an array of webinars and online lectures on anything from neurobiology to herbology. I have since made new rules for myself. One rule is that each week I reach out to one person whom I love and haven't spoken with in a while. Another rule is that I try doing something new every couple of months - whether that's paddle boarding or Vietnamese food. In a sense, the pandemic gave people the opportunity to rediscover themselves. In my process, I felt more reaffirmed in who I am and more motivated to have a life that intrigues me than maybe I did before.