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A Memoir of 2020-2021: How COVID-19 Affected the Lifestyle of a High school Student

February 2020

My family had been planning a Caribbean cruise vacation since the summer of 2019. My mother, my father, and myself were going to celebrate my grandfather's eightieth birthday with my grandfather, grandmother, Aunt Veronica, and Uncle John. I had never been on a cruise before and was really looking forward to it. We had a lot of fun excursions planned for every place that we stopped. Coronavirus cases had already begun to show up here and there within the United States. Also, the Diamond Princess cruise ship (from the same company that was hosting our cruise) continued to be quarantined off the coast of Japan with numerous cases on board. However, we were not ready to give up on the trip just yet.

March 2020

March 5 - With the first two reported cases of coronavirus in Colorado, we became a little more concerned. We were supposed to leave for Florida on March 20th. We would then cruise through the Eastern Caribbean and spend time in the Bahamas, St. Thomas, and Saint Martin.

March 8 - We had a family conference and decided to cancel the spring break trip because of the coronavirus. My grandmother is very immune-compromised because she takes a lot of medications for rheumatoid arthritis which suppress her immune system. We were worried that she would get the disease.

March 12 - My parents went to the grocery store, just on a regular grocery run, and came back shocked. The store was packed with panicked shoppers who were pulling everything off of the shelves. Toilet paper was nowhere to be found.

March 13 - I stayed after school in order to present a math project. I remember the day because this was when a musical artist that I enjoyed listening to dropped a popular album. My school, PRA, closed for Spring Break a week early. After I did my project and returned home with everything from my locker "just in case", little did I know that I wouldn't be going back to school for the rest of that year and all of the following year.

March 18 - Gov Polis closes all schools until April 17 and limits gathering size. Coloradans were advised to stay at home as much as possible. We started wearing masks everywhere, even outside, in order to cut down on virus transmission.

April 2020

After we came back from spring break, PRA switched to asynchronous learning. Our teachers gave us daily assignments and some projects to complete on our own, and we rarely interacted with the rest of the class.

Rarely, we would have a group session via Zoom. School became quite a chore. Because of the Pandemic, no one could go out to eat at restaurants for a while, except to pick up an order and bring it home to eat. As a result, we spent a lot of time cooking at home. I also spent a lot of time talking to my friends online and often played video games with them. I liked to walk around the lake with my parents in order to keep from going crazy from being

stuck inside. Everyone walking on the trail wore face masks and allowed a lot of space for other people to walk by. Before the pandemic began, our cat Charlie died from cancer. Luckily, we went to adopt kittens just a couple of days after this happened. It would have been much harder to get through this time of isolation without having Wren and Riley at home to entertain us.

May 2020

The pandemic created a strange situation for AP tests in 2020. The tests were given online for the first time and the format was changed to all essays. It was very stressful taking the test at home because it did not upload the answers in a timely fashion. As I finished my long essay, with five minutes to spare, it took almost all the time that I had left just to upload to the internet. It was received with five seconds to spare. I was glad when it was over. The rest of my finals were taken on-line as well, but were not nearly as stressful as that AP Gov test. My dad had lost his job in January and had been remotely interviewing with different companies for four months. He started a new job on May 4th. With my dad's new job, came great medical and dental insurance, so as soon as school was out my family started to make some appointments for me. I had braces put on May 26th. I also began to have some consultations for having my wisdom teeth removed and for having chest surgery.

June 2020

On June 2nd I had my four wisdom teeth removed, and I had to go under anesthesia. My mother was not even allowed to come into the building and had to wait out in the car for me to have the procedure. Due to the pandemic, most hospitals had put a hold on elective procedures. When hospitals began to schedule again, I consulted with my surgeon and was quickly approved for surgery with the health insurance company. I was thrilled to have this procedure during such a bad time because I figured that my tennis season would be canceled anyway due to the pandemic. I had to have a CT-scan and allergy testing to see what kind of bar they could use for my chest surgery. At the end of June, two days prior to surgery, I had to have my first covid test. We drove down to the Children's Hospital parking lot for a drive-through testing clinic. I didn't even have to get out of the car. The test involved a nurse in full body personal protective equipment inserting a cotton swab so far up my nose that it felt as though he was attempting a brain biopsy. It felt as though I was drowning. Luckily, it didn't take very long. We got the results a couple of days later. Since I was negative, the surgery was a go.

