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

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### COVID 19 and me

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COVID 19 served as life changer in many aspects. As a global pandemic, it took the world by storm. It took individuals away from their fast pace daily routines and forced the world as a whole to sit down and be still. Living in a fast pace society, it felt as if our lives had come to a complete stop and we were hopeless with no control of the situation. At least that is how COVID 19 made my household feel. I come from a family that thrives off of daily routines, everyone is up by a certain time and everyone is out of the door by a certain time. Unbeknownst to my household, we used daily tasks as a way to cope or ignore the current emotional wellbeing of ourselves. We lived by the motto of "Life happens but time waits for no one", so we had the habit of experiencing a tragic event and using work and school to keep our minds busy and not think about our feelings.

Thanks to COVID we had no choice but to stop, think, feel, and sit in our actual emotions. At the start of COVID, I received news that an estranged friend's battle with cancer took a turn for the worse and was only given 2 weeks at most to live. Without any thought, I drove to Houston the moment I received the phone call to take advantage of what would be my last opportunity to speak with my friend. Luckily, this was at the very beginning of the pandemic and I made the cut off time to actually be able to enter the hospital as a visitor. Within that weekend, we were informed that classes would be on an extended spring break so after returning from the hospital, I had nothing but time and silence on my hands. I had no clue how to process and accept what was to come. I've dealt with deaths before and my way on coping would be to push even harder in my academics or job and tell myself that that's what they would want for me to do. However, with COVID it felt as if I was stuck in a box with no outlet and had no option but to truly face what I felt and deal with it. Those two weeks were the hardest weeks that I have had to endure, as the text messaging between my friend and I grew less and less as they became weaker and approached their final days. At that point I felt as if I was driving myself crazy because there was no escape from my feelings and having to remain strong for everyone around me.

There were many things I tried to do to take my mind off of the situation such as pulling weeds out in the backyard, painting and reading. Those were great for the moment, but the instant I returned to my room, my thoughts would run amok. It was then at that time that I realized in all serious situations in my life I never truly processed what was happening, but brushed it off and ignored my feelings to convince myself that I was totally fine. That time period stripped me to my core and forced me to acknowledge that I have held on to so many incidents and traumas to where one more stroke to the camel's back and I was on the verge of a breakdown. I was able to use majority of COVID to acknowledge and address all of the things that I have been through in life and process each trauma and each emotion. Ever since COVID I have made an active effort to sit in my emotions as soon as they happen, understand why I feel the way that I feel, and find a healthy outlet to express those emotions. Life has a way of forcing us to grow

as an individual and although it took something as pronounced and tragic as COVID, I am forever thankful for the opportunity to work on myself to become a better me.