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To-Do List:

- *Adapt to new changes*
- *Evolve as an individual*
- *Prioritize mental health*
- *Connect with others*
- *Reflect on yourself*

A Collection of Essays

2020

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS

Edited by:
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For my mom.
Thank you for your love and support.

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RESTING PLACE

Syki Barbee

My wife, Maggie and I have been together since she was 16 and I was 17. We were both rushed into adulthood, not having the luxury of home to rely on once we both graduated high school. We moved into our first and only apartment in July of 2006. We worked our asses off in order to afford first, last and security, the last needed \$200 coming from a desperately bought \$2 scratch ticket. My mother gave us the money to buy a used fridge, and my sister bought us groceries. We slept on the floor on an old mattress Maggie's mother gave us and lived out of our duffle bags. We barely had money to feed ourselves, so furniture was the last thing we were worried about. As time went on, our family would give us things they no longer wanted, and we'd scrape up enough to buy cheap furniture at tag sales. Every piece of furniture we ever owned (besides a bed) was either hand-me-downs from family or brought at tag sales. Until this summer.

Covid-19, and this forced quarantine we are in, has been both a blessing and a curse for my wife and me. It is the reason that at the ages of 33 and 34 years old, Maggie and I finally have our first headboard. We both deal with anxiety disorders, but Covid has been particularly brutal for my wife's anxiety.

"This house gives me no peace," she said one day. A feeling

that was completely mutual. Our home is supposed to be our resting place, but its chaotic appearance never allowed our spirits to rest peacefully.

Our house, before this summer, was a mix-match of random things that didn't go together. Our living room had a brown three-legged couch, two broken AC's, my prize bookshelf, buried under rows of stories, some read and some still patiently waiting their turn. I have a very small collection of Harry Potter Funko Pops that I have also stacked on top of my bookcase. Thrown haphazardly against one of the walls was an old queen-sized bed our niece used to sleep on when she lived with us last year. Despite being a hand-me-down, the bed was quite comfortable especially with a new mattress topper.

We had years of a chaotic built up of crap that we couldn't be bothered to sort through and get rid of. Being forced to stay in the house, we knew that for both of our sanities, we needed to bring order to the mess. The deadline we created for everything to be finished was the day before classes started. We took our time going through every piece of furniture we possessed. The California king size bed that we bought over ten years ago with the money my wife won in a settlement? Gone. The supposed sturdy, but really weak, bed frame I got off Amazon? Gone. The mix-match bookcases that were barely standing themselves, but collectively holding up the 55in TV I bought for my wife so she could watch movies while she healed from surgery? Gone. My wife paid some company to come pick up all of our trash for a decent price after she failed to persuade me that we—me and her—could bring all that junk (quite heavy junk at that) downstairs by ourselves. I didn't blame her for her lapse in sanity, I just gave her a look that she understood well.

When Ikea opened again, we'd psyched ourselves up for the hour-long drive, heavy boxes that needed to go up 38 stairs

carried by two people whose backs took vicious pleasure in torturing us for days afterward. Any desire Maggie had of lifting heavy objects together quickly disappeared when she first looked at the more than 15 boxes ranging in weight from 30lbs to 130lbs and then looked at me looking around praying that a nice man would offer his services. God really answers prayers, because I only had to lift one of those devilishly heavy boxes.

I prepared our empty living room to fit as my work area. I was looking forward to losing myself in the building process. As I ripped open the first box, I allowed the memory of my wife ripping open new boxes of latex gloves and face masks, handing me both before we went into the store, to drift away. Even with the gloves and the mask, she was going to burn her skin off in the shower and use hand sanitizer like lotion once we got back home. As I read the somewhat vague instructions, I wished for instructions on how to help my wife deal with her anxiety and panic attacks. I wasn't prepared for the full-on panic attack she had when she pulled into the Ikea parking lot and noticed the crowd of people waiting at the door. As I organized the screws and such as part of my setting up routine, I realized that my wife had her own routine that made her feel safe during this pandemic and I should have more patience for her. I knew that I was capable of patience because it takes some serious patience to get through Ikea's directions. The amount of times I had to go back a few steps, take apart certain areas, or just plain stare in confusion at the directions was enough to drive a saint to cuss. As I continued to build, with every piece, I imagined our new home, with my wife comfortably relaxed on our new sectional, and me at my new desk working on schoolwork watching a basketball game.

IT'S OKAY TO BE DOING NOTHING (SERIOUSLY)

Stephanie Bergmann

“How’s that novel coming?” my father asks one night at dinner. It’s April, and we’re quarantined together while he works from home and I make a valiant effort to not fail out of college. His question is innocent, curious, apt: he knows I’ve been working on several manuscripts here and there. He also knows that since I am home in the middle of the semester and not able to see anyone besides him and my mother, free time stretches out before me in a never-ending horizon. This is the perfect time for me to spend hours writing, since I have absolutely nothing to do once my Zoom classes and schoolwork are finished. On paper, this should be the perfect time to do that thing you’ve always meant to but never had time for – fix up that spare room, plant a garden, get in shape, watch that TV series, or, in my case, finish the elusive draft of my book.

But when I close out of Zoom, the first thing I do is open Twitter. Even with an overload of free time, my instinct is not to veer toward something traditionally productive, like going Marie Kondo on my bedroom or hopping on Duolingo to brush up on my deteriorating Spanish or finding a good at-home workout. Part of it is that, even having not left my house all day, I am

still exhausted; but a larger part of it is that, with the world in chaos – an unexpected pandemic, uncontrollable wildfires, the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the appearance of a murderous species of hornet – trying to be productive is the last thing on my mind.

The idea that all this free time granted to us by quarantine is the perfect opportunity to be productive ties into “hustle culture,” the notion that we must be constantly productive, spending every free hour working, whether at home or in the office. It existed long before 2020 and the pandemic, fueled by a capitalistic ideology that every hour not used to better ourselves is wasted. It can be hard, however, to feel motivated to take on a lengthy to-do list when it feels like the world is on fire. After all, what is the point of organizing my closet when nearly 200,000 people in America alone have died?

You might recognize some of these sentiments from Twitter:

“Just a reminder that when Shakespeare was quarantined because of the plague, he wrote *King Lear*.” – @rosannecash

“If you don’t come out of this quarantine with either: 1. a new skill, 2. starting what you’ve been putting off like a new business, 3. more knowledge – you didn’t ever lack the time, you lacked the discipline.” – @TheJeremyHaynes

“During a pandemic, Isaac Newton had to work from home, too. He used the time wisely.” – @washingtonpost (Implying that Newton was able to make his key discoveries and theories about gravity because of all that free time stuck inside during the Great Plague of London.)

These takes on hustle culture during the 2020 pandemic feel almost accusatory. Not to mention that much of America was and still is facing housing crises, unemployment, and general stress about the state of our world with little governmental assistance other than a \$1,200 stimulus check several months

ago. A reply to Jeremy Haynes's tweet from @Android_Btsy, I think, sums my point up pretty succinctly: "Yes, [let's] judge how productive people can be with the threat of sickness and death looming over their heads. This isn't a health retreat for people with writer's block, it's quarantine from a pandemic while worrying if one can still afford to have shelter and food."

Hustle culture existed and was harmful long before COVID-19, but the pandemic has exacerbated the damaging impacts of the idea that we need to remain in a constant state of productivity. The shift from physical to entirely online spaces has furthered this issue: before almost all work and school shifted to be online, there was a distinct separation between home and work or school life. You went to work, you worked, you went home, you stopped thinking about work. Now, working from your kitchen table, it's a lot easier to answer emails after five P.M., because there's no physical act of "clocking out" by leaving a building and driving home. I worked from my bedroom this summer, and the only distinction to show I'd finished for the day was the two feet I moved from my desk to my bed. This lessened separation means that it's harder to spend time choosing to not be productive. If you have access to work on a Saturday, what's the harm in getting a few extra things done? There's no harm to anyone — except suddenly your endless horizon of free time has shrunk.

