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In Sickness and in Health in South Texas: Narratives of COVID's Impact

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Covid Wellness

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Covid Wellness Assignment

Covid has had a major impact on the lives of billions across the globe over the passed few years. This includes people of every age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic group. The impact of Covid had on my life was probably to a lesser degree than many, which is saying something. My experience includes two interstate moves, various academic challenges; as well as, the far too common occupational and social issues that inevitably arise during a lockdown.

My story began with a 3 hour move from central Louisiana to Clinton Mississippi, in order to attend a Bio-Medical Master's program. This was the first time I was truly on my own, having commuted from home throughout my undergraduate career. I knew no one, had no connections to the area, and quickly found myself buried in school work. Fortunately for me, I was able to make friends through classes, and church. Although I was dealing with seemingly unending changes and adjustments at the time, I found some comfort in those relationships. I spent the large majority of my time studying at the library on campus, where I could generally find a classmate or two to bounce questions off of, or at least share a passing wave and howdy.

Following my first semester, I was confident that I had, in a way, found my groove and was going to be even more successful in my second semester. Unfortunately, a proverbial wrench would be thrown into my plans as not too long after classes resumed the school sent out emails stating classes would be held online for about a week. This would turn into the month and finally the end of the semester. Now, I will be the first to admit, much like presumably every other student across the country I was elated classes were canceled at first. However, once the campus shutdown was continued passed the week, and eventually the semester, I grew more and more frustrated that I was unable to study with classmates, and to an even greater degree no longer able to seek the comfort of my regular study spots. I felt totally alone in my studies which would eventually become compounded by the impending city and state mandated shutdowns.

Fortunately, with classes being moved online, I was able to make the trip back to Louisiana, and see family more often. But this at times seemed like my only comfort, and the drives between states seemed to compound my stress and anxiety. I felt drawn to the comfort of my family home, but at the same time felt isolated from my studies and felt as though my going home would result in the failure of the courses I was enrolled in. But what else did I have in Clinton other than my school work? I had lost my continuity, could no longer see friends, churches were being closed left and right and even the stores/businesses were on abbreviated schedules. I was being isolated as a result of something out of my control. As time passed, I wrestled with this over and over until finally graduating. This of course brought its own challenges however. Shortly before the semester's conclusion we learned we would not have a formal graduation and would simply receive diplomas in the mail.

I decided I needed to find a way to socialize and having graduated thought "why not look for a job". To my surprise this ended up being a fairly easy task. I sent resumes to the few medical clinics and doctor's offices I found online, and after a few days received a call for a Zoom interview. I gladly accepted and shortly after was asked to visit the hospital to meet in-person. Once being hired I learned that the office was using a bi-daily schedule to reduce the chances of transmission. Therefore for the first few months I worked every other day, but still

found it difficult to build relationships due to my being confined to a certain office space and not being allowed contact with anyone from the other areas of the clinic. However, in the fourth or fifth month of my employment, to my great delight we were allowed to resume “normal” practices and began working daily with only slight restrictions on contact. Over time, the restrictions steadily decreased and I eventually was able to travel to other “satellite clinics” with the doctors.

Throughout this time I had made the decision to apply and attend optometry school to which I was accepted and made the decision to make an even greater move. I decided to pack my bags and move a little more than 9 hours to San Antonio Texas. Thus with great delight, much anticipation, and a slightly heavy heart, I handed in my 2 weeks notice and bid my first home and the friends I had made farewell.

I arrived shortly before classes started and made my first attempt to tackle the strenuous course-load head on. To my great dismay however, I found the transition from the work-force back into academia especially challenging, initially falling behind and doubting myself. I tried to fall-back on the study skills I had utilized previously, but the same doubts, anxieties, and stresses seemed to be flooding back greater than ever. I felt like despite my best efforts I was not finding the same level of success I had grown accustomed to. And to make matters worse, with the new move, I again found myself without any friends or connections to the community, as well as, an even greater distance from my family and support system in Louisiana. The semester turned into a bit of a trudge and my performance suffered as a result.

At the conclusion of the semester I went home for the holidays where my mother knew all too well about my struggles and issues with anxiety I had encountered. After talking with her extensively, I was convinced to talk to my primary care physician and describe what I had been and was still battling. I was setup an appointment, where I was directed to a separate doctor and diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder, or ADHD. This resulted in my being directed to seek additional help and was told that I did not have to shoulder the entire burden. Although I am the student and my academic performance ultimately falls on me, that I could seek counseling and help from the resources the school provided. Being told this, as well as being directed to the appropriate resources has seemingly corrected my issues of the past, and has allowed me to once again find academic success.

As anyone reading this would know, Covid had a major impact on everyone of us, including myself. I had never dealt with anxiety and felt such a great pressure before these last couple of years. I believe Covid definitely had a large role in that. As previously stated, although I had my own issues, I was definitely fortunate to have only been affected in the ways I was. Many people lost family and friends, had their finances ruined, and many lost their livelihood. I count myself as fortunate and am so happy to once again find a sense of normalcy. I would like to say though, to anyone who is still struggling to find that normalcy, just like I was told, you are not alone. If you are dealing with anxiety, depression, or a general sense of being overwhelmed, reach out. Find the resources available to you and utilize them.