

Memories of COVID-19

by Parker Kellman

*In January, February, and March of 2020,
the coronavirus began to spread around the world.*

In the weeks following me hearing about the coronavirus in March, my life was slowly changing, as news and worries started trickling into Mill Valley from around the world. I remember my early knowledge of the coronavirus as fragments of information coming from many different sources.

The first time I heard about the coronavirus was in my core class, in sixth grade. Towards the middle of the week, my class was casually discussing various topics when the conversation turned to the closure of schools in the Northwestern United States. The cause was a virus, but I did not learn much more at that time, only that it had come from cruise ships.

Later that week, in the same class, we learned that the coronavirus was spreading southward, and some schools in California were starting to close. The class speculated that the encouragement of hand washing that the school was already advertising might give way to more serious precautions, but I sincerely doubted that the virus would become prevalent enough in California for that.

After school that day, when I got home, my mother told me about an article that she had read, which called the virus COVID-19. The article stated that it had originated in Asia and had already been affecting that region of the world for some time.

Throughout that week and the next, the school began practicing some minor precautions against the virus. Hand sanitizer and washing hands were encouraged more than ever, and posters went up in the bathrooms about how to wash your hands properly.

This was especially problematic for me because I had braces, and I needed to keep rubber bands in my mouth almost all day. I would have to put my hands in my mouth to get them out so I could eat, and that was not entirely sanitary at that time. My family discussed a solution, and we decided I would keep my bands in while I was eating snacks and just eat small bits of food, such as crushed-up Cheese-Its, that would not pop them out of place. Additionally, before and after lunch, I would wash my hands extra thoroughly, for I would have to take my bands out to eat bigger pieces of food, like a bite of turkey sandwich.

At this time, around Mill Valley, people were preparing while I was in school. I heard that many people were buying toilet paper and non-perishable food in quantities that depleted the stores. Hand sanitizer was also on high demand, and every time I went in or out of my Academic Support class, I would use some. For an assignment in that class, I wrote a paper about the ineffectiveness of hand sanitizer compared to soap, not knowing that hand sanitizer would, in about a year, become one of the most used items at my middle school.

All in all, precautions against and news of COVID-19 were slowly trickling into my life during the month of March in 2020.

On March 13, 2020, my school district announced a temporary closure of in-person schooling. Below are the events surrounding this day.

The closure of schools in the Mill Valley School District was announced on Friday, the 13th of March. That Friday was a staff development day, so I did not go to school anyway, nor did I have any schoolwork. After the weekend, however, that changed.

During the two weeks that we were going to stay at home, my teachers posted optional assignments for the students to do, which were graded with a credit/no credit system. I opted to do the assignments for every class, and they shaped my life for the rest of the school year, just as school would in more usual times. I sat in my room for hours with my folders and papers around me, doing work.

Each day, my math teacher made a video and assigned us a Google doc with instructions of what worksheets to do, what videos to watch, and other mathematical activities. In this way I was introduced to Khan Academy, which I used to study for my seventh grade math class too.

My Language Arts and Social Studies teacher always assigned her students 30 minutes of reading and some social studies related activities. After students stopped coming to campus, we began studying Ancient Greece, and that study lasted the rest of the year.

For science, my teacher made videos showing what we were to do for each day in our science packet. We wrapped up our unit on convection currents and heat and started learning about climate change. In addition, every day, we continued the tradition of doing a DQ, or "Daily Question," about what we were learning.

Weekly, my art teacher posted an art project for us to complete at home. We were encouraged to add enough effort and detail to make the project last about 60 minutes in the whole week before we took a photo of it and turned it in. This allowed us to use new mediums, like fruit and vegetables, that we wouldn't have had access to at school.

My P.E. teacher, however, was more flexible. She just had her students do logs of our physical activity over the week and occasional assignments to record their diet or complete a word search. I sometimes combined P.E with other activities, doing exercise while watching a social studies video, for example.

At first, I did not have a schedule for all this work, and I randomly checked Google Classroom for assignments from my teachers. My mom made a schedule for my sister and then one for me. I did math, then science, then took a break. Art and P.E came before lunch, and Language Arts and Social Studies came after. This structure persisted until the end of the school year.

Overall, the school's closure on March 13th marked the end of my traditional school year in 2020. It also signified the beginning of a new learning experience that was adapted to the challenges presented by COVID-19. Each class took these adaptations in a different way, but common themes permeated the learning methods of every class.

