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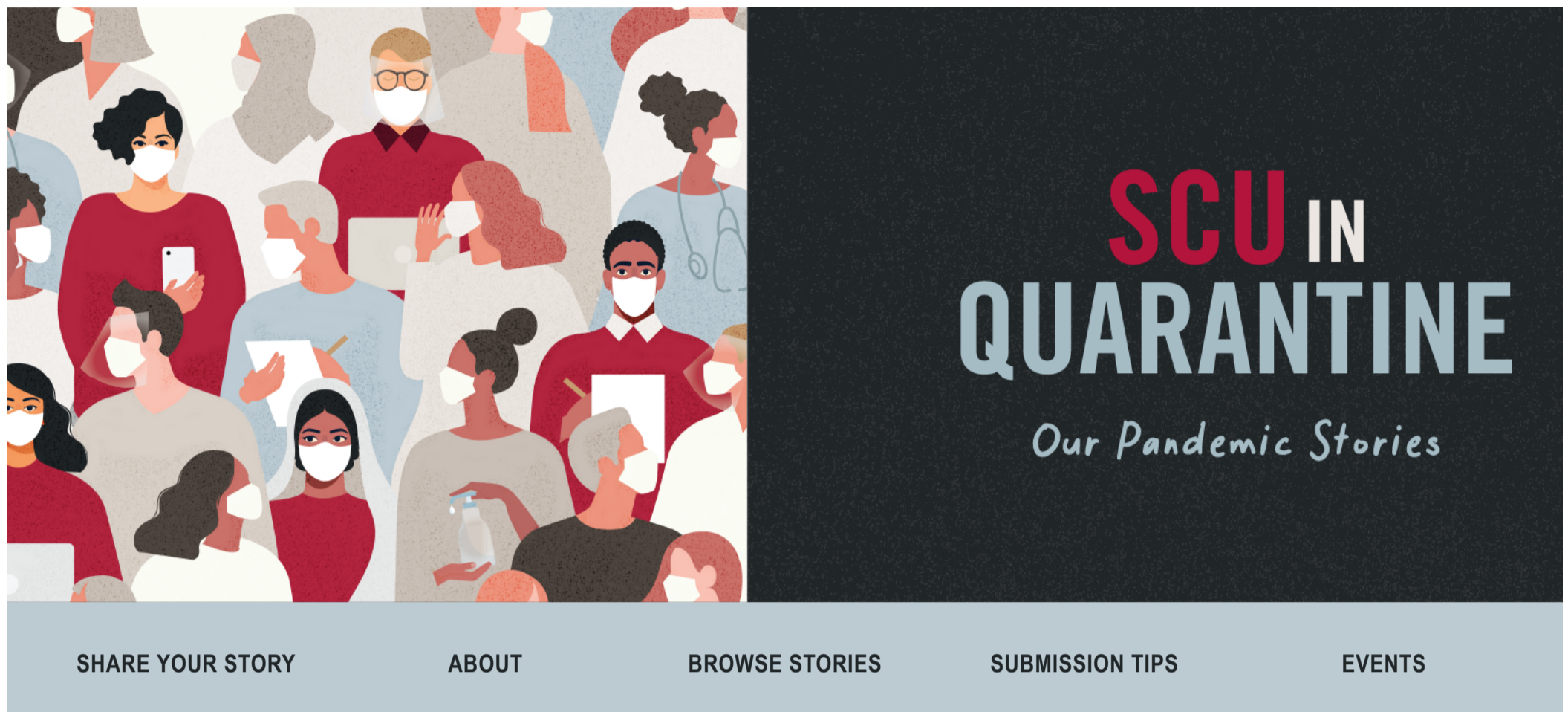
My Pandemic Marathon

Minnie Uyen Thai

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My Pandemic Marathon

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The pandemic stay-at-home order started March 16th. I felt angry and couldn't believe it happened. COVID-19 felt like an uninvited guest who came to visit for a week, stayed for a month, then forced us to live with it until now. Everything shut down and felt out of control, the whole world turned upside down! Our business decreased 90%, kids have been home for a year, and all resources closed. The days became heavier as we faced our roles as business owners, partners, and caretakers. At the same time, I faced the challenge of maintaining an "A" GPA in graduate school. Though the pandemic was scary, stressful, and unpredictable, it shaped me to be an independent, adaptable, and compassionate woman. I learned that there is a season for everything under the sun—even when we can't see the sun.

The experience that brought me the most happiness was when I successfully taught my first virtual flower design and Santa event in December 2020 to benefit McCollam Elementary School. I organized it in 3 days, provided free flowers, and connected 300 people over Zoom by teaching kids and parents flower designs. Before this event, I had just finished my final and wasn't sure whether I would be staying in the graduate program. However, I felt the calling to create the opportunity for families to experience love and connection through flowers. I let go of my class-related fears and focused on helping people. It felt so fulfilling. After we finished the event, I got a letter from school saying that they recognize my resilience and allow me to continue the program. I was happy in tears. This experience taught me to not be afraid of failure, instead to focus on the present, serving people, and believing in my process.

The most devastating experience was when my husband brought up divorce again 3 weeks before my finance final. I felt like somebody cut off my legs as I approached the finish line of a marathon. I was dying with pain, I couldn't breathe! I broke down. A part of me blamed myself, asking what did I do wrong to deserve this, and wanted to give up. Another part of me remembered President Barack Obama saying, "When people go low, you go high." I realized there was no one to rescue me. The necessity to rescue myself and be strong for my kids was greater than my pain. It woke me up to move forward and reminded me to not give up on finishing my MBA. I cried and prayed to God to give me the strength to scoot and slide my way to the end of the final.

At this 1 year mark of the pandemic marathon, I don't think I won any gold medals. But if I can push through these 12 months of COVID-19, nothing can stop me. I believe through all the hard work of hot summers and cold winters, we can harvest and celebrate the spring season.

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