You don't have to use that seemingly infinite supply of leisure time to accomplish anything, actually. What is "productivity," anyway? In my opinion, anything that brings joy or entertainment is productive. If that's spending two hours mindlessly scrolling TikTok? That's time well spent to me, at least.

NEW YEAR, NEW SOCIETY

Emily Bevacqua

A rush of anxiety raced through me as I checked the time. 11:54PM. Doritos and pretzels were split on the floor where we were playing card games. Amongst the chatter, I softly heard "If I Could Turn Back Time" by Cher. Dom must've added that to the playlist, I thought to myself.

"Has anyone seen the cups? And who's got the champagne!?" I shouted to no one in particular.

Rushing to the kitchen, Heather handed me the bottle of champagne to open. Not thinking twice, I twisted its top and it exploded everywhere. Pure chaos in the kitchen. Allie and Julia, who witnessed the whole incident, died of laughter. One of them caught it on tape. Sooner than expected I could hear the countdown in the other room. I hurried over, pouring cups as soon as I arrived.

"Happy New Year!" we all shouted, raising our cups.

Celebration erupted. Kisses between friends and significant others swarmed the room. Phone calls and texts from family blew up our phones. No one was paying attention to the scene of New York City on the TV; we were too excited about the year that we'd just entered: 2020. The year we turn 21. The year we become seniors in college. The last year before we enter the scary world of adulthood.

Little did we know that was the last time we'd all be together at once.

*

I remember the day it was rumored we were going to be sent home from campus. The Boston Globe released an article about UMass's plan, before Chancellor Subbaswamy might I add. I was in the writing center when it happened. A fellow tutor, Spencer, was freaking out because his senior thesis relied on in person observations. He needed the writing center to stay open to finish. It was now up in the air on whether or not Spencer would graduate with honors; a feeling many seniors were now experiencing. The minute Subbaswamy released the official email about remote classes, all I could feel was my heart sinking.

I stayed in the center past my shift, completely overwhelmed with this feeling of the unknown. Is the coronavirus as serious as everyone is saying? How much of my stuff do I pack? What are my classes going to be like? Will I ever return?

Since that day, life has been a series of unpredictable events. No one knows the right way to control the virus because the virus controls us. It's constantly on our minds.

You can't leave the house without a mask. You go into a store and need to sanitize as soon as you get into the car and you wash their hands when returning home. You constantly clean everything you touch. And avoiding your face is nearly impossible. Something always begins to itch as soon as you've touched a door.

I'd like to think we'll be able to stop living with this constant worry, but I doubt it.

*

I started fishing with my boyfriend in June. It's a really nice way to get out of the house while social distancing from others. We've rarely encountered people on our walks down Miller's River and canoeing in Tully Lake gives us plenty of space from kayakers.

A few days ago, we were fishing along the Connecticut River. I must have been standing too close to my boyfriend while he was casting because the lure whipped around and snagged me in the head. We rushed to the ER.

It took about two and a half hours to get the lure out of my head. Two of the three hooks were embedded in my scalp above my left ear. The nurses were unsure of how to remove one without affecting the other. Eventually they cut the hooks in half, so they were separate and were able to remove them individually. Thankfully, I didn't need stitches and I kept all my hair.

The entire time I was terrified. I couldn't have my boyfriend in the room with me, I had a lure stuck in my head, and I was in a lot of pain. Even getting home I was terrified to shower; the thought of two deep holes in my head made me nauseous.

One of the first things said to me by my boyfriend's mother when I was out of the hospital was, "Did you feel safe?"

It didn't even occur to me to not feel safe in a hospital. I was really confused.

"What do you mean?" I asked her.

"Like with corona, was everything clean?" she elaborated.

At the moment, I didn't care at all to look about the hospital for procedures they were taking for Coronavirus. There were definitely people there with the virus and I didn't think twice about it. I had a lure stuck in my head, could you blame me?

Constant worry has become the new normal. Simple tasks like going grocery shopping or out for dinner require extra thought.

I'll never have a party like I did last New Year's again. It's just too risky. As we continue to live our lives, we will continue to do what is necessary to stay safe. For me right now, that means four antibiotics a day and extra-long, careful showers.

ANOTHER YEAR WITH NOTHING TO DO? THE PARADIGM SHIFT OF 2020

Nick Chechile

My friend Tom picked me up on a beautiful summer day in mid-August 2020. We were ready for yet another adventure, like most other days throughout this past summer. The destination was the semi-abandoned Dundas Castle, in Roscoe, New York, about 3 hours away. It was located on private property owned by the local Masonic chapter. We called the property's owner in hopes of being granted the access of which we were quickly denied, so we started driving anyway.

Upon arriving, we could see the property was well maintained; there was an occupied groundskeeper's house just past the ominous front gate and security cameras were eyeing various locations. We snuck through some woods, landing at the stone wall surrounding the castle. After scaling the wall, we looked for access to the inside among the boarded up windows. We climbed a gate which was situated on top of a wall and then snuck through a second story arched window on one of the spires. The security cameras were inactive and nobody ever came to escort us off the property while we spent the afternoon exploring.

The Dundas trip was one of the best of too many summer highlights to remember. Tom and I finished the day by swimming

in a waterfall and swimming hole that we found in a neighboring small town before heading home. Swimming was the typical conclusion to most of my summer days.

When the UMass campus closed in spring, like many students, I struggled with the distance learning. I was stuck in an awful living situation and all of my issues (ADHD, anxiety, depression, plus a few more) were exacerbated to the point that getting work done felt impossible. If UMass didn't offer Pass/Fail grades, my GPA would have suffered terribly. Once the semester ended, I went through a medical ordeal which I'm still recovering from. The end of May was a low point in my life (which says a lot) and the hopeless isolation from quarantine left me with few positive expectations for the summer ahead.

In June, I was ready and determined to recover physically and mentally, so I searched for trails and mountains to hike. I had been so narrowly focused on school and work for so many years that I lost touch with what I felt defined me as a person. I had become complacent with a humdrum existence in my "old" age. Working in television at local news stations had shaped me into a media literate news junkie and the news highlighted a dismal reality that was getting worse every day. I needed to disconnect from the misery which was plaguing the United States and the rest of the world. Escaping this entirely was obviously impossible; reminders were everywhere. Hiking and exploring natural wonders like the D.A.R. State Park, Sander-son Falls, Glendale Falls, the Chesterfield Gorge, or any of the Seven Sisters mountains were the kinds of escapes I needed, so that's where I went.

My body was weak, but my budding reconnection with nature compelled me to go outside nearly every day. I hadn't been swimming in years but it became a healing force for which I'm eternally grateful. I also hadn't recorded music in years and

only picked up the guitar every once in a while. I unplugged my television and my life became all about music and nature, the story of my youth. I was fortunate enough to have a solid support system in place as well. My therapist, lifelong friends (two of them are also therapists), and my girlfriend all helped resuscitate me. My memories and experiences with my friend Tom, however, were the most transformative, as they helped me create a summer that I previously could not have imagined.

