

Tiring. That is the best word I can use to describe the last 15 months of my life. On Friday, March 13, 2020, my school dismissed students for an “extended spring break” that was planned to be only two weeks long before we would resume classes. On that day it felt like the world stood still. The sky was cloudy, an ominous grey shroud that denied passage to even a single ray of sunlight. At home, it felt no different. My parent’s eyes were glued to the TV, watching intently as the news anchor droned on about toilet paper and grocery stores. I just went about things as usual. Left my backpack and school supplies in my room, and then hopped on my Playstation to play some games with my friends, namely Destiny 2. After that, it all becomes a blur. I imagine I spent those whole two weeks playing games and nothing else, as there was nothing else to do since COVID had closed just about everything.

Eventually, school started again, but not in the traditional sense. All classes were online, asynchronous. Teachers would occasionally assign work through google classroom and would expect it to be turned in at the end of the week. It was easy at first. All of my work for the week would usually be done in a single day if I tried hard enough. It left me with all the free time in the world, most of which was spent playing video games with my friends. As time went on, the isolation and lack of engagement became too much. Work was all the same, look at the assignments page, get it done, and turn it in. But it became harder to work, to think, to focus. My motivation sunk incredibly low. Everything felt like a slog, like trying to tread through a pit of quicksand that was slowly taking me deeper. What once took me ten minutes to finish would have taken me an hour, at best, to complete. My only final, a presentation for Health class, felt like too much work to finish, and so I never even ended up doing it. In May, my sophomore year of high school ended unceremoniously. Nothing happened, at all, just a single email was sent out to students and staff that signaled the end of the year.

Summer was spent about the same as spring break. I got lost playing video games with friends for hours, from the early morning until late at night. It was the only thing that helped to pass the time anymore. After about the first week the days blended together into a mess of nothingness. I felt like I was living through some twisted version of Groundhog Day, where I would wake up play games, eat, sleep, and repeat the cycle the next day. I rarely saw friends in person, in fact, I saw them a total of three times during those two months.

In August of the same year, junior year of high school began. Due to COVID all classes would be online but through video calls, or Zoom. I was excited for the new year to begin. I would finally have something to do other than waste away playing video games for endless hours. These video meetings would only be four days a week: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. The Wednesday in the middle of the week could be used as a break or to catch up on any missed work. It felt nice and relaxing to not have to worry about school every day of the week. My classes weren’t too hard, in fact, I would say they were easy. Work was light and for the most part fun. But as the first semester drew to a close, everything went downhill. Due to the altered schedule instruction time was shortened significantly, and teachers made up for that with increased homework and reading outside of class. Stress levels mounted, and motivation once again began to decline. Midterms were relatively easy, except for one or two of them, and as soon as it began, the first semester was over.

Winter break, like all other breaks, was spent doing the same thing, video games. It was too cold out to bike, and COVID still kept most things closed. Eventually, the second semester of school

began. The workload was still high, as the end of the first semester, and the previous excitement I once held for school was gone entirely. The feeling of Groundhog day once again arose. I would get up, eat breakfast, log on for an entire day of Zoom calls that I would mostly ignore out of boredom, save for a few classes, and do homework until it was dark out, repeating the cycle on the following day. Not even weekends were safe. It felt like I was working an actual job, that lasted for roughly ten to eleven hours a day. It all blurred together again, and even just trying to think of that time only results in a mess of blurry grey images.

Spring break finally came in March of 2021, a whole year after the mess began. My mom had bought plane tickets for her, my brother, and me to visit my grandparents in California for a week. It was the first time I had been on a plane in almost two years. The experience was mostly the same as I had remembered it, except for being required to wear masks, but that was nothing new. Visiting my grandparents was fun. For the last year, I had been locked in my room doing work or playing games, but now I was out and seeing the world again. We visited some college campuses to see if any appealed to me, visited my cousins, and just enjoyed some quality time with my family. A week later we boarded our return flight, and I returned to my room of isolation once more.

The break ended and students were given the chance to return in person again, which I took, hoping it would make things better in some way. Unfortunately, it all felt the same as before. Work piled on even faster than before, and my free time diminished substantially. The time my teachers had planned to use was running out, and they had to cram as much as they could into the little they had left. My stress levels were at their peak, and motivation was at the lowest possible level. The blur had made its return, and days became one and the same. It felt like everything just continuously dragged on, like it was designed to just make me feel defeated and tired. And now, as the year comes to an end, I sit here in my room writing this. Finals week begins in one day, and after Thursday, everything will end just like it did in sophomore year, which still feels like I'm living through. I will go in, take a test, and that will be the end. No real send-off, just another email that will tell us the school year has finished.

I can't help but wonder what opportunities had been taken away from me all because of some stupid virus, and what opportunities I was actually given because of it. I without a doubt despised this year. All the loneliness, isolation, and stress, made for by far the worst experience of my life. But I just want to stay optimistic and hope that at least something good came of it. I met some amazing teachers who helped me manage it all, and I don't think I would have ever made it through the year without them and their kindness. I made some new friends who I hope I will see more in the future, and strengthened my bonds with some I met in the past. I also grew apart from many of them, losing contact almost entirely. It sent me to some very dark places, devoid of hope and motivation. But most importantly, I learned there will always be people I can count on in my life to help me through the worst of it. I will always remember everything they've done for me, and do everything in my power to return the favor should they ever need me to.