The Best of Times, The Worst of Times

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This reflection will pale in comparison to Charles Dickens' novel, <u>A Tale of Two Cities,</u> but the opening line perfectly encapsulates my feelings of 2020-2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic, so I couldn't pass it up. It truly was both the best and worst of times for me, my family and friends, and I hope (for reasons I'll explain later) for the world. I hope that when future generations are sifting through the rubble that was a year in a global quarantine, they find some of the good and the hope that sustained those of us who had to live through it.

My family was blessed during the pandemic. We didn't struggle while in quarantine. We are homebodies by nature, so aside from minor bouts of restlessness and missing traditional holiday gatherings, we thrived at home. Together, we completed several DIY home projects, found little day trips to nearby places we'd otherwise not know about, learned new craft skills, played dozens and dozens of board games, tried out new recipes (looking at you sourdough bread), had dance parties, read so many books, and watched so many movies. The key in all of that is that we were *together*. My children are still very young, aged 10 and 7. The year spent at home with them has become one of my most favorite, most beloved times with my children.

A year in quarantine helped me to reconnect with my husband, too. We married young and essentially grew up together. Before quarantine, we didn't focus much on our relationship separate from our roles as parents. With nowhere to go and little to do, we made an effort for "home dates". These could be bonfires after the kids went to bed, a movie night on the couch, or an evening of board games and video games. Again, those memories are ones that I'll treasure forever. In the name of transparency, I should make it clear that there were several moments where I thought I would lose my sanity if I had to spend one more minute cooped up in the house, but I kept reminding myself of the alternative. I had the luxury of staying home when so many did not. The school corporation my husband and I work for continued to pay us for the time we were at home. Compared to years before, 2020 was something of a financial success for us. We were blessed with our situation, and did not take it for granted. We invested in the kids' futures and our retirements.

Our little quarantine bubble was so juxtaposed with the harsh and painful realities so many others were facing, that I almost feel guilty for acknowledging how much good 2020 did

for our family. It forced me to reevaluate my outlook and mindset about my home and family, my relationships, and my attitude towards my job. Though almost everyone of my extended family tested positive for COVID-19 at one point or another, and my little family all finally ended up with it in the beginning of 2021, we all experienced mild presentations of the virus. No one in my family died due to COVID, or to a COVID-related condition. My best friend lost her mother right before Christmas, due to COVID, though. Losing your parents is hard enough, but going through that without the help and (physical) support of friends and loved ones must have made that process even harder to bear. We couldn't help her mourn or grieve because we all had to stay home.

Technology played a vital role during the pandemic. I've said to friends and family that if I had to live through a pandemic, I'm glad I did so during a time where technology is as advanced as it is. Thanks to technology, companies like Zoom, Google, and other similar companies and platforms, schools were able to stay open and provide some kind of education to their students, loved ones were able to celebrate together virtually, when they couldn't be together physically, doctors were able to treat their patients from afar, thanks to technology. Technology also had a negative impact on society during the pandemic. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the like were alight with conspiracy theories, false information and what feels like a willingness to hate those different from yourself. A quick history lesson tells you there's always, always, always been racial, social, and equality problems that have plagued humanity in the past. Social media makes it so those problems are easily accessed, and a constant in our lives.

I hope that when my grandchildren look back at this time in history, they acknowledge where we failed. I hope they see the hate and venom that permeated the internet during this time. I don't want them to brush it under the rug or make excuses for why things happened, I want them to learn from our mistakes and do better than we've done. I hope future generations see the good that we did during this time too. I hope they see the videos of whole city blocks filled with people hanging out on balconies or out of their windows singing and playing music to each other. I hope they see the posts from schools telling their community that teachers, staff, and volunteers would be delivering free lunches to all students, even after schools were shut down. I hope they see the "parades" small towns put on to celebrate their schools, and to give teachers a chance to wave goodbye to their students, since they were so abruptly closed. I hope they see the

unflinching and unrelenting efforts of medical personnel to care for those suffering and dying from COVID, often alone with families trying desperately to say goodbye before it was too late. It's easy for people to compare the Black Plague and COVID-19. I've heard people wonder about what kind of future this pandemic has set up for future generations. After all, after the Plague had ravaged Europe, the Renaissance began.

There is no darkness without light. In my experience, you can't have one without the other. I fully recognize and acknowledge that my experience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine reflects my privilege and my story is not the same story shared by others. We aren't all in the same boat, despite the metaphor. We're in the same storm, but we are in very different boats. I hope society doesn't take for granted the things we didn't have during this time in history. I hope we teach our children and grandchildren to live in the present, appreciate the small things in life, because often the small things end up meaning the most. I hope the future sees the fear and panic felt by everyone in 2020, if only to learn from our experiences. I also hope they find the quiet, small happinesses that sustained some of us through the best of times, and the worst of times.