Tom was my best friend in my 20s but we had largely lost touch. In June of 2020 we began hanging out again, at first we would go on socially distanced hikes but soon we were hanging out more frequently. We both kept limited company and embraced similar safe pandemic practices so we became a "pod" and traveled together to various places: abandoned castles (Dundas, Abercrombie), mansions (Tytus Mansion Ruins, The Bells), haunted woods (Gungiwamp, Duddleytown), abandoned rail yards/tunnels (Clinton, Hoosac), weird memorials/monuments (Great Barrington UFO sighting location, Holyland U.S.A.), quarries (Skull Cliff, Milford), and mountains. We explored abandoned mental institutions (Medfield, Metropolitan), went cliff diving (Dorset, Beckett), and explored caves (Sunderland, Howe). We set off copious amounts of fireworks and went swimming as much as possible. Looking back now, it's all a wonderful, hazy blur. When checking my photos, I'm reminded of already forgotten destinations and memories. The summer was so dense with life and experiences, it's difficult for me to remember it all and I am chuffed to be so fortunate.

Every few days, I would take my head out of the sand and check the news. George Floyd's murder exposed rampant social inequities and systemic racism, the grim reality which mainstream media had whitewashed for too long. I thought of Richard Pryor's 1980's routine about police chokeholds and

about how little has changed in the time since I was born. The economic, employment, and housing crises only furthered the oppression of the majority of Americans, all while large corporations consolidated and thrived. This furthered class divisions and created the illusion of a recovering economy. There was QAnon, Russian election and social interference, the politicizing of every crisis, the dismantling of basically every government department, and all of that was set to the backdrop of a pandemic that was unnecessarily killing tens of thousands of people. Societal schisms, greed, misdirection, disinformation, and cognitive dissonance were beneficial to those in power and the “mishandling” of crises was often too much. It felt like I was watching democracy crumble in real time and there was nothing I could do to fight back, so I would escape and desperately try to heal.

The reality wasn’t completely inescapable, but having Tom, as well as my support system, made it possible to deal with. We constantly discussed society, police, surveillance, opulence, and oppression while we semi-aimlessly travelled, often finding stops or destinations mid-trip. The covert-turned-overt racism woven into the social structures of our country was defeating but it helped to reinforce a deep appreciation for not just the experiences we were having, but for also being alive and free, and having a home to sleep in, however unhappy I was there.

The Fall 2020 semester has begun, and I’m trying my best to learn from the paradigm shifts I made over the summer. I recognize, however, that building new habits is a struggle that takes time. Even the lazy, hazy, aimless summer had a sort of structure and rhythm to it-- a necessary architecture for my happiness and productivity, I’ve come to learn. The turbulence of the world still weighs on me but the clarity which this summer has provided me, as well as the personal growth that accompanied it, has

helped prepare me for this semester. It’s been overwhelming at times to rejoin society and be part of such a large institution again, but I feel ready to take on these challenges and begin to consider what role I can play in affecting change.

WHAT I REMEMBER

Julia Dickman

I remember summer as this:

The windows of the green room were open, screens in place. During the day, I pulled the shades down and the sun pressed against the stiffened fabric, steeping my bedroom in warm air and a sleepy stickiness that made it impossible to get anything done. At night, the shades rolled up and in came cool breezes and the creeping sound of crickets. The view into my backyard was blackness; I slept with a fan on so that in the morning, when motorcycles roared by on the nearby street and unidentifiable birds began to scream, it would be harder to hear them and harder to wake.

When I did open my eyes each morning, I felt very small and out-of-place. Sometimes, if it was early, the room would be blueish, and I would lie there in the blue and try to feel more like myself.

I didn't have a job. My one online class was cancelled due to an insufficient number of enrolled students. I rarely left the house and jumped at the opportunity to go grocery shopping while also shrinking away from committing to things early on. Insignificant things felt huge and huge things felt insignificant.

I had nothing to plan for but new, empty days, and days didn't really feel new when they were all the same. I spent the vast

majority of my time in that bedroom even though the house got hotter on the way up. The basement was the coolest and I could feel the temperature change as I walked up or down the stairs; every window on the first floor remained covered to bar sunlight from entering and the lights were never on; the upstairs made sweat pool after five minutes, maybe less. But my bedroom was one of the only places I could go where no one would see me, and I found it hard to leave. The one thing that the humidity was good for was breeding sluggishness and making it easy to sleep at odd hours.

I felt like I was walking along the same footsteps every day. I would wake up, go downstairs to eat, then go back to sleep. The rest of the day was made up of jumbled, forgettable attempts at creativity, and I went to bed each night knowing that the next day would be more of the same. And scattered amongst this drudgery was a strange pull from the center of me, or a push that came from all around, that made me want to perform a mind-baffling disappearing act so that nobody could ever talk to me again and I'd be left in peace. I missed my friends and family, and I enjoyed getting to see them, but I also couldn't escape feeling like everyone should just leave me alone forever, as a basic courtesy.

Somehow, isolation didn't make me resent it; it molded me to—begrudgingly—fit it.

I do (and will) remember summer as June-July-August air in the green room, and an odd fear of people that I've never had before.

This year has felt like a lot of meaningless days strung together on a moving clothesline. Sometimes it goes too fast, sometimes it goes too slow, and it never feels like I can see anything other than vague colors and shapes that are dully unpleasant to look at. Even though the beginning of the semester has brought

an upswing, I wonder, often, if everyone else feels stuck, too. I see other people making the best of a bad situation, being functional, pushing through “these unprecedented times” all the way to the other side, and I can’t unsee my own failure to accomplish the things I set out to do early on.

I get worried that I’ll stay stuck while everyone else keeps moving, and I don’t know how to get un-stuck. Days feels short when I need more hours, and long when I need them to end.

I have new things, now: five (mostly) upper-level courses, a part-time job at the grocery store chain I’ve worked at since I was seventeen, an apartment full of friends. The window by my bed has blinds instead of shades; we close it during the day to keep the space from getting hot, and we open it at night. I can hear the crickets here, and feel another New England autumn making itself comfortable in the air the further we get into September.

I think I’ll remember this, too.

IS THE CUSTOMER ALWAYS RIGHT? CERTAINLY NOT IN A PANDEMIC

Kirsten Diefenbach

“Hi there! Welcome to Target! Have a great day.” I repeated myself for each new customer who entered the store front.

Standing behind a small table at the entrance of the Target store, I waited in agony for my seven-hour shift to come to an end. Keeping a smile on my face, despite wearing a face mask, made every interaction feel increasingly fake. I looked down at the small pile of face masks that I was required to hand out to anyone who had either forgotten, or “forgotten,” theirs. I was making some small chit chat with my coworker, who was cleaning the carts nearby.

I readjusted my attention to the sound of the door opening and hid my disgust as a couple entered the cesspool of germs that was Target. My heart spiked as I realized that the man entering wasn’t wearing a mask, despite the number of signs outside citing the current mandate.

“Hi, how are you both today?” I said with my high-pitched customer service voice, cocking my head to the side. I forced each word out and mustered my sweetest smile possible, too nervous to do anything else.

They replied that they were doing well and proceeded to move

quickly past me before I stopped them. “Just to let you know there is a mask mandate currently in state. Do you happen to have a mask on you, sir?”

“I can’t wear masks.”

I internally facepalmed myself at this and responded with the scripted statement my team lead had given me earlier on: “I understand, sir, it’s just that it’s both a Target policy and a state of Massachusetts mandate. I have some right here if you’d like to try one on.” I motioned towards the bag of masks next to me.

“I can’t wear masks.”

“I can call one of my team leads over to better explain it to you if you’d like,” I said, as I reached towards the walkie talkie attached to my hip, hoping he would get the message loud and clear.

The girl next to him started to say that she could just shop for the both of them if he wanted to head back to the car, but he cut her off and shook his head. “This is ridiculous. Let’s go somewhere else.”

As they walked out of the store my coworker yelled out to them: “They’re going to tell you the same exact thing!”