How My Family Prepared

My family did not go to extreme lengths to prepare for the pandemic, nor did they buy excess consumables during the lockdown. However, my family did make some changes to their grocery shopping. They also adapted new habits for restocking supplies, such as sanitation materials, masks, and the daily meals.

Reed, my dad, did all of the grocery shopping for my household during the coronavirus pandemic, and he picked the groceries up when we ordered them from Whole Foods through Amazon. In the early stages of the lockdown, he also shopped for my grandparents. He mostly shopped from Whole Foods, and that store usually had everything that we needed. In theory, he was to buy larger portions of food and shop less, but often the grocery lists would be incomplete or my grandparents wanted something obscure, like cashew ice cream. If that happened, he would have to go to another store later that day to get the food he did not obtain. My family did not sanitize the groceries he bought, but we did try to avoid touching the packaging.

In addition to grocery shopping, my dad would go to stores to buy other daily necessities, like paper towels and toothpaste. These would usually come from Costco. Hand sanitizer was not something that he would regularly buy, because most of my family rarely used it. My mom, my sister, and I almost never went out into places other people would be, and we used previous stores of hand sanitizer and hand wipes for when we did. Soap, however, we frequently needed to restock, for we washed our hands more often. Also, I sometimes would wash them and forget I had a moment later and wash my hands again.

Toilet paper was never a problem for my family, because we ordered our supply in large quantities online. This tradition had started before the pandemic, because the

toilet paper company we ordered from used more sustainable and environmentally friendly materials, and they donated some of their profits to help build toilets where they were needed. This was lucky because my dad reported how the fear of running out of toilet paper had depleted the shelves.

The reason my sister and I did not go outside that much at first was primarily because of masks. I had seen people wearing them and the fear of carbon dioxide inhalation was on my mind whenever I thought about wearing one. The first time we got masks was from our grandparents, who had acquired them from one of their friends who had a sewing machine and was making them to donate to the community. We did not wear them for a while after we got them, but when we started to go outside more often we ordered more masks from a clothing store so we wouldn't have to wear a dirty one each day. Once we got used to them, wearing the masks seemed natural, so we went outside more and ordered more masks.

Originally, during the pandemic, my dad did all the cooking, and we did not purchase take-out. As time progressed, we started to order food from restaurants more frequently, until we were eating an abnormal amount of take-out. Also, we often ate outside with our grandparents on the weekends, and my dad would usually make a special dinner then. I cooked less than usual, because I was so busy. I only cooked one meal during the whole pandemic, and I had made that one many times before.

All things considered, my family did not prepare for the coronavirus lockdown as if it were a natural disaster like some people. We already had many things necessary for living in a lockdown state. However, we did have to alter our habits to conform to the new requirements in place for safety, as did most people.

Work and School

During the coronavirus lockdown, work and school were altered dramatically for certain members of my family, and less so for others. My parents both kept working at their same jobs, at home, while my sister and I did assignments for school.

My dad was affected the least by the pandemic in terms of his job. He already had been working at home, on his computer, before COVID, and only went to his office in San Francisco on infrequent occasions. He worked making sure that a nonprofit, government-funded company met the government's regulations and restrictions for how to spend their funding. Although his work was not as altered as my mom's, the people with disabilities that his company helped would usually go to daycare during most of the day, which could not happen during COVID-19. This forced him to work for longer to contrive legal solutions to help them during that time.

My dad also would help my sister and me with our schoolwork, because his schedule was more flexible than my mom's. Even when we went to a hybrid schedule

after the summer, he would often remind my sister to attend Art or P.E zooms, or help her with her schoolwork. He also made our lunches most of the time.

My mom, on the other hand, had very dramatic changes in her job because she was a teacher. Our house did not have the necessary quiet and non-distracting space for her to do zooms, so she went out into our Eurovan when she needed to work. She ran an extension cord from our house so she could use a fan, a WiFi router, and her computer. She added private comments to all of her student's work, and created hundreds of assignments in a day so she would not have to do them later. In addition, she used her technological expertise to help the other teachers at her elementary school, making her day very busy.

For my sister, who was in third grade, school consisted of two optional zooms a week. One was for homework support and the other was to stay in contact with her classmates. She did around a dozen assignments that lasted from three minutes to one hour, meaning that she had a lot more school work than usual, and more even than me. For example, she had to watch her teacher read a read-aloud book and answer questions about it each day.

I did many assignments for my classes in an orderly fashion, determined to go by my schedule. If I had any special assignments that would require me to go to a specific location or do an activity for a long period of time, I did those after all my other work was done. When my teachers started posting zoom links, I attended the mandatory ones and a few others, but I mostly did not participate in zoom, because I did not see much reason to.

