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Jenna Yoshimi

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SCU IN QUARANTINE

Our Pandemic Stories

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The Amorphous Threat

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Student

Reading the words “my pandemic story” in letters written in bold and underlined on my screen make me feel as if I’m supposed to have discovered this great impressive truth about the world or about myself during the past year when so much has happened. But my habitual “going through the motions” attitude towards life and during big important things leads me here, in this moment at the tail end of a global pandemic staring at a screen and feeling like I have nothing important to say.

I feel like the transformations I have gone through over the past year have been necessary ones, but not necessarily transformations that are exclusive to a pandemic. I mean sure, I spent a good month or two in my childhood home and experienced true shelter-in-place, leaving maybe once a week to go to the grocery store with my mom. I saw the beaches of Hawaii shut down and the streets of Waikiki empty—a feat I don’t think even my grandparents can say they’ve witnessed. I saw the beginnings of reversing the effects of climate change on my beautiful home; cleaner waterfalls and greener valleys and more pristine beaches. But that didn’t feel like my story.

While all of this was happening, I was tearing myself from my bed at 5 in the morning to attend a Zoom class happening at 8 a.m. in California. I was taking my first course in organic chemistry, finishing linear algebra while at the same time leading a school club. My daily story consisted of signing out of class and immediately cuddling my childhood dog who I had missed dearly during my time in California. It was interrupting countless FaceTimes and Zoom meetings shushing those same dogs every few minutes. And while it doesn’t seem important enough, these were my moments.

When it was no longer sustainable to ask my body to operate at unreasonable hours, I packed up and moved back to Santa Clara county, the place we’d vacated nearly a year prior and home to one of the first deaths from COVID-19. At the time we moved in during January 2021, the United States had reached half a million deaths, there were no formal announcements about emergency vaccine approval, and the U.S. government was literally nearly torn apart by domestic terrorists storming the Capitol. But that was not my story either.

My moment was living in my first rental home, signing my first lease agreement and dealing with the stressors of living with one’s partner full time and having three college roommates. My moment was managing social anxiety, battling the same depression I’d dealt with since high school and always, always attending Zoom meetings. This narrative, though it may seem to be the one we want to preserve for posterity, doesn’t seem like any big, profound moment; this is just the every day toil of a person who lived through the pandemic. If you pressed me, though, and I had to choose, then I’d say my favorite moment was dancing, literally dancing to my first vaccine appointment even though it made me late for my analytical chemistry midterm. It was leaving the vaccine clinic feeling like I’d personally exacted the end of this big amorphous threat we’ve battled and, we must remember, will soon conquer.

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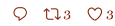
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