She grinned at me, laughing at how horribly he had acted. We told our team lead and other coworkers about what had happened. Even now it’s laughable that he put forth so much effort to combat an actual mandate.

Sure, he might not have been that worried about himself getting sick, but what about the well-being of everyone around him?

This one moment speaks largely to the United States’ current state. After the tidal wave that was COVID-19 swept over the world, most nations went into lockdown to combat the pandemic, in order to protect their people. However, the United States’ reaction was quite different to say the least. People rejected

science in every which way to avoid wearing masks, calling the pandemic a hoax—a “plandemic,” if you will. I watched alongside everyone else as all semblance of logic was essentially washed down the drain. In this situation, you would hope for a leader to step forward and steer the people in the right direction. Yeah, some kind of leader that we have, encouraging them all to go without masks.

I talked to my dad about why so many people acted this way. Why did it seem that so many Americans were rejecting the words of trusted scientists and officials for this crazy belief that the pandemic was a hoax? He responded by saying: “Americans have this twisted sense of freedom. They seem to believe that individual freedom is greater than the well-being of all people—like they’re above everyone else.”

I’ve thought about this sentiment throughout quarantine. Over the course of nearly seven months, it’s this individualistic perspective, rather than one focused on the greater good of the people, that has only caused the number of cases and deaths to be greater here than anywhere else in the world. It’s horrific to even think about. The United States has always seen itself as this heroic figure—even in movies. For the love of God, there have been movies about pandemics like this, in which it’s the United States that saves the day! And now that it’s actually happening, we’re certainly far from that.

The question remains: how far down do we have to fall before we realize the truth of this situation—before we all come to terms with our nation’s true colors?

A NEW OUTLOOK

Sarah Graham

When I think of the summer of 2020, my mind drafts to the tall green grass and worn-down, beaten dirt paths of Wheelock Fields. It's almost like I can feel my lungs burning from exertion, my back protesting my movements with agitation, but my music's loud, and my eyes follow my feet instead: one step at a time. My mom's always been a runner. When I was growing up, she would wake up at 5AM, just so she would have enough time to run 8 miles before she headed to a full day of work. I never understood why she did that. She would tell me it was her time to unwind—sometimes her time to think, and sometimes she might've used the time to forget. Whatever it was each morning, it helped her piece of mind.

When the global pandemic hit and we all became isolated into our own homes, I'd never felt so lost. At first, I still had school and my classes, but the months flew by and before I knew it, I was just another college student with no job for the summer. I haven't been unemployed over the summer months since I was an underclassman in high school. Once school ended, I felt like I was in this never-ending loop where I had no purpose. I disliked not having anything to do, and I hated not having a job. I tried not to be too hard on myself, but I admit it's in my nature to never slow down. I couldn't help but feel like I had

nothing going for myself, and I was wasting my summer away. However, there was just one thing.

When I got home in March, gyms had shut down due to the pandemic, so eventually I decided to give running another try. In the past, I've never hated running, but I never really enjoyed it either. Instead, it was usually just something I did to stay in shape. Growing up, I was very active, but my modes of exercise consisted of only playing sports. In high school, I only ever went running to prepare for tryouts, and in college, my time on the treadmill became one of my least favorite parts of my workout. However, in March, I started to run outdoors to stay in shape, and looking back on it now, I'm really glad I did.

I began to run at Wheelock Fields, where I grew up playing soccer. The place has a number of beautifully trimmed soccer fields, along with land behind them. Further out, you'll find a large, wild field with beautiful golden-green grass and trails extending into the pines of the woods. I like to walk my dog back here. I found that I liked running around at Wheelock much better than I ever did before on a track or treadmill. I liked being under the sun, powering my legs through the shaggy grass, and breathing the fresh New England air. My body's balance feels right in my sneakers on the beaten path's dirt pebbles. My mind eases under the blue sky as my head floods with oxygen, my heart pumping in my ears as I suck cool air into my lungs. My time spent outside also gave me time to connect with nature again. In the summer months, I found the hot sun to be motivating against my sweating skin. Once I started to run in the mornings, I started to cling to it as one of the only constants in my life, especially when it felt like the world was crumbling around me. Going to Wheelock every morning helped me get back into a routine and started to help me feel like I had a purpose again. I would think to myself: even if this is all I do today, at least I

got out here. At least I'm trying.

The key was letting go of a certain level of performativity. I made a conscious decision not to care about how fast I was running, but instead I focused on getting out there and jogging the same 2.53-mile loop as best I could every single day. The resulting feeling of this decision was one of freeness and ease, almost like I was untethered from doubt. This was the process of how I came to love running, because in the end, I loved how it made me feel. So, yes, 2020 was a terrible year overall for mankind, but something good did come out of it for me, and I do hope running will continue to be a useful and enjoyable activity for me in the future.

Running was my gateway to really working on my own wellbeing during the summer of 2020. I didn't even notice how uncomfortable I was in my skin until I felt better in it. And it's not only physical—being more active has made me want to be a better person in every facet of my life. When I run, I feel empowered. I feel in control of my own body. And I even feel a little proud of myself every time I do it. I finally feel like I'm in a spot where my body and mind feel comfortable again. It's amazing to feel less self-conscious, and instead work on my confidence. Running in the mornings has also made me feel more of a drive to be more productive. It sounds cheesy, but after I run my whole outlook on the day changes. Instead of dreading certain activities, I look to tackle them head-on. Running has also become an outlet for me when dealing with my anxiety. Running has really helped me with maintaining a clear mind, and outlook on life. Jogging on the fields, woods, or pavement paths that my route provides gives me time to think more. I get space to slow my mind and breathe. I feel more encouraged to resist pushing away my anxiousness. Going running at Wheelock simply makes me feel happy that I've found an outlet that helps me reflect on my

mental and physical health every day, and I think that's really healthy for a person like myself.

2020

Andrew Grundal

Nine and a half months in, and it is fair to say 2020 has seen its fair share of ups and downs, with some people getting impacted much more than others. What position were you in this summer? Were you frantically trying to work and stressing about how you were going to get by this Fall without enough money? Or were you bored out of your mind with nothing to do and no one to talk to? Or both? It's fair to say that 2020 has not been an easy year. Some people have lost loved ones, some people lost their job, and some lost their money. But some people gained something. Despite all the mental health difficulties that many people faced, quarantine was still a time to take a lot of time for oneself and self-reflect. In my own personal case, I felt that in a way, quarantine was the most productive three months of my life. I don't mean this in the sense that I physically got a lot done, but I had a lot of time to think about how I wanted to live my life. Thinking about this now, I believe that if you don't give yourself this time to understand how you want to live and spend your time, then you might not have the opportunity to fully enjoy it.

My biggest realization was understanding the impact that I want travel to have upon my life. This idea came from my love for geography, culture, language, international food, and the

overall feeling of being somewhere different. Throughout my entire life, my family has hosted exchange students, so growing up, I always had two "older siblings" living in my house from different places around the world. They would bring gifts from their country when they first arrived and would often make traditional dinners that they would have at home. After hearing all of their stories from home, I always wished that I would have the opportunity to travel and experience new cultures and environments.

To many, traveling during a global pandemic might be irrational and irresponsible, but if you really want something and you think about it every day, then you'll be able to figure out how to get there. I decided to take my studies down to Sint Maarten for the Fall semester. All my classes are online and I was able to continue working my remote internship. I feel more comfortable living in another country and being in some place different, so I have actually found myself to be more productive during my time here. For me, living in a warmer environment and exploring a new culture, with a lower number of cases seemed like a no-brainer. Getting down here was a bit hectic, and the first couple days were stressful, but I am glad to have settled in and gotten used to Caribbean life.

