**The Plan Untold**

**By: Nyla Manuel**

Monday through Friday my mornings consisted of passing out affectionate hugs before I started my shift in the classroom, as an assistant. The children at the elementary school had big hearts, intriguing minds, and most importantly found comfort in my presence. Each one loved telling me stories about their family, friends and their plans for the weekend. The children confided in me so much that once my three hour shift ended, I was left with only forty-five minutes to get to Cal State Long Beach— not to mention the uncertainties of traffic, parking and finding a seat in class. However, I knew things were changing over the couple of days when I had to reject their love with elbow bumps. Instead of the students focusing on addition and subtraction, they became fixed on how many times they could wash their hands. I found myself making copies for the teachers; assisting them in creating take home packets for the kids during the unexpected two-week hiatus.

This two-week hiatus quickly turned into a month then abruptly into the rest of the academic year. Never did I expect the 13th of March to be the last day I would physically see my coworkers and students. How could that same week be my last as an undergraduate student in college? My body was filled with so much excitement attending the grad fair just days before. I remember being in the bookstore with hundreds of graduating seniors; the temperature inside had to be about seventy nine degrees. In that moment it felt normal to be squeezed in between so many people—waiting in long lines that never seemed to end. I still can’t process how such a proud moment could be stripped away from the people who deserved it most. Even children in grade school have been removed from an environment that gave them their primary source of knowledge, peer interaction, and a hot meal.

As I reflect on my life since the coronavirus outbreak, I think I’ve tried on my cap and gown three times—each standing in the mirror. I imagine what it would feel like to sit next to the class of 2020 while we bask in all of our memories and celebrate our hard work. I try to envision the faces of my family and friends, sitting in the seats watching me from the big screen once my name is called to walk across the stage. I think long and hard about how things have changed. As I try to find the motivation to finish my online assignments and work from home, I do look at the bigger picture. The plan untold requires me to assess the time I spend at home— which consists of loving, valuing the health of my family and congratulating myself on getting accepted into graduate school.