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Our Pandemic Stories

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Rage, Rage Against

Lauren Loftus

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Even now, wearing the rose-colored glasses of the freshly-vaccinated, when I look back at 2020, most of what I see blurs red. With rage.

It used to take a lot for me to get angry. I'm usually a peacekeeper, the emotional toll booth attendant for those needing a safe space to vent. I remain calm when others spiral. But this past year, I broke that pattern and got mad. Really mad.

It started back at the beginning of the pandemic, in early March 2020. I was angry when coworkers insisted on coming into work with colds despite the increasingly frenzied news reports about a new, mysterious coronavirus. We were giving each other wider berths in the breakroom but our country's breakneck, prioritize-work-above-everything culture propelled us to continue reporting to the office at 9 a.m. on the dot, regardless of being contagious.

After the University sent everyone home, my anger kept expanding, cloning itself as I watched news reports of frolicking spring breakers flooding beaches and jammed restaurants despite desperate calls from public health officials to stay inside and stay apart. It continued as weeks turned into months, as then-President Donald Trump spouted false claim after false claim about the lethality of COVID-19 and the efficacy of mask-wearing, or hawked snake oil cures, or seemed to care more about economic losses or dings to his poll numbers than the loss of human life. That he successfully convinced his followers that the seriousness of COVID was overstated by the media, a political gimmick created to kick him out of office, exasperated and enraged me.

By the end of 2020, my anger had taken on an impersonal quality. People's refusal to heed the early-pandemic calls of "We're all in this together!" had affected me and my family little. I was healthy and lucky enough to work from the safety of home. But not everyone was so privileged: COVID was decimating nursing homes and spreading like wildfire through marginalized, underfunded neighborhoods comprised primarily of Black and Brown people. Meanwhile, those same people of color were marching for their lives to be protected from a racist policing system. They were dealing with two pandemics, while my neighbor was slapping a "Hillary for Prison" bumper sticker four years too late on his gas-guzzling SUV and refusing to wear a mask at the grocery store.

It's the unfairness of it all that fuels my rage. And the futility. No amount of shouting at strangers on social media, or consuming endless stories of mounting death rates in the 24-hour news cycle, or downloading yet another meditation app to attempt to reclaim my long-lost calm appeases it. This anger is like a glowing orb of pure hunger residing somewhere deep in my belly. And until I learn how people in the worst public health crisis of our lifetime could so willfully ignore and risk others' lives because it inconvenienced them slightly, I fear it will never be satiated.



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