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Longwood: Life during COVID-19

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### **Pandemic Journal - English 400 Final Essay**

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## Dear 2020, Here's What I Learned

Ah, 2020,  
Oh how you tricked me.

Going into this year and this semester I anticipated the usual college struggles of difficult assignments, late nights doing way too much homework for a 2-credit class, and then trying to figure out how to pay for everything. But with such a nice, OCD-pleasing number and plenty of humorous memes to encourage an optimist like me, I expected this year to be full of excitement. I was certainly not prepared for the worldwide panic and confusion that came with the development of COVID-19.

My situation does not entirely fit the usual student model. Being married and renting our own house, my wife and I are both education majors at Longwood. I am also a few years older, having transferred in with an associate degree in engineering and started filling my résumé with various work experiences before pursuing a bachelor's. When preparing for this spring semester I carefully planned out my schedule with study times and lunch breaks, to ensure my schedule could flow smoothly. I intentionally did not choose any online classes because I know it is much more difficult for me to learn and stay on top of things when I do not have a regularly scheduled class to have some face-to-face time with my professor. Needless to say, when classes were shifted to all online my schedule and ability to keep on track was thrown out the window. Even after the initial chaos of professors trying to figure out how to adjust assignments to still meet the course objectives, the last few weeks of the semester flew by in a raging turmoil of meaninglessness. Instead of continuing my education and expanding my knowledge in my field of study, most of my courses were reduced to a series of assignments with little instruction. I found myself scrambling to complete pointless assignments that just reiterated material that was covered in the first half of the semester. I honestly don't think I learned anything academically in the last few weeks, but since it was mostly a blur I may simply have not realized it yet. What I did end up learning was several new health precautions and information about how medical organizations around the world handle potential epidemics.

On top of the academic transition, there was some life changes as well. My in-laws do in-home elderly care and with the stay-at-home order in Virginia they would not have any of the other employees to help spread out the responsibilities. To help them out we packed up a bunch of stuff and moved up to stay with them. This meant we now had two homes to care for with a driving distance between that made simple tasks like mowing a bit more complex. In addition to the standard life obligations, we also ended up planning and running a wedding. My sister-in-law and her fiancé had been planning to get married already, but the closures across the country meant the venue was no longer available, and the large gathering was prohibited. With the immediate family alone, we found ourselves already at the ten-person limit. So, after much adjusting and consideration of the opportunities available, we decided to run the wedding

ourselves. This meant my wife suddenly got to learn as much as she could about professional photography in three days, and I got to run and officiate the ceremony! (See picture below)

Before they got married though, they were still trying to find a place they could live. With social distancing guidelines in place it was making their apartment search quite difficult. We have some friends who owned an unfinished above garage apartment though, who generously offered to let them stay there until things clear up, so we jumped into construction mode and spent the next couple weeks installing flooring, tiles, heating and air conditioning, cabinets, and shelves to make a livable space for them. We got it ready in the nick of time and the wedding day arrived. We ended up planning a small wedding streamed online for roughly 200 friends and family to still attend virtually. It was certainly not what any of us expected a few months ago, but it was still a joyous occasion and a unique experience.



*Our humble wedding ceremony. Photo credit: My beautiful wife <3*

Amidst the wedding planning, the various trips back and forth, and the continuous onslaught of homework, my wife and I found our sleep schedule and daily routines becoming very irregular. To compensate, we tried to make a habit of doing some yoga or working out in some form so that we stay active, as well as find new, healthier recipes to make. As we became suddenly antisocial by default to follow the guidelines, we found it took even more effort to stay in contact with friends and family. This made us appreciate the people God has brought into our lives a bit more, and also caused us to think more about what was really important in the long run. Even though we still want to graduate on time and do well with our education, we found we had much less motivation on the individual assignments as they seemed less and less important. Instead, we valued the phone calls, the celebrations, the late-night conversations, and the little ways we could serve and care for others. As we recognized more how limited the

time we have with our parents and other important individuals in our life, we sought to make the most of each moment, even if that meant making some small temporary sacrifices.

I guess having our plans all changed and life shaken up has turned out to be a good thing after all. I know this is still a tragic time for many, but in the bigger picture I still like to look for the silver lining.

So thank you 2020 and COVID-19,

for showing me more about valuing the important things in life.