So, what's pandemic travel life like? Well, it's wearing a mask for around 10 hours straight, while having to cope with the nervousness that I might get the virus from being on a plane. Trying to figure out all of the testing requirements was quite the hassle as well, but if this is the new normal, it's probably not a bad thing that I have done my research. For those that have never had the chance to experience long-term travel, there is a very important distinction to make. It is important to understand the difference between traveling and going on a vacation. This means that you have to spend your money like you normally

would even though you're spending your days in a vacation-like environment. There is a lot that comes with moving to a new place, especially when you're in another country. The first couple days are important to get yourself acclimated and comfortable as soon as possible. This means going for a walk around the neighborhood and getting to know the area and what's nearby: where the grocery stores are, what the public transportation is like, how much it costs to live and how to spend your money, especially when you're on a budget. For me, I do not have any public transportation nearby, so I have to walk everywhere. I have to plan out when I want to walk to the grocery store and which one I need to go to, because some of them only take cash. I have to plan out when I should go on a run based on when the humidity will be a little more bearable. For most people reading this, this process might seem like a nightmare. But to me, this is exactly how I want to live. I love going to a new place and trying the new foods, the local beer, seeing the difference in architecture and landscape and just soaking in everything that comes with something different.

2020 gave me travel, the understanding of how to travel, and how to base my life around travel. What did 2020 give you? What were you able to understand about yourself this year that you would not have understood if 2020 was like any other normal year? Despite all the horrible events that have happened this year, 2020 has shaped my life in a way that now feels unthinkable without.

REALITY V. EXPECTATIONS

Mandy Huang

I felt the blistering cold hit my face as I began to walk up the hill. The hill that I would typically rush to get up to the top as quickly as I could. But today, I decided to pace my steps a bit slower, as I reminisced about how I initially thought this year would have played out.

Like many others, I was eager to start off this new year and believed that there was so much to look forward to. It was New Year's Eve. My family and friends gathered around the living room floor as a stunning display of fireworks were being played on the TV screen. My excitement rushed through as the countdown began. 5... 4... 3... 2... 1! That's it. It was officially 2020 - the start of a new decade. The living room was filled with laughter, smiles and cheers. It was at that moment where I was positive that 2020 would be an amazing year, especially knowing that my friends and I were going to hop on a flight to Los Angeles the next morning. The trip was short, but it created long lasting memories that soon became one of the few happy ones that I made this year.

A sudden gust of wind snapped me back into reality as I hurriedly tried to dig through my bag to find my UCard to open the door. Today was the last day before the start of the highly anticipated Spring Break. Yet, the mood of the campus

felt rather solemn.

As I squeezed the last item into one of my suitcases, I understood I was no longer just packing up for a short vacation back home. I took a look at the emptiness of the walls and floors around me as this was the last time I would ever see this view. There was this indescribable feeling I felt as I parted ways from the campus and my friends.

The series of emails that we received that week all occurred so rapidly that I still wasn't able to process that the pandemic was going to drastically transform our daily routines. Masks and hand sanitizers became a necessity in our wardrobe. Zoom became a main protagonist for the rest of my spring semester. Instead of seeing familiar faces, I stared at black screens with my classmates' names through my computer screen. As my professors worked hard to make Zoom more bearable for us, it made me realize how much I truly took in-person lectures for granted.

Soon, this sedentary lifestyle began to take a toll on my mental health. I turned to the app, Tik Tok, which brought me a piece of mind and some comfort; it was a mini escape from reality. I would endlessly scroll for hours through my 'For You' page, which was mainly filled with cooking videos. And so, I went to my kitchen, grabbed a whisk, two spoons of instant coffee powder, a cup of hot water and started whisking away. "400 mixes," the video said. I kept mixing until the brown liquid turned into a fluffy foam-like texture. I reached for a spoon and dumped the foam on top of a cup of almond milk. After I took a sip, I looked at my hand which felt extremely numb at this point and was surprised at how tasty it was.

Unfortunately, my cooking phase died down rather fast. While in self-quarantine, I was troubled with my lack of productivity even with the loads of free time I had in my hands. I began to question, "Was it never enough time or was it just because I

didn't have the will to self-discipline myself?" I had chosen to bury myself in the social media hole instead of getting things done. Though through social media, I was made aware of the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement along with the spiral of endless events that followed. Despite raising awareness and educating myself further, it seemed like there was never a pause to these events where I could take a breather and digest each situation before the next one arrived. I also felt sometimes my efforts were futile and minimal compared to the contribution of others. Yet, my friends assured me that I took the appropriate steps and did what I could to help.

And so, with my summer break coming to an end, I wanted to cross at least one thing off my to-do list. I got myself together and contacted my friend to make a short film with themes that centered around self-growth. Throughout the process of filming, it made me discover my passion for creating, and the tiny bits of motivation I had slowly started to come back. However, those tiny bits of motivation were soon deviated by the start of Zoom University again.

Nevertheless, through my own reflection of what this year has unfolded into, I personally believe that it was a test to make everyone stronger as we learn and grow from these bleak, yet bittersweet experiences. This year took many unexpected twists and turns. With only four months left before 'we' gather together for a countdown again, will I still feel the same eagerness that I had before? Will I still be looking forward to the new year to arrive?

QUARANTINE JOURNAL

Tenzin Ingsel

Three years ago when I started college, I wouldn't have expected my senior year to begin under current situations. As someone who needs to have everything planned in advance and not leave anything to chance, this 'new normal' has sent my anxiety through the roof. March was the month I turned 21, and yet I feel that nothing much has been different in essence of who I am. Time seems to stand still and a state of uncertainty is ever so present. The past six months have been so surreal and I've spent a great deal of time in introspection. However sometimes I catch myself ruminating on things I have no control over. "What am I going to do after I graduate?" "Will I get a job?" "I wish I could go outside" These anxiety driven thoughts do tend to race in my head every once a while. Usually being the cheerful and positive person that lifts the mood, some days this anxiety and uncertainty drives me far from my 'normal' self. But what is normal? Quarantine has made me realize how normalized the normalization of conforming to normalcy of always masking one's emotions is. During this time, I have been able to gain new perspectives on life and accept myself without condition. I have strengthened connections with my loved ones and people who have grown dear to me which I never would have thought possible before this pandemic. The year has definitely opened

up my mind to so many new things.

Growing up in Queens, NYC I am used to seeing the city thriving with people. I would take the train to the city to hang out with friends anytime I wanted or see my extended family members without the fear of potentially harming their health and risking my own health. Little things like these are crucially important to have some semblance of normalcy in our lives. Staying at home for an unprecedented amount of time during the summer had both its ups and downs. Each day seemed to be a repetition of some sort and it made me reflect on the things I used to take for granted. At the beginning of the pandemic and during the precarious time throughout summer, I felt the need to constantly be doing something more than ever in a sense to prove myself that my parents' and family's efforts to raise me with the amount of love and care they have were not in vain. Being a first generation student from a diasporic Tibetan immigrant family, the pressure I put on myself to be perfect to meet my own expectations was very high. Starting this semester was ever so stressful. It is considered normal to mask your emotions and avoid vulnerability when you're having a hard time and pretend everything is alright so others won't find out how you really feel. I believe that your feelings and emotions should be able to flow out of you without others' judgement. Especially with how rough this year has been on everyone, it is okay to feel our feelings.

The emotional stability I have been instilled with from my parents and family have made me feel secure with my own emotions and to sit with them without fear. The sincerity, resilience, and honesty that mirrors those of my close family members have instilled in me the motivation to strive to be the best version of myself even through hard times. My family and friends have always been there for me, especially more so

now, during these times of quarantine and social distancing. The pandemic has made me realize once again and to uncover the things that truly matter to me, such as how important it is to remember my roots and to not to take anything for granted. Even with the feelings of doubt the year has brought me, I genuinely am grateful for the increased amount of time I was able to spend with my loved ones and the opportunity it offered me to take care of myself both physically and mentally.