July 2020

On July 2nd, I checked into Children's hospital to have a surgery that would correct my chest wall deformity called Pectus Excavatum. The Nuss Procedure, where they insert a bar under the sternum to correct an indentation of the chest cartilage, lasted a little under three hours and went smoothly. I had to spend around five days in the hospital for pain control. The doctors put me on intravenous pain meds, so I slept for a lot of the time that I was in the hospital. The hospital was very quiet because not a lot of patients were undergoing procedures at that time. Unfortunately, I spiked a fever on the second day of the recovery, and I had to have some more tests done. The doctors did blood work, X Rays, and another coronavirus test, but everything was normal. The doctors determined that the fever was caused by the erector spinae plane block catheters that were delivering pain meds directly to nerves that encircle my chest. After the catheters were removed, my fever resolved. We were

in the hospital for the Fourth of July. From our floor, we were able to look out the window and watch a number of fireworks displays to the East. After arriving home, my dad had to go buy a recliner because I could not get comfortable on the couch. I camped out in the family room for around three weeks in that chair because I was unable to lie flat on my back for a while. During this time, I played video games with some friends, and I went for short walks a few times a week once I was able.

August 2020

In early August, my family went for a short hike at White Ranch Open Space near Golden. We wanted to do something outside, but it was too smokey in our neighborhood from some wildfires that were burning to the north of us. This was the first time I had done anything really active since my surgery. I was still on restricted activity, so was unable to play tennis for PRA in the fall. Coach Finklestein allowed me to manage the varsity team so that I could be involved in some way and receive some physical education credits. The season was shortened and many restrictions were in place. The team played a lot of matches wearing masks on the court and the spectators were required to distance themselves and wear masks as well. My job was to take the players' temperatures prior to practices or matches. I also helped run drills at JV practice. I was able to volley a little, but was prohibited from serving for a time after surgery, which is why I had to sit out the season.

School was delayed by one week so that the school board could decide how to proceed since the pandemic was ongoing. It ended up starting remotely again. However, this time classes were synchronous via zoom four days a week. Wednesdays were a flex day to catch up on work and get projects done.

September 2020

In early September, I was inducted into the National Honor Society via Zoom. Someone from the group surprised the inductees with the delivery of a certificate, a pin, and a bundt cake in a gift bag.

The tennis season went by quickly and we were able to have a banquet outside on PRA property after our regional tournament. We placed better in the tournament than we ever had in the past. Someone arranged for Chick-fil-A meals to be delivered to the school parking lot, where we shared a meal and watched as the coach handed out letters and awards to the players. It was very cold and windy that evening, but we were unable to take the celebration inside because of pandemic restrictions. I don't think that I have ever been that cold.

Since coronavirus cases in Colorado were leveling off, I felt safe enough to complete my driving lessons through the driving school in Westminster. I also completed the mandatory number of hours that I needed in order to get my license. My family did a lot of road-tripping on the weekends, short drives into the mountains that always ended with a stop for ice cream. My driving test was on September 30th and I passed on the first try.

October 2020

Online schooling continued through October with a long-weekend break in the middle of the month. Usually, we would try to get out of town for a few days, but because of the pandemic, we remained in Broomfield. We were missing a lot of opportunities to travel because of the virus. I used one of these days off to stand in line at the DMV in Longmont in order to change my permit in for a driver's license. That same day we went to Safeway near us to get our flu shots. My family and I made some jokes about what passes for a vacation in the time of a pandemic. Toward the end of the month I dressed up as Ferris Bueller and joined my friends in the National

Honor Society to pass out candy at a PRA Halloween fundraiser. It was the first time in a long time that I was able to see a couple of the guys in person. We were outside the school as children passed by in a driveline, so risk for exposure to the coronavirus was minimal. There was a little scare, however, as one of my friends that I was hanging out with that evening later had to quarantine because he was exposed to the virus. Luckily, he never developed symptoms or tested positive. Quite a few of my friends had to quarantine over the course of the year.

November 2020

November brought a little bit of excitement with the presidential election. The results were not even close, but because of the pandemic, more citizens than ever mailed in their ballots. This led to a delay in tallying the final results. The election was held on a Tuesday, but the winner was not called by any of the major news networks until Saturday morning. My parents were ecstatic with the outcome and invited some close friends over for a celebration on the front porch, socially distanced of course. There was champagne and toasts and I hadn't seen my parents that happy in a long time. It was good to have some social interaction for a change.

The day after the election, PRA went to a hybrid schedule where each of two groups of students would learn in person two days a week. I decided to stay remote because it looked as though coronavirus cases were on the rise again in Colorado. The hybrid schedule did not last for long. A couple of positive cases and a group of quarantined students forced the administration to reconsider opening the school up to in-person learning. PRA returned to distance learning for the remainder of the semester. I was happy that I had stayed remote.

Thanksgiving was a quiet holiday with only my immediate family as we wanted to protect my father's parents from any possible exposure to the coronavirus. We celebrated together via a Zoom meeting after the meal.

December 2020

Colorado coronavirus cases were spiking again after many people traveled for the Thanksgiving holiday against CDC recommendations. I had started to volunteer for a few shifts at A Precious Child and at Centennial Valley Animal Hospital, but pulled back again after the cases increased. Luckily, we were only weeks away from the FDA granting emergency authorization for a vaccine to be used in the United States. It would be a while before my family could receive our doses, because healthcare and the elderly would receive priority with the vaccine rollout, but there was an atmosphere of hope for the first time in a long time. I concentrated on finishing some research papers and on studying for my midterms, which would be taken remotely in mid-December.

Christmas and Hanukkah were also quiet holidays, spent with only my immediate family. My mother did not even bother to put up a Christmas tree in 2020, but we still exchanged gifts and enjoyed the down time.

January 2021

After the winter break, PRA returned to hybrid learning. I decided to stay remote again, at least until the coronavirus case spike from the holidays leveled off and more people, such as teachers, had the opportunity to get vaccinated. On the second day of school for the semester, there was a violent insurrection as the official vote count from the presidential election got under way in Congress. An angry mob of Trump supporters rushed the Capitol and threatened the representatives inside. We were glued to the television for most of that day and

evening as we watched the event as it happened and the aftermath that followed. Security would remain tight for the inauguration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, our nation's first female Vice President, just two weeks later. Unfortunately, on January 28th, my grandmother in Florida was diagnosed with COVID-19. She and my grandfather had celebrated his eighty-first birthday a few days before with a small gathering of neighbors who they considered "in their bubble." One of those neighbors turned out to be infected but asymptomatic.

February 2021

My grandparents managed my grandmother's symptoms at home for a few days. She was experiencing fever and body aches, but no shortness of breath. My grandfather tested positive a few days after my grandmother, but his only symptoms were a very temporary loss of taste and smell. They both received an infusion of monoclonal antibodies from their doctor. On February 2nd, my grandmother collapsed and had to be rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. After observing her overnight and rehydrating her with intravenous fluids, she was released the next day to recover at home. She was not having any respiratory symptoms at the time. This changed over the course of the next few days. My grandfather was monitoring her oxygen saturation on a pulse oximeter that he had purchased. Her levels dropped low enough to call 911 for the second time in a week. This time, the hospital would not release her because her X Rays revealed a bad case of COVID pneumonia. They admitted her to the ICU. I will never forget what happened on Superbowl Sunday. We had spoken to my grandmother and other family members in the morning and everything seemed fine. I decided to go online to complete a timed essay test for my APUSH class. While I was in the middle of the essay, my mother had to pull me away from the computer to tell my grandmother that I loved her. She had taken a turn for the worse and was moments away from being placed on a ventilator. I went back to my room and finished my essay. We tried to distract ourselves by watching the Superbowl, but we were very worried. The doctors decided not to use the ventilator and tried some different drugs instead. She gradually improved, although the doctors were careful not to give her false hope of recovery.

March 2021

None of the hospital staff expected my grandmother to pull through, but she did. She ended up spending a total of six weeks alone in the hospital, but was released during the second week of March. She had to go home with an oxygen tank, but she was much more comfortable and less scared in her own home with my grandfather. I was sad during March because it marked the second spring break where we could not travel anywhere. I spent the majority of my time off talking to friends online and practicing guitar. My mom was scheduled to get her first vaccine at the King Soopers on Table Mesa in Boulder where a mass shooting took place. Luckily she was scheduled for the day after it happened. This shooting marked yet another deadly shooting for the year, and it was shocking to hear that something so awful could happen so close to home. For me, this event underscored that a shooting can happen at any place and at any time and made me want to be more careful and aware. After the break, PRA returned to in-person learning four days a week. At first, I tried the new schedule but found one of my classes to be much too crowded and found that I was the only person in my Music Theory class. I therefore decided to remain at home for the rest of the year, attending classes via Zoom again.

April 2021

I received my first dose of the Pfizer COVID vaccine on April 9th. I went up to Aurora to get the vaccine at Children's Hospital, and after I received my vaccine my family and I went to In-n-Out for dinner. It was a nice treat because we never really went out for food during the pandemic. I took my SATs a few days later, in person at school. At the end of April, I received my second dose of the Pfizer vaccine. Neither dose gave me much of a problem. I think that the Pfizer vaccine to be the safest vaccine available because some of the other vaccines such as Moderna and Johnson & Johnson had given some people bad side effects. J & J was pulled off of the market by the FDA for a short time because of a blood clotting issue in women. It was eventually reapproved.

May 2021

I was excited for the school year to come to an end. It had been a very long online year and I realized I needed to spend more time outside. I had to go to school to take my Music Theory Exam in person, which I was most likely unprepared for. On the 19th, I took my online APUSH AP exam. I spent my time hoping for the last few weeks of school to be over quickly and thinking about what I want to accomplish over the summer. I continued to talk with my friends online, but I looked forward to seeing them in person as more and more of us become vaccinated. Over the summer, I know I want to spend much more time with my friends because I hardly saw any of them during the last school year. Hopefully, next year will feel more normal as we all return to a full-time in-person school schedule and participate in extracurricular activities with little or no restrictions.