**Small Virus, Big Impact: A Reflective Narrative of a First Year Medical Student in India**

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Dear Diary,

The time...the day… the date...I no longer keep track of such frivolity. I don’t even remember the day I reached back home. “Has it been a month now?”, I ponder. But will May 3rd be that “opening day”? The day I get to embrace my friends, the day I get to return to that dilapidated hostel (which I have now started yearning for), the day I get to start quibbling about how boring the lecture before lunch is, the day I get freed from this mental and emotional prison.

The past month - 30 days or 43,200 minutes – has been a whirlpool of emotions. From the exhilarating joy of not having to stick to a schedule throughout the 10-day holiday declared by the university, to the looming trepidation about the bleak future while I read about the impending lockdown in the newspaper. Nonetheless, there were some memorable days that I got to experience due to “social distancing”. They were the threads that connected me to sanity. The boundless joy of reconnecting virtually with a long lost friend, the freedom in letting my creative spirit loose while making a pictorial series “The Teddy Diary”, the unwavering hope in fundraising for the shelter homes and orphanages that were shutting down due to the outbreak – would however, remain sealed in the vaults of my soul.

There were days when my towering fear of the impending future was swiftly washed away by joyful tears brought by the unending dedication of health workers and the common man. There were days when the gloomy thunder clouds were a trifling portrayal of my inner turmoil. There were days I wished I could go back and hug my friends one last time before we drifted into the corners of our rooms which were miles apart. There were days when…. I hoped and hoped.

I now remain at peace. One thing that I have learned with certitude over the past 43,200 minutes, is that we have started to care more. We have remained connected at heart even though we are miles apart…Be it the tiny smile near the good morning we text our near and dear ones (or rather... far and dear ones), be it the fundraising message we forward to our social groups, be it the enthusiastic calls we make to check on people, be it wearing a mask so as to not infect anyone, be it musing about how pollution levels have dropped and animals have started to thrive over the past few weeks : we care more. We have in isolation, stood together.

Dear Diary, as I end my pondering, I hope we - or rather I - will never forget the lessons that life has thrown my way in the past 43,200 minutes and counting.

Yours lovingly,

Neha

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