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What I’ve Learned, Where I Haven’t Been, Who I’m Becoming

 Whenever something upsetting happens, one of the most common phrases used is “life is full of ups and downs.” While I believe this to be true, some of life’s events can never be fathomed or predicted until they actually happen. The outbreak of COVID-19 has halted lives all around the world, leaving people wishing for a quick return to normalcy in their lives. The truth of the matter is that our lives will probably never return to the way they were before this pandemic, because we will never see the world exactly the same way again. Even though change is scary for most, I believe the aftermath will make our lives more fulfilling and we will live with a greater purpose. While reading stories of the 1918 flu pandemic, Gussie Gordon Bumgardner’s fear during 1918 is explained by her granddaughter, which reminds me of the fears I’m experiencing through my own changes today. These fears and uncertainties are also outlined in the narrative Jess Minieri wrote, describing her feelings towards our pandemic in a very raw and honest way. I feel very connected to Jess when reading her narrative, as it outlines many of the internal struggles I am dealing with. I found a glimmer of hope while reading Parker West’s narrative though, as he expressed how important he found nature and being outdoors to be in this time. My confusion, anger, and sadness during this pandemic have made me realize how this experience will change the way I view my life. This pandemic has presented me with an excellent opportunity to reconnect with myself through the Earth and appreciate all the wonderful people in my community.

 When this pandemic first began, I was filled with feelings of defeat and sorrow. It took me time to accept this new reality, and on some days I’m still not sure if I have. Jess took the words right out of my mouth when she expressed in her narrative “being on my own, making my own choices, having freedom, not having a pair of eyes–or six– looking over my shoulder every minute, that was the most “me” I have ever felt” (Minieri). Jess expressing how college made her feel herself leveled me. I have grown to love the person I’ve become, I just didn’t realize it until I read what she’d written. I don’t feel as much myself living with my parents, because my independence has been reverted back to when I was in high school. Since college began, I have been growing, changing, and developing myself and I’m afraid I will begin to lose this progression the longer I don’t continue to move forward. I also connected with Jess when she explained herself as a “reflective individual” (Minieri). Some would say I’m an over thinker, because like Jess I’ve also looked deep inside myself, analyzing who I am, and what my purpose in life is. I sometimes find myself wondering if I am on the right path, and if I will succeed in the career I have chosen to pursue. I still don’t have answers to these questions but knowing I can’t go out and find them right now fills me with uncertainty.

 I have also noticed this uncertainty in my family and community as they have dealt with the pressures of COVID-19. I have seen my community over purchasing groceries and other necessities in fear they will run out. I have also noticed my mom worrying about not being able to work during this pandemic, and my sister’s concerns about her own online schooling experience. It reminds me very much of the narrative Gussie’s granddaughter wrote about her experiences during the 1918 pandemic. Gussie is quoted in her daughter’s recollection, saying “I thought I was going to die. I remember lying here in the front room and watching hearse after hearse pass by my window outside” (Burkett-Halapin). While today we might not be watching hearses pass by, we are hearing about the deaths of people all over the world, which can be pretty terrifying. The media has expanded immensely since Gussie’s time, so we know everything that is happening in regard to COVID-19 all around the world. This is both a blessing and a curse, because the media coverage is also creating a fear that has overtaken people even more than the virus. Even though there seems to be so much chaos in the world right now, and it feels like I’m just sitting here watching it all fall apart, there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

 Some may say that there is no bright side to this pandemic. That nothing beneficial could possibly come out of this. One of the reasons this seems so untrue to me is since the start of COVID-19, the environment has begun to flourish. Because of social distancing, gas emissions from cars and public transportation has been greatly reduced. We are seeing these effects in the clean waters of the canals of Italy, and the clear air in India has made the Himalayan mountains visible for the first time in decades. I have also found myself reconnecting with nature right in my backyard. When reading Parker’s narrative, I couldn’t help but relate to his need for outside air. Nature is something I’ve taken for granted before, but not during this uncertain time. Parker explained his point of view on this by saying “going outside and getting fresh air has never been such a significant part of my life, because I have never really viewed it as much” (West). Now that I am limiting my travel due to COVID-19, spending time in nature is the only activity I can still participate in. I’ve always loved being outdoors playing sports, fishing, and taking nature walks, and the corona virus has given me the option to slow down and really enjoy that part of myself. These outdoor activities hold a deeper and more personal meaning to me now. Through this pandemic’s challenges, I have realized the importance of outdoor activities to my physical and mental health.

 This pandemic has thrown me its fair share of curveballs, but also has improved my life in some of the most unexpected ways. This is presented in Jess’s narrative, when she describes the isolation she feels in this pandemic, but expresses at the end how it could be positive. Jess thoughtfully states “I hope to be able to take advantage of the opportunity of time, spent with myself, to become a source of my own happiness” (Minieri). I too hope to find my own inner happiness, and this pandemic gives me the opportunity to find what I can do to make myself happy. Not only am I able to reconnect with my thoughts and happiness, but I am also able to slow down and appreciate the simple things in life such as nature, like Parker describes in his narrative. Parker explains how since this pandemic has begun he views going outdoors “as a very important part of my [his] day” (West). Going outdoors has become one of the things that has kept me sane throughout this pandemic. Jess, Parker, and I are in agreement that although this pandemic has been difficult, there is some good coming out of it. For me, some of the positives are spending more time with my family, my community coming together in support of each other, and our climate improving.

 We are all working through difficult uncertainties and trying times, but I have seen so much progress from myself, my community, and communities all over the world. I have seen neighbors picking up groceries for the elderly, people holding car parades for their loved one’s birthdays, essential employees working tirelessly without complaint, and so many other civic virtues. The kindness I have witnessed over the past few weeks has been nothing short of remarkable. These actions hold a greater meaning than just ordinary civic virtue. The kindness of others during this time says something about our humanity. We can threaten other countries and try to become the most superior nation, but while the whole world is struggling, we have supported each other instead. I will be glad when this pandemic has ended, but I will not return to the way things were before. I will hug my friends a little longer, enjoy days spent in noisy crowds more, and remember how lucky I am to be attending such a beautiful university. I will not forget this pandemic and have hope for the future of humanity because of it.

Works Cited

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