Yes I do admit that I tend to take up space and feel my feelings when things get overwhelming. It is more than okay to sit with our feelings, especially now during these anxiety ridden ‘new normal’ times. Sitting with my feelings this quarantine has made me realize the importance of being fulfilled with the situations and moments I do experience even though it might not always be happy moments. Everyone at the moment is going through their own struggles and experiences which is completely okay. I have learned how not to take everything personally and face situations with an open and understanding mind which sometimes doesn’t always come easy. The normalization of normalizing what is considered normal and toxic positivity of concealing our not so ideal moments and emotions further hinders our growth as a person. Sometimes, I still have these moments of uneasiness on things I have completely no control over but I have realized my feelings and emotions are valid which has led to an increased growth in my self acceptance.

2020: A REVOLUTION AMIDST THE CHAOS

Leila Kiddu

I was tired. No. Exhausted? With how this year was going. With everything going on with 2020 it is safe to say that some of the words being closely associated would include: unpredictable, subversive, transformative. From Kobe Bryant’s death, to the wildfires spanning from California to Australia; not to mention the spread of coronavirus, the politicalization of masks, and more. From learning numerous TikTok dances to trying new virtual workout classes, it was so difficult to break the chain of boredom and tiredness. It was not until one moment changed this consistent feeling for me. It took me out of my mundane day-to-day quarantine routine and shifted my entire mood. Most would think that this would be a good thing, but unfortunately it was not a positive action that caused my sudden mood shift.

On May 25th, 2020, the death of George Floyd occurred. His public lynching was broadcasted for millions to see. Even though police brutality on the African American community is not new, I was shocked, and so was the world. The video acted as a shifting moment for the Black Lives Matter movement, which occasionally would gain tremendous momentum when an unarmed black person would get murdered by police, but then

disappear into another headline. From the immediate nationwide protests, to the president's crude reaction, to the effects of social media, this wave of BLM felt different: more angry yet empowered. The death of George Floyd revealed to me and many others the importance of speaking against injustice, the influence of social media, and the new challenge to educate others on race in our society.

The video reel of George Floyd's death repeated on every screen in my house. My multiple feelings of anger and numbness took away my ability to react. I remember the flood of support texts from white friends; everyone was shocked, flustered, even in disbelief that something like this could happen in the time of a pandemic. For a black kid growing up in America, seeing your own kind get publicly murdered is not new. Sometimes I even felt blessed knowing it was not my father, mother, cousin, aunt or uncle. Everytime something like this would happen, it traditionally became a life lesson for me. My parents would talk about why I had to be "extra" careful and how I should stray away from doing anything that could get me in trouble where my white counterparts would not have the same consequences. Because I grew up in a majority white environment, broadcasted police brutality forced me to get angry quietly and mourn silently. I never spoke to anyone other than my parents about how I was feeling in fear that I would further ostracize myself by being the stereotypical "angry" black girl. But that was before George Floyd, the Pandemic, 2020, and me becoming comfortable within my skin at college once I moved out of my hometown. Now was a different time, and I was ready to speak out.

George Floyd is lynched; The world explodes. The reason George Floyd's death was so influential was because the pandemic forced everyone to halt their routines and rewatch what

happened on social media. Social media was a major platform for news regarding case updates, the president politicizing the BLM movement and inciting counter protests, and education on what the BLM movement stood for. By acting as an educational platform, people could learn about periods of history that white people have tried to erase (redlining neighborhoods, systematic oppression, tula massacre) as well as ways to support other minority groups that have suffered great hardships. As more people began to publicly come out as allies in my own community, I not only felt a shift in the effect social media had on my day to day life (from being a source of entertainment to a source of learning) but I finally became comfortable with speaking my mind on issues that I feel deserve attention. I also began to do my part by sharing resources regarding BLM history and support. This new and arguably strongest wave of BLM turned my tired and passionless attitude to a fired up citizen, ready for change. I became more confident when calling out race based socio-economic issues, and in that process, became more proud to be black.

Even though the death of George Floyd was a tragedy, his death acted as a spark moment that forever changed how myself and others socially deal with racial discrimination. We still have a lot to do on the matters of legislation, but I have full confidence that my generation will be able to enact change. Gianna Floyd, at a protest looked up at the sky and said, "Daddy changed the world," and I think that I, along with countless others, can agree.

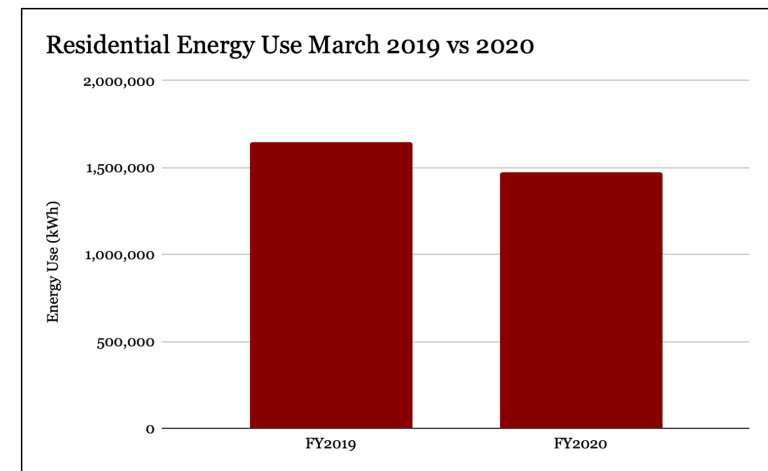
UNINTENTIONALLY GOING GREEN AMIDST COVID-19

Emma Lovett

Ah, 2020; the year that has forced us to work three feet from our beds, has given us plenty of time for new hobbies, and has kept us from driving to parties, Summer cookouts, bars, restaurants, and even our grandparents' houses. Quarantining ourselves has proven to be mundane even to the most isolated introverts, and has tested the threshold of everyone's sanity. We have found comfort in TikToks and short around-the-neighborhood walks that most Gen. Z'ers never would have gone on willingly before March of this year. We attend Zoom University and pray that our internet connection isn't unstable, that we really are muted when we think we are, and that we remember we aren't wearing pants before standing up in front of our webcams. Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic has hurt us all in some way, but is it really all bad? I'm here to argue no, it's not all bad. In fact, some of the bad has led to some good. As peculiar and difficult as this year has been, 2020 has also introduced some undeniable benefits to the nation and world, and one that deserves to be addressed is the impact on energy usage— a change that we can see on a scale as small as UMass campus.

All UMass Amherst students who were on campus last

semester remember that dreadful March day. In Blue Wall, voices were filled with buzzing anxiety with a tinge of excitement, claiming that the Boston Globe reported the school would be sending all students home by the end of that week. After that, things happened pretty quickly. Businesses closed up shop, our hair grew too long without the faithful work of barbers, and some strange panic occurred over toilet paper. Most of us stopped driving to work, school, and anywhere else in March 2020 as Coronavirus became a major concern in the U.S.. You may be wondering, how is any of that at all advantageous? Well, the proof is in the pudding— or in this case, the data from UMass Amherst's Central Heating Plant energy reports.



We left campus on March 13th, 2020, leaving the campus mostly uninhabited the latter half of March. Only a few were left on campus, and most of the buildings and dining halls were closed. Figure 1 shows the residential energy usage in March 2019 and March 2020. In FY2019, UMass Amherst used over 1.5 million kWh of electricity to power residential buildings alone in the month of March. In FY2020, this number dropped

below 1.5 million. Estimating this drop means that UMass saved about enough energy in the month of March to power Worcester Dining Hall for a whole year. This may not seem like a significant amount on the entire scale of campus, but the numbers don't include laboratories and other essential buildings on campus that required power even after students were sent home. Many buildings kept hallway lights on as a safety precaution, even if they were empty. Imagine how much energy we could save if remote learning was the norm, or if less people lived on campus regularly.

