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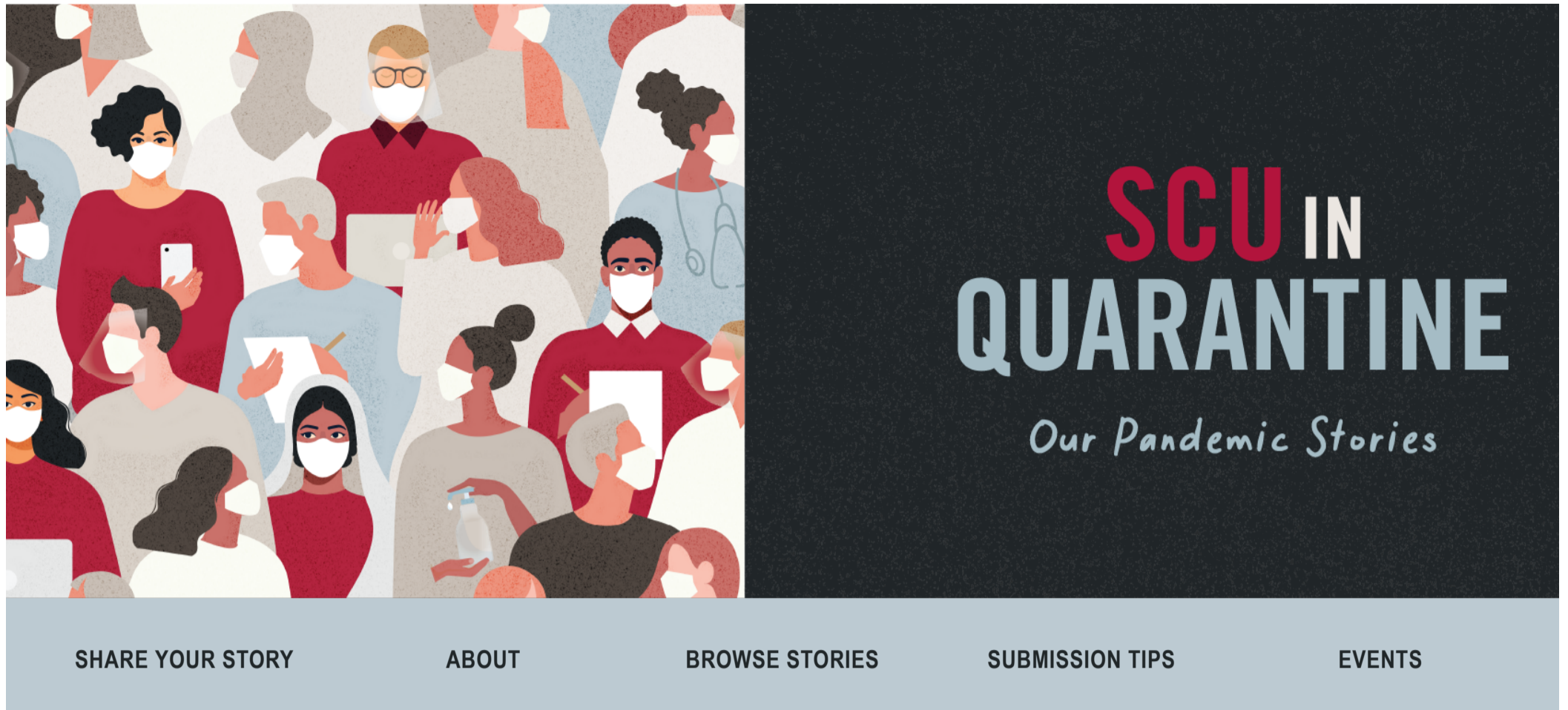


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Learning to Pay Attention

Anonymous

Before the first quarantine order came in March 2020, I had a rhythm going, like everyone else: going to work, eating dinner with my husband, then maybe a hike or shopping on the weekends. It felt predictable, like I was swimming with the current toward the inevitable—kids, maybe a house, etc. But underneath, the current felt wrong. My marriage had been in trouble for years, but I had run out of options and ideas for how to fix it. We'd tried everything, from psychiatrists to counseling. He was unable to make intentional and much-needed changes in his life, and I was deeply unhappy, thoroughly addicted to distraction.

As the pandemic dragged on, it felt like we were in one long, never ending argument, and underneath it all, for me, ran a current of intense fear. Would he ever keep a job? Was it my duty to be the sole breadwinner for us as well as producing the children he often asked for? The pressure felt like how I imagined COVID might feel in my chest: dark, squeezing, heavy. A different kind of illness.

I don't know that I would ever have actually made a change but for the long hours of soul searching I was able to do that summer, out of my routine, the pandemic pushing me past my comfort zone, world events giving me more perspective. I grew in my job, tried new recipes, read, took long walks. I started paying attention to the things that were working in my life. In September, I decided to take a tiny step: I'd look, just look for another space to live for a couple of months to give my husband and me a break from each other.

The day I walked into the tiny, 400 square foot cottage, with its powder blue walls, the sunlight dappling the floor, I cried with relief and happiness. Having my own space, a place to be at peace with my own thoughts and feelings that I didn't have to censor to get through the day, was incredible. It felt like crawling out from under a heavy cave into a sunlit field. I'd never imagined it would feel this good. Three months in, when the time I'd meant to stay in my cottage was up, I realized there was no going back.

Today, I'm intensely grateful for this second chance, this new path. I have a cat, I regularly walk to the rose garden, and cook for one. At night, I read about co-dependency, about faith, and reworking it, and journal about what I've learned. It is the fullest, least distracted, most authentic version of myself I've ever lived.

So many things about the pandemic and the world events we've lived through have been terrifying and soul-wrenching, but there has been some incredible good that's come of it too. It's both the best and worst thing that could have happened to me. It taught me to pay attention, to trust myself, and to let go.



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