

A Silver Lining

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I know I haven't written anything in here in a while, but it's either this or lay in bed with my phone looking at NFL draft pick grades just to get more pissed off at the Dolphins. It's after midnight and I have a lot of thoughts running through my mind, so what the hell.

Before I begin, let me set the record straight: I hate the Coronavirus. I haven't left my neighborhood in a month, I haven't seen any of my friends since I got home, and it singlehandedly ruined the end of my first year in college, my summer plans, and quite possibly a few of my new friendships. I can't text Bryan and Justin anymore asking to meet in front of Wyatt to play football. I won't grab another shrimp burrito at Taco Mama with Max and Rohit.

I don't get to stay up way too late with Anthony arguing about Aristotle or Elton John. My Maymester with Paul to Greece and the business program I got accepted to both got cancelled. I had also just returned from my first ASB, where I made several great friends. Two of those great friends also happen to be seniors, and unfortunately the Coronavirus stripped from them their final semester of fun and relaxation. I'm excited to keep in touch with them, but, realistically, I know damn well that I'll probably never see them again and, in a year or so, the only contact we'll have is liking each other's Instagram posts.

In addition to the massive emotional strain, however, the Coronavirus outbreak has also hit me on a financial and physical level. What little money I invested got crushed as the market crashed. Also, I'm painfully aware that some of my favorite local restaurants won't be able to survive the financial onslaught. A senior fellow at the Harvard Business School estimates that 20-30% of small businesses could fail because of financial complications with COVID-19. I also don't have a job, and, with a real unemployment rate higher than it has been since the Great Depression at 20.6%, I see no solution to my boredom or frustrating lack of money. So, yes, I hate the Coronavirus, and I hate it for a lot of reasons. So why the disclaimer?

As it turns out, with the inability to go outside and class taking place only once every two days, I realized that I had a lot of time on my hands. I've tried to spend as much of that time being productive and improving myself as possible. I've continued studying the guitar and I've started learning the ukulele. I've finally started to make a dent in my ever-growing reading list. I also read that first-person shooter games supposedly improve parallel processing skills, so I dusted off *Ghosts* and *Black Ops II*. I spent some time hashing out my schedule for the next few years and thinking about what minors I could pick up and which careers I could pursue. Inevitably, though, I still find myself sitting around all the time, from right when I wake up to when I hit that lull in the middle of the day to when I should be asleep but instead stare at the ceiling. With all that time doing nothing, though, I've been able to spend a little bit of it reflecting.

Although I'm not one of those people who mechanically insist that "Everything happens for a reason!" to cope with any and every inexplicable tragedy, I try to always find some kind of silver lining when faced with an unfortunate challenge or misfortune. I genuinely believe I can learn something valuable from each novel or difficult experience I encounter, and I find comfort in finding that something valuable, no matter the shape it may take. So, now, I will say again what I

have said before: I hate the Coronavirus. *But*, I have learned a valuable something about myself in its lonely aftermath.

In a recent attempt to become a more informed citizen, I uncharacteristically decided to read the news one day after class a few weeks back. I wasn't expecting to see much uplifting content or general positivity, but even with my shockingly low expectations I was disappointed. In addition to the mounting death tolls and global economic collapse, the world has uncovered an unforeseen consequence of quarantine, growing and metastasizing like a malignant tumor across our deteriorating planet: domestic violence. Much like during the Christmas season and summer months, reports of abuse have risen dramatically because shattered families are spending more time together. Forced to stay in their homes without an escape, women and children around the world are suffering from a worldwide spike in "intimate terrorism," a more striking and more appropriate term for domestic violence. Abuse hotlines are perpetually ringing, with the number of calls doubling in Lebanon and Malaysia and tripling in China. Also, Google has reported a "75% increase in online searches for help with domestic violence." Innocent people around the world are trapped in their private hells, while I get to quarantine with four of my favorite people alive. I'm not a particularly over-emotional person by any means, but after seeing those numbers, I closed my laptop, laid down on my bed, and damn near cried.

It was one of those immensely frustrating moments of tantalizingly perfect mental clarity censured by an inconvenient yet near complete motor breakdown. Like losing an argument about something you're passionate about when you know you're right, but instead of articulating your thoughts with poise and conviction, your body shakes, your face gets hot, your voice cracks, and your throat starts to close. But, like winning that argument in your head in the shower a few hours later, it's always easier to find the right words and coherence after having some time to reflect.

I love my family. It can be so easy to take such a simple statement for granted sometimes, and it can be even easier to forget my roots when I'm with my friends, on top of the world, with a blood-alcohol concentration that could rival a Viking's. Regardless, though, seeing the sobering statistics of rising domestic violence reminded me to treasure the people I care about the most, even if it only means deleting *Clash Royale* and finally setting a Daily Reminder on Instagram. Every night when I go to bed, I look forward to waking up and seeing the faces of my parents and sisters. Having lived with them for so long, I find it hard to imagine anything different and it's even harder to remember that I won a lottery I didn't even buy a ticket for. I wish there was a less cliché way of saying I have the best family in the world, but I haven't found it yet.

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A violent smack of my head against my wooden desk at some point last night told me I should go to bed. My head still hurts a little which is probably not good, but I'm not quite finished saying everything I need to say. The Coronavirus reminded me to cherish each moment I get to spend with my family, the only people I've actually seen in weeks. Just as importantly, though, quarantine reminded me to reconnect with the other people I care about and better appreciate the time I spend with the people I haven't seen in weeks.

Ever since I got home a month and a half ago, I've been listening to even more music than I usually do, and one of my favorite groups recently has been the Irish rock band Kodaline. Last week, I was up late in my room finishing my Oceanography homework as I shuffled Kodaline's

Spotify profile