I'm not saying that this remote lifestyle should become the norm. Definitely not. I hated being trapped on my twenty-first birthday, canceling my completely paid-for research trip to Tokyo, and my 2020 Spring Break plans in the Bahamas. Seriously, 2020 was going to be the year of my life. But we've now been given information about our daily habits that we never would have seen without a global pandemic. For example, all these flight cancellations and the halt of daily transportation to and from work and school have led to a drop in greenhouse gas emissions all over the world. The things we do and don't do make a difference, and we can see that difference numerically now. We can learn from this. We can continue to use this threshold of energy usage to make more informed decisions as a global society. Pointing out the positives may be difficult this year, but they're there and should be recognized.

Of course, we can't just draw these conclusions about energy usage and claim the ultimate truth of COVID-19 leading to reduced greenhouse gas emissions; there are a lot of factors that should be considered, such as individual electricity increases as we sit at home on our phones and laptops all day. Even if it were true, what then? In mid-September, the emission levels are back up as the economy inevitably starts to reopen. 2020 has left us

with yet another unanswered question (like, what happened to those Murder Hornets everyone was freaking out about a couple of months ago?). With unanswered questions, though, means a potential to learn something new. This pandemic has taught us a lot already: healthcare workers are underappreciated, how to effectively wash hands, and maybe riding your bike to work once in a while really does make a difference.

“TIMESICK”

Natalee Marini

It often feels like I've fallen through a crack in the universe, stepped off at precisely the wrong juncture to have wound up here: a world shifted leftways or rightways or allways. The sun could stop sinking and I wouldn't notice, the long days bleeding continuously into each other. That feels like a good way to go septic. Timesick, maybe.

On a Monday that feels like a Thursday, I watched a video about wormholes. (I spend a lot of time on YouTube these days. It's a bit of a hostage situation, me holding myself at gunpoint and I don't even like it there). In a world where we could manufacture our own wormholes, the edge of the universe is only a sidestep away. All you have to do is cut a hole through time and space and prop it open. Easy. And it sounds like something cool, something I'd like to write a book about — oh the many marvels of man — except...

Well, there's always an except, isn't there? Except that this might shatter the very principle of time, at which point you'd have a paradox on your hands. One where, maybe, the sun stops sinking and stops rising too. One where the long days bleed continuously into each other. There's that timesickness again.

I think that it wouldn't be so unbearable if only there were people around. My family and I have run out of things to say,

things to do. On a Friday that feels like a Sunday, I watched another video (I told you, that's all I do anymore. The only new people I see are on a screen, what does it matter if they're friends or strangers). This one about why time feels so slippery these days. It says, we mark time by the people we see and the things we do. Take those away and you've broken the damn clock.

It seemed easy at first to lock the doors and embrace the isolation. It's what I did all throughout high school: wake up, go to school, go home, sleep. Rarely see friends. It worked; I made it work. But I don't have school anymore, not in any way that means anything. I've read all the books that matter, seen anything worth watching. Social media is a point of numbness and I make it a point to be there.

Remember when people stopped feeling real? I left the house for the first time on ???day, a quick run to the grocery store. A crowd of ordinary people in an ordinary place but all of them mouthless like something from the abyss. Some of them walked close by me, the wrong way down the aisle, but none of them felt any closer than any Netflix character on the other end of my screen. Time and space are dilated beyond reason. The maw of the wormhole won't close. We're spacesick now. I fear the moment it all snaps back into place. I long for it, too.

The moment of the snap feels so far away most days. There will inevitably be an end, either through hellfire or sheer mercy. It will all end, but I have a hard time seeing it. Already I've adapted to feeling time-and-space-sick. Already, it is near-instinctual to flinch at a crowd gathering in a movie. It feels chronic by now.

But on long days that have stretched into three or four, on the nights that never seem to end, I can think instead about the days I managed to shift the world back into its proper place, if only temporarily: a long drive with June Radio, pockets of rain on a clear stretch of highway, and the destination at the end of

a wooded cul-de-sac; new conversations with old friends, and warm pizza from Sunset down the road; brown sugar boba and an afternoon on the sunny park grass where each second fits in its allotted space again.

Coming home from that small trip, I felt something click permanently back into place. The world still feels like it's spinning on another axis but the symptoms of timesickness don't feel so acute anymore. The books on my shelf feel fresh again. It is a Monday, and it feels like a Monday. And the days aren't so bloody anymore: the sepsis is clearing. This sickness, like all things, will someday pass.

THE PERFECT TIME TO TRY SOMETHING NEW

Vanan Phan

I tried not to lose my balance as I slowly walked down the stairs, grasping an overstuffed duffle bag in each of my hands. Though it was only seven in the morning, the parking lot behind Washington Hall was already filled with cars, and students lugging moving bins overflowing with hastily packed items. There was a quiet frantic energy in the air that seemed to collide with the bird's indifferent morning chirping as students ran in and out of buildings, some trying to secure travel arrangements while others checked social media for the latest updates regarding COVID-19. A sinking feeling erupted in my stomach as I took one last look at campus before driving home.

*

After a few days of living back at home, I had come to terms with the fact that I wouldn't be returning to campus for the far foreseeable future. I decided that it was time I began the daunting task of opening the packages that had arrived at my house while I was on campus.

I would love to say that I'm not an impulse buyer, and to be

fair, when it comes to most things, I'm normally pretty rational about what I do and don't need. However, one of my biggest weaknesses has always been books. Needless to say, I'm very proud of the variety of genres and authors included in my personal library.

Just when I finished opening the last packages of books, a crowd of brown cardboard boxes littered at my feet, I felt my phone go off with a notification. As I checked my email, I felt as if a small part of me had died as I read and re-read the email from my local library stating that it would be closing indefinitely due to COVID-19. It might sound strange and perhaps, absurd given the number of books I owned, the news that the library was closing felt like I was losing a friend. For as long as I could remember, I had been going to the library to check out the new releases and discover recommendations from librarians. The books I borrowed from the library, and the memories I made there played a huge role in my choice to start my own book collection at home. In addition, the library also serves as the community's pillar for education and resources in the community as many ESL and K-12 tutoring classes are held there.

As I placed the books that I recently purchased on my bookshelf, I realized that there was a silver lining to the library closing. Now, was my chance to prioritize reading the books that I owned.

*

I slammed the fifth book I had started this morning shut in frustration as I finished reading the last words on the fourth page. With a sigh, I carelessly tossed the book onto my desk, where it joined at least three others, though I had barely gotten past the first page before I decided I just couldn't get into the

story. While some were concerned that they wouldn't be able to exercise due to most fitness centers closing, I knew I was getting the recommended 10,000 steps per day given the infinite number of times I had walked back and forth from my bookshelf to my bed, an ever-changing pile of to-be-read books serving as proof of my indecisive reading habits.

As I glanced at the endless pile of books around me, I couldn't help but feel a bit shame. Like many others, I had decided to use quarantine as an opportunity to do and try things that I previously wouldn't have been able to do. With the extra time I had, I was excited and determined to start reading all the books that I had previously bought, but no matter how hard I tried, I found myself continuously losing interest. It wasn't until I decided to try listening to audiobooks that I was finally able to get out of my reading slump. Before quarantine, I hadn't been a fan of audiobooks because they reminded me of the required reading, I had done in high school, but with the chaotic state of the world, I found it comforting to be able to block out any distractions, and allow someone else to guide me through the story.