Throughout my family, the pandemic affected us in similar ways in terms of work and school, such as forcing us to use technology for everything and making us stay at home. Also, the pandemic affected us all in slightly different ways, so it is important to realize that everyone's experience was different.

Quarantine Hobbies and Exercise

During the quarantine, I picked up several new hobbies that I had not been doing before, such as planning for a native plant garden and playing tetherball. In addition to these, I also picked up on hobbies that I used to do but had ceased doing for a while, like jumping on our trampoline and writing my story.

I planned for a native plant garden by using a recent acquisition of mine, a book of native plants called *California Native Plants for the Garden*, to make a slideshow for my mom. I added a picture of each native plant that would be good for our garden, recorded the amount of water and sun it required, and noted its preferred soil. Then I showed the slideshow to my mother and my grandparents, so they could decide which plants they wanted for the garden. I also took pictures of the sun at different times of

day, so we could find out what quantity of sun shone on specific spots in a day and determine what plants would do best there.

In addition, my family also purchased a tetherball so that we could play together. My mom recommended it because she had fond memories of playing tetherball at school in her childhood. The tetherball came much later than we had anticipated, but once it had arrived we had plentiful fun playing with each other. We played for hours each day to get our exercise, and I would play against myself if no one else was available.

Another way I got exercise was using our trampoline. My sister and I both jumped on the trampoline together for exercise before the tetherball arrived. We would train for a game we called Super Bounce Ball. We were campaigning to host the championship game before the pandemic hit. In Super Bounce Ball, there was someone who dodged the ball and someone who tried to kick the ball at them. They both would have to bounce at all times during the game which ended once the time limit was reached or one person fell over from exhaustion. Each player would each earn points for dodging away from or kicking the ball, and the person with the most points at the end of the game would win.

Additionally, I restarted writing my fantasy story, *The Uprising*, during quarantine. I had started on the first chapter a while earlier, but had gotten distracted and left off. I revised everything I had written and added around three more chapters during quarantine. However, between exercising, school, and various other activities, I did not have much time to work on this story.

These hobbies came together to help me fill the cracks in my day during quarantine, and they aided me in getting through the difficult times of COVID-19.

Missing Family and Friends

My family did not have a social bubble for most of COVID-19, so we were unable to interact with just about anyone in person for about nine months. After a while of FaceTiming, my sister and I started to participate in continual socially distant interactions with our friends almost every weekend.

My grandparents eventually started randomly popping up at our house almost every day while they were on walks, and they insisted that we come over for dinner. We did not think that they were interacting with anyone else at that time, so we formed a social bubble with them. Once they got their vaccines, I felt better about that.

My sister would FaceTime her many friends almost all day, and she saw them in her classes on zoom. She also started doing social distancing events and classes with them, including an outdoor dance class.

My dad only saw his friends in person during COVID a few times, but he played video games and watched movies with them almost every week.

However, I believe that most of my family was lucky to have this much interaction, because my mom did not see her friends at all, due to the fact that she was so busy.

Altogether, most of my family started to see people we had not seen and do in-person interactions in increasing amounts around mid-December in 2020.

COVID and My Body

My internal clock did not change due to COVID for the most part. Neither when I woke up, nor when I went to sleep had been impacted to any extreme degree.

During the pandemic, I woke up around 7:20 AM rather than 7:06. This difference of a few minutes was due to the tiring and stressful times. I stayed in bed for another 15-30 minutes, not trying to get back to sleep but enjoying the comfort of my blankets and steeling my resolve to get up. The lack of difference in my sleep time was no doubt due, in part, to the fact that my bearded dragon, Pogo, had an ultraviolet light that was scheduled to come on at 7:00 AM.

In the beginning of the pandemic, when I went to sleep was entirely unaffected. I turned my lights out and stopped reading at 9:00 PM, like usual, and fell asleep some time after that, which felt neither unusually short nor unusually long. Once I was well into the pandemic, my parents allowed me to stay up later. At that time, I read until 9:20 PM.

In terms of sleep, the pandemic had less effect on me than other people. One reason I did not change my habits was to preserve as much normalcy as possible during the pandemic, in an attempt to lessen the chaos of a chaotic time.

Travel, Celebrations, and Holidays

During the coronavirus pandemic, my family had to cancel trips and lessen the intensity of celebrations. We missed a trip to Hawaii, and my parents vacation to Colorado was canceled. Thanksgiving and Christmas were not as festive as they usually were, and I did not participate in anything related to Halloween. Also, my sister's birthday was not as extravagant as usual. This also was the case with the rest of my family's birthdays.

