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

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The Greatest Relationship

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The Greatest Relationship

Zoom. A word once associated with speed now serves as the sole connecting thread in a world where time seemingly stood still. In hindsight, I experienced many notable life moments through Zoom – graduation, birthday celebrations, optometry school interviews, among all others. However, the sheer absence of interlocked fingers during prayer, a warm embrace upon greeting, gentle pats on the back to show compassion, and a high-five just because, left my soul barren. You see, I was one who thrived on human interaction. I consumed early morning walks with my family for breakfast, spontaneous chats with strangers on the bus for lunch, and exuberant game nights with friends for dinner. At the peak of Covid-19, I was *starved* - truly famished because I knew naught about enjoying my own company.

This period of isolation left me with what I soon learned to be my biggest discomfort - being alone with my thoughts. When I removed other people from the equation, I realized that I hardly knew who I *really* was. After multiple defeated attempts to find reprieve by filling every crevice of my schedule with Zoom or FaceTime only to end up right where I started, I finally resigned to conversing with myself. “How bad can it be?”, I remember thinking. Safe to say, it was quite bad. But only at first. The endless negative self-talk, harsh sentiments towards my own shortcomings, regret upon regret bubbling to the surface, and instability upon my own identity left me appalled. How can I love others so much but scorn myself so deeply? The realization of my own self-contempt served as a wake-up call to not only be kind to myself, but also get to know who Yvonne really is and champion every part of her – flaws, quirks, and all.

First, I began practicing mindfulness by cultivating awareness and patiently paying attention to my thoughts and feelings at the present moment. As painful thoughts of the past and deeply ingrained misconceptions about my place in the world arose, I learned to process my emotions and ultimately learned to forgive myself. I learned to free my emotions and truly allow myself to feel love, hope, joy, anger, sadness without judgment or rebuttal. This journey, though incredibly uncomfortable at times, opened a whole new worldview and unlocked a side of myself I never knew I had. I learned to be brave. I learned to tackle fear. I learned that it is okay to make mistakes. I learned that failure is just a redirection. I learned

to cherish the present. I learned to find light even in the darkest of times. I learned the value of true honesty. I learned to seek discomfort because it often leads to open-mindedness and empathy. I learned that I actually enjoy alone time. By cultivating a healthier relationship with myself and my emotions, I was able to better nourish my relationships with others and with the world around me. The real Yvonne, I learned, isn't so bad after all.