Within days, I became obsessed with audiobooks and the new reading experience I was able to get from just listening to the narrators tell the story. Instead of focusing on reading as many books as possible, I was able to slow down and really immerse myself in the story through the different narrators and sound techniques used. My phone buzzed with a notification that my audiobook is ready to be loaned, and with excitement, I clicked 'borrow.'

THE DOWNFALL OF BA'S TEST KITCHEN

Erin Walsh

My urge to mindlessly watch cartoons and cable television during my childhood has slowly transformed into scrolling through an array of vlogs, makeup tutorials, and practically any mind-numbing media that YouTube suggests for me on the home page. Through the years, I have curated a subscription of seemingly perfect YouTubers who all allow me to waste endless hours of comfort in my bed with my laptop in front of me. Amid my conservative list of twenty-three channel subscriptions lies Bon Appetit's Test Kitchen. I feel as if I know Brad Leone and his fermentation process by heart, and I can personally relate to Molly Baz who generously provided me with a delicious homemade mac and cheese recipe. The Test Kitchen is not your average cooking show; each member of the cast has a running series, from Claire Saffitz remaking popular packaged snacks to Ameil Stanek cheffing up the same ingredient in twelve different ways. Not only do BA members make food like it's a five-star restaurant, but they have a personality to match. The cast almost resembles one of the most binged Netflix series, *Friends*. The running jokes and dynamic of the members played a big part in BA's cult following. There was a sense of calm that came over

me when I had the time to check in on what the Test Kitchen was up to. But all good things come to end, especially in 2020, and the BA test kitchen was not exempt from that.

The Black Lives Matter movement had a ripple effect across homes, businesses, and cities spanning the nation. Years of oppression to people of color has exploded into a powerful movement that is working to bring justice to those who are still experiencing racial disparities today. Even within society's most praised companies and T.V. shows lurks discrimination against POC, including but not limited to wage gap disparities, slurs, and other prejudices that are rarely accounted for. This movement for equality was prevalent throughout history, but in 2020 it is creating breakthroughs that could mean true equal opportunity for all. In light of this, multiple video cast members of the BA Test Kitchen have resigned after failed negotiations for equal pay. Test Kitchen personalities Priya Krishna, Sohla El-Waylly, and Rick Martinez took it upon themselves to break down the institutionalized racism running rampant in Conde Nast Productions. A token negotiation was offered to those affected by the wage gap, but according to a Business Insider article, it was noted that the offer did not chalk up to anything close to what their white co-workers received.

Sohla El-Waylly has expressed her opinion on the pressing issue through her Instagram. In a post on her Instagram story she wrote, "I voiced numerous complaints about how non-white members of the test kitchen were tokenized, carelessly framed as monolithic experts for their communities, used as props for white talent, and not given equal opportunities to be featured." The claims Conde Nast made to become a more inclusive environment never gave way, forcing Sohla El-Waylly to stop her appearances on Test Kitchen videos. After leaving BA, Sohla can now be seen on other popular cooking channels on YouTube

like “Binging with Babish” and “NYT Cooking”.

Former member of the Test Kitchen, Molly Baz, did not support Conde Nast’s actions and therefore resigned in solidarity with El-Waylly, Martinez, and Krishna. Months after the failed negotiations with Conde Nast, Baz posted on her Instagram, “I wish I had more to share with you after months of silence, as I know you have all been waiting for change along with me.” To Molly and the others that left the company, it was apparent that “people of color had been treated like second class” (Insider Magazine). It is hard to believe that in the 21st century people of color are still facing discrimination, as Conde Nast is proof that our society still needs change. Bon Appetit Magazine, a separate entity from Conde Nast, has promised to become more inclusive and equitable by resolving pay inequities, including more POC in the editor-in-chief pool, and utilizing anti-racism training for their employees. As it becomes increasingly aware to the public which companies and organizations are not evolving, it is important to carefully choose who you are watching, listening to, and buying from. Although it is easy to mindlessly click any YouTube channel or video online, it is necessary for the viewer to support organizations that will progress society instead of holding it back.

DO WE REALLY WANT THE ‘OLD’ NORMAL BACK?

Danyea West

Scrolling through Instagram has been a pastime of mine for some years now. It’s second nature to check it several times during the day, especially when trying to avoid responsibilities. It’s very easy to disappear in the app and find content that distracts me from the real world. I was mindlessly scrolling through Instagram stories recently when I stumbled upon the story of a woman I follow from California. She has a large following and is constantly posting about eating habits and how to evade the pressures of diet culture through intuitive eating. I’ve learned a lot from her, and her dishes are decently inspiring (although I’m not much of a cook). Overall, I tend to identify with most of her posts and I appreciate her efforts to promote healthier lifestyle habits that aren’t tied with detoxes and fad diets.

As I read the small blurbs of text on her story, I felt the alarms go off in my head—something didn’t feel right. Her post was something along the lines of “why are everyone’s posts so political?” and “when will my Instagram feed go back to normal?” Seemingly innocent questions, yes? It took some learning and unlearning on my part, but I can now understand why these are

anything but innocent questions. Allow me to shout from my soapbox for a moment.

First, we must ask the question “what does ‘normal’ look like, anyway?” We’ve all been hearing the term ‘new normal’ from nearly every authority figure in the country, from governors and mayors to our own managers and bosses. But what did normal look like before we had to revamp it to adjust for a pandemic? For some, normal was probably full of what most people think to be average, everyday events. Going to work at your 9-5 job; visiting your parents on the weekends for Sunday breakfast; going to a restaurant with your friends on a Friday night. Average, everyday things, right?

For some, maybe. For most middle-class Americans, especially those who are white, this was the norm before this year went sour. Before the pandemic killed thousands of people in just the U.S. alone. Before a rejuvenation in BLM protests swept across the country. Before the state of California was burning from preventable wildfires due to the climate crisis. And maybe, as we adapt to this ‘new normal,’ many people’s lives will continue in the way they did before. Now, they’ll work from home; they’ll video chat their parents on Sunday mornings; dinner with friends will be take out instead of dining out.

But what was normal like for others? What was normal like for the working-class people who need two jobs to pay their bills? Or for those who rely on grandparents and schools for childcare? Those without internet access? Those who simply can’t do their job from home? And what about those who live in food deserts? Those being displaced by wildfires on the West Coast? Perhaps most importantly, what about those who were—and still are—getting murdered in the street for the color of their skin? Those who are denied healthcare, housing, and employment because of the systemic racism that has proven so

difficult to dismantle? Their normal wasn’t sustainable before, so why should they want to go back to that?

The simple question of ‘why can’t things go back to normal’ brings on an onslaught of other problems that so many of us can ignore. If I’m not experiencing any of these hardships, it’s natural for me to ignore them. I, and so many others, can ignore these problems because of certain privileges so many of us enjoy.

I won’t pretend to be an expert, and I also won’t pretend to be without privilege. Privilege is a great source of power that exists in many different forms. As a woman of color, I am at more of a systemic disadvantage than white males. However, I still contain privilege because of my socioeconomic class, the lighter color of my skin, my education, and so on. Privilege is not a dirty word and can be used for good. But first, people have to get over their fear of it. Having privilege does not make you a ‘bad’ person. It is not enough to simply recognize privilege—we each have to make a conscious decision to use that privilege to uplift marginalized voices and experiences.

What does this look like, then? For starters, it looks like accepting the notion that your ‘normal’ is not likely to return—and you shouldn’t want it to. Embrace the work that comes along with dismantling oppressive systems, including the continuous process of learning and unlearning. Work to create a new normal that benefits the many, not just the few.