How the Pandemic Has Opened My Eyes

Before Coronavirus cases started rising and everything was still “normal,” I was not too worried about it becoming a big issue. As I read the flu has had more death incidences, written by health specialists, the coronavirus was downplayed for me. Later in the beginning of March, I started hearing cases coming closer to me and eventually cases in Long Beach. My fellow CSULB students were afraid and professors and staff were concerned about everyone’s safety. That is when they brought to the table to cancel in-person classes. There was so much uncertainty with what was going to happen with school. I worried, when would I be able to go back? At first some of us were happy about classes being cancelled because who does not want a break from school? Later, we were informed that we were going to transition to online classes. I started freaking out, just as all the students and professors were. We did not ask for this! How is this going to work?

Online classes were boring and seemed monotonous, no one, including the professors, were having a good time. Although, we all talked about our worries, concerns and anxiety with what was going on. I thankfully lived off-campus in an apartment with two other roommates in Long Beach. I was still working at my Pet Hotel job in Costa Mesa. Work was very slow, because no one wanted to go on vacation or go anywhere during this time, which led people to stay home with their animals. We had very few clients. With work being slow, our hours were being cut. With having a couple days off from work and only having online school, I decided to visit my parents in Murrieta. As I was visiting them, I got a message from my bosses informing me and my coworkers that our business was shutting down. They gave us the resources we need to apply for unemployment. I was so shocked. I did not know how to react to this, as one thing just kept coming after another. I never applied for unemployment. I did not know how it worked and how long the process would take. I started having more anxiety and again, more uncertainty. After hearing I no longer had my job to go to or a campus to attend, I decided to stay with my parents. I luckily brought enough of my belongings to stay there for as long as I could and my animals were also with me.

Staying at my parents was nice in the beginning. I got to spend time with them after being away from home for school and work. I got to see my old friends in town and climbed at my home climbing gym. Everything seemed to be okay, until we got the news that we had to be under mandatory shelter-in-place. I could not believe it was happening. There was chaos, panic everywhere. Everything was shutting down. No more climbing for me, no more friends. It was just now being stuck at home. Can we even go outside? That was one of the main questions.

After a while my parents and I were not getting along. I could no longer stay in an environment that was toxic. So I decided to go back to Long Beach. I was not close to my roommates, so I did not have much company besides my animals. My partner ended up visiting me, which led to him stuck quarantining with me. He was considered an essential worker so he still had work twelve hours a day, for four to five days a week. While he would be at work I would spend time doing homework and have my online classes. My friends and I downloaded a group video chat app called HouseParty. That is how we stayed connected. We also downloaded the TikTok app that kept us entertained and learned the dances from there together. I was really grateful.

As time passed, tension grew in my home between my roommates and me, and my partner and me. We were starting to clash with each other. I started getting stressed out and my mental health was not doing very well. I always thought I was doing something wrong. School became even more stressful and that put even more weight on my shoulders. I started drinking and smoking to numb my mind and emotions. That eventually caught up to me. My mental health was spiraling. As someone who is diagnosed with Bipolar disorder, I struggle maintaining my mental health. I did multiple impulsive actions such as getting a tattoo and two piercings, and chopping all my hair off and even bought a $1300 puppy off Craigslist. The puppy was a great addition to my life, but also another stressor. As more external stressors kept building over each other, I was having intrusive thoughts. One day I had a group presentation in class. I was in charge of controlling the PowerPoint. For some reason, it did not go as well as my group wanted it to go, and of course I was the one at fault. They bashed on me through our group chat during class. I was already having intrusive thoughts and ironically, the next presentation was on suicide and self-harm prevention. I was immediately triggered. I did exactly what my thoughts told me to do. I freaked out and reached out for help. My therapist had called 911. I was sent to the hospital. Out of all times, in the middle of a pandemic I was going to the emergency room for not even having COVID. I felt so ashamed. I was admitted to a psychiatric unit for an involuntary hold for a week, and luckily was released early. It was a nightmare.

During this pandemic, I became more involved with what was going on in the world. I was able to see that there are so many people out there struggling much more than I was. Some people do not have the appropriate shelter to “shelter-in-place.” Some do not even have a roof over their head, the access to all the goods and necessities in order to live a healthy life or even survive. Some live in toxic homes, that may even be dangerous due to abusers. Some do not have the tools or space to do online school. These times are the times we need to open our eyes and be empathetic of others, while also being grateful for what we have. Although no matter what circumstances we may be in, our experiences are valid, as it is a very difficult time, but we need to be able to keep others in mind.

If the pandemic could not get any worse, it did. Several news of the killings of innocent black people were brought to the public’s attention. People were outraged. I was outraged. There was an influx of rage through social media. Everyone was spreading information and resources on what we could do to help. Protests began flooding the streets, despite the pandemic. I joined them. Despite what some news were covering about the Black Lives Matter protests, they were peaceful for the most part and we all wore masks versus the other protests about anti-maskers. I was appalled to see that there were people literally dying because of the color of their skin and are shut down when someone speaks up about the issue, but others are risking the safety and lives of others by not adhering to health protocols because they refuse to wear a simple mask. They are allowed to speak up, wave their guns and people turn the other way. This time has brought my attention to the injustices that happen to the black and brown communities. I became more and more invested to the point where it was almost unhealthy. I had to take breaks from all the information that I consistently saw or read all day and night. I could not help it.

Just when I thought my mental health was doing bad, it got worse. Due to my mom losing her job from the pandemic, she lost our insurance. Our insurance expired and we were no longer eligible for that insurance. We became uninsured, just as many other Americans during this time. Without my insurance I lost access to seeing my psychiatrist, therapist and over time have lost my medication to manage my bipolar disorder. My mom tried to apply for different insurances to make sure I got the help I needed as soon as possible, but unfortunately they did not cover my prescriptions and the company was too expensive. Now we are just waiting for MediCal to process to activate our insurance. Unfortunately, my mom did not qualify but I did. As time passed by with having no resources to aid my mental health I started having relapses and was struggling to manage my difficult symptoms. I was afraid of what I might do again. Everyone around me was struggling as well with their own circumstances, I felt hopeless to reach out for help, but thankfully we were all here for each other. My professors had also refer me to the counseling services offered at school, which I had eventually reached out to.

This whole year has been difficult and saying that feels like an understatement. As more and more tragic events occur it does not seem to end. Although this has been a huge learning experience. There is still a lot left to overcome but I am grateful to have the resources I have, the support I have and now I am grateful for online school as I feel I am doing better than in-person. I now have my job back, which I love. I have hope.