My family was planning to take a two-week trip to Hawaii during the summer after COVID hit. We had traded a trip to Tahoe with someone who had a coupon for a trip to Hawaii, but we did not use it because we would have had to be in quarantine the whole time we were there, so the coupon expired.

Additionally, my parents were going on a trip to Colorado to see concerts by bands like Rainbow Kitten Surprise. Due to COVID-19, their trip got delayed multiple times, and all the concerts got canceled except for the Rainbow Kitten Surprise concert.

However, trips were not the only events that were altered for my family due to COVID-19. During Thanksgiving, my grandparents insisted on having my family and our cousins outside their house for lunch, to keep up the tradition of getting together for Thanksgiving. We usually went to the beach for Thanksgiving, however, so it was not exactly as they had hoped. We had a relatively small Thanksgiving meal, consisting of turkey, buns, sweet potatoes, and brussel sprouts. I also baked a chocolate tart for dessert. Before the meal, I paced around inside, away from the gathering of people and the smoke that came from the outdoor heater.

Fortunately, the traditions my family practiced on Christmas were not as greatly diminished. All that was different was that my family and my cousins both had separate sessions at my grandparents' house, instead of all being together. Additionally, I did not perform my traditional magic show, but that was due to my lack of practice and not my lack of audience.

I largely ignored Halloween. I did not dress up in a costume for school, although I was planning to make one. I did not go trick-or-treating because that was unsafe and discouraged by health advisors. I also did not participate in the Halloween activities at the Homestead Community Center like usual. Other than a few candies my parents bought for me, I did not participate in Halloween.

My grandparents insisted on celebrating my parents' birthdays at their house like usual. We only celebrated with cake and a meal however. My sister's birthday was much the same, except we celebrated at our house and had more presents. My birthday was also similar.

The restrictions to stop the spread of the pandemic affected many things, but the cancellation, postponement, or changing of significant events and holidays was a notable, if not major, impact of the coronavirus. My family's plans and celebrations were greatly affected by the changes brought about by COVID-19. These effects may be small in the grand scheme of things, but the significant days are the ones that we remember the most, so the effects of the pandemic on holidays and birthdays will be remembered for a long time to come.

Favorite Shows, Movies, and Games

I discovered some new shows, games, and movies during COVID-19, such as *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, *The Dragon Prince*, *Ctrl*, *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Othello*.

My mom collected suggestions from her students for shows and books my sister and I could watch and read. One such suggestion was *The Dragon Prince*, which we watched. On a long car ride, my sister started watching a similar series of shows with a similar style: *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. Later, I started sporadically watching some episodes while she was in the middle of the series.

Ctrl was a game we acquired for the New Year's Day of 2021, so that we could play it while we ate our homemade pretzels that night. *Ctrl* is a strategy game, in which each player tries to dominate a cube with their color by the end of the game.

My family watched the movies titled *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* in quarantine. We watched the extended editions because we had watched the regular versions before. My sister, my father, and I all had independently read or listened to the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy before we watched the movies, and my family listened to *The Hobbit* while on a road trip before the coronavirus.

My family played *Othello* because my mom had liked that game in her childhood, and she forced everyone else to play multiple games against her. She was very proficient at the strategy of *Othello*, and she won many games before I finally defeated her. *Othello* was originally the game my family was going to play for New Year's Day, but we could not find it in the store we checked in, so we obtained it later.

These games, as well as my other hobbies, kept me entertained throughout the pandemic.

Returning to In-Person Schooling

I returned to the Mill Valley Middle School campus on December 11th of 2020. It was the third day of our new “3 by 3” hybrid schedule. The first two days of the school week were done by connecting with our class via an app called Zoom. This pattern continued every week up until April 12th of the next year. On Monday and Tuesday, the students in the hybrid model had the three periods that they were doing that half of the trimester on Zoom. For the next few days of the week, we went to school to learn.

Monday was an “A day” meaning we had our “A” periods, from one to three. I had Social Studies, then Technology, and finally, after I had finished lunch, P.E. I often had headaches on Monday. This was because each week, Monday was the first time in six days that I had spent incredible amounts of time on a screen. On Mondays, I had very little time to do homework because I had to complete it all after school, but this was not too much of a problem because I had my three classes with the least homework.

On Tuesday, I had my “B” classes. These were the same as my “A” classes, but my P.E class was replaced with art. I did not get as many headaches on Tuesdays, although I was on a screen more. This was because I had a Dungeons and Dragons class online on Tuesday, which ran from 4:00 to 6:00. This gave me less time to do homework on Tuesday than on Monday, but I had time to get that done on the next day before I went to school.

Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays each week were very different. These days I went to school on campus. Each day I would join the whole-school meeting, Panther Community, as usual. After that, however, I would work independently on assignments until lunch. This was because I was in the PM cohort, meaning I was on campus from 12:10 to 2:50. The AM kids went to school while I was doing work at home. I wished I was in the AM cohort because once I had finished school, I could do my work and have more leftover time for leisure. The school promised a switch of cohorts many times, but it never happened.

After lunch, I walked to school. I soon perfected the art of timing my arrival so I did not have to wait around off campus until I was allowed to enter. In school, the schedule shifted. I had two classes per day. First I had my 1A and 2A classes, which were Social Studies and Tech, on Monday. On Tuesday, I had my 3A and 1B classes, which were P.E and Social Studies. On Friday, I had 2B and 3B, Tech and Art. Yellow dots were painted to give socially distanced places to stand during the times between these classes. We all wore masks and were required to sanitize our hands whenever we entered or exited a classroom. In addition, our parents would need to fill out health screenings of us before we could go to school.

Midway through the section of the trimester devoted to periods one, two, and three, after winter break, Tech switched out for Engineering. I had a split Tech and Engineering class, taught by one teacher who instructed his students in the use of apps,

and another, who taught us about engineering and the use of lego robots. Instead of alternating with the A/B schedule, I had each of them for half of a trimester.

After the first section of the trimester had been completed, I switched to having a more intense section of periods four, five and six. Instead of period one, I had period four, Science. Instead of having Tech or Engineering, I had Math. I studied under a new math teacher because the old one was teaching students who were doing EDL (extended distance learning). She taught her classes from Zoom on all days of the week, and let her assistant teacher handle classroom matters. Instead of having Art or P.E, I had Language Arts. This switch in classes increased my homework load dramatically, but because I had lots of time before school, this was not an extreme problem.

Once the trimester was over, plans started to develop to have a full week of in-person schooling. Once these were almost agreed upon, the school experienced a crazy three week period from March 15th to April second in which we had one and a half weeks of periods one through three, and one and a half weeks of period four to six, the last two days of which devoid of assistance from teachers. This was managed by splitting the middle week in half, so the in-person days were of periods four to six, and the Zoom ones were of periods one to three. My Tech and Engineering periods switched daily to keep the number of in-person days and the number of Zoom days the same.

After spring break, the new schedule started. We had periods one to three each day and ate lunch at school, spaced six feet apart. The guidelines for seating in the classroom changed from maintaining a distance of six feet between each student to three feet between them, so everyone who participated in in-person schooling went to school at the same time. After the periods switched again, the amount of homework I had skyrocketed, but this time, I had less time to do it. This meant I had to do homework when I would be asleep in the other rotation.

All these changes made the hybrid and full in-person periods of school a very chaotic time.

Contracting COVID-19

I do not know anyone who, to the extent of my knowledge, got COVID-19. Additionally, I had never contracted COVID-19. My family and I had gotten tested for the coronavirus once, and my mother, being a teacher, was required to be tested many times, but our tests never came out positive. I was, however, worried that my grandparents would contract the virus, because they were not very concerned about the guidelines and liked to have a lot of people over to visit. Fortunately, I have heard no news that they had been infected, and they, due to their age, were vaccinated earlier on than most other people. Thus, I did not know anyone with COVID-19.

The World Begins to Return to “Normal”

As the world was returning to “normal,” I looked forward to visiting museums and zoos again. Also, I wanted to spend more time with my family and friends. These things were limited by the restrictions on activities to help stop the spread of COVID, but as more people were getting vaccinated, the restrictions became unnecessary.

I stopped going to the San Francisco Zoo awhile before COVID hit, so as of May of 2021, I had not been there for about three years. In addition, going to museums like the Academy of Sciences was a fun part of my summers and weekends. In the summer of 2020, I did not go to a single museum or similar place.

I missed out on being with my family and friends due to COVID-19. Usually, annually or biannually, My family and I would visit my grandparents on the east coast of the U.S.A. During the pandemic, we took a break from our family tradition of going to a small island near my grandparents’ house with them, and they did not come over to visit. Instead, my sister and I read books over FaceTime with our grandparents, but it was not the same. In addition, I had not experienced as much quality time with my friends as usual, even though we had play dates more often. Being socially distanced came with limitations in activities and fun.

At the end of the school year, in June of 2021, I was looking forward to performing my old hobbies during a more normal summer.