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## **Resilience in the Journey to Justice**

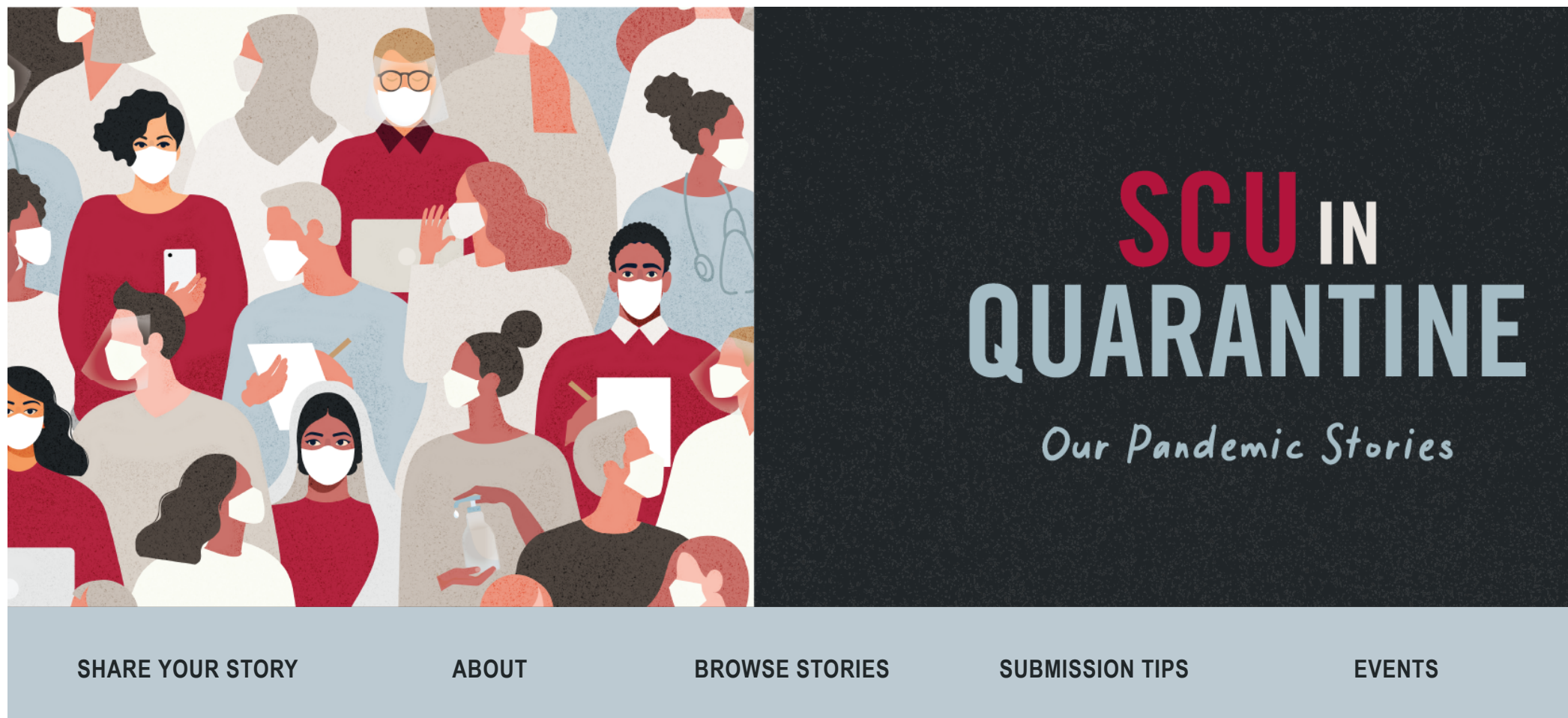
Romae-Anne Aquino

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## Resilience in the Journey to Justice

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Law Student

In March 2020, I was positive with COVID-19 and took months to recover after contracting pneumonia. I remember the grueling 13 days that I had to wait for a COVID-19 test because of the limited supply back then. After speaking with two nurses and one doctor with no luck, I rushed myself to the emergency room because I could barely breathe. I was 22 years old, with a generally weak immune system and bad allergies, yet no pre-existing conditions. I remember fighting for my life. I remember constantly laying on my back feeling crushed as if a truck fell on my chest. I remember sleeping all day and night, barely able to keep myself awake and alert enough to attend virtual classes. I remember struggling to even go to the bathroom because I felt so winded and weak.

Despite the pain, stress, and fear, I persevered with my second semester of law school and passed my classes. Even with lingering effects of COVID-19, I managed two law summer courses (with a 3.67 term GPA) and two fellowships to support my family. Despite my limited time and energy, I sought more professional growth. I participated in various virtual programs to build my professional network and skillset. After feeling the constant effects of COVID-19 on my body throughout the summer and fall, I continued to stay true to my purpose: to advocate fiercely for individuals facing adversity. Regardless of the months of isolation, I continued to pursue growth in my legal journey; I developed a newfound confidence in myself.

I also learned to love my body more. My body did so much for me these past few years. It has survived all COVID-19 symptoms imaginable, it has survived pneumonia in both lungs, it has survived all of this during my second semester of law school.

I learned to be patient. The wonders of human biological functions happen microscopically, sometimes without explanation. Just as Rome was not built in a day, my temple takes time to better sculpt my palace.

I learned to appreciate all my body does. This is through the ways it fights vigorously, like recovering from a new worldwide pandemic. I appreciate the way it grows, even if it leaves behind traces. I appreciate its sensitivity, being my last line of defense when my brain and insecurities pressure me otherwise.

Instead of feeling betrayed, ashamed, furious against my body, I see it for all its strengths and weaknesses. I hope to never take advantage of it, but I know that I will never again shy from feeling anything other than whole.

I can carry myself through the toughest storms because I am strong, because I am a fighter, because I am living proof of resilience.

My resilience and endurance in academic and professional settings have prepared me for a legal career promoting justice and prosperity within underserved communities. People that face disadvantageous systems deserve the best representation. They deserve motivated people, like me, to fight against the legal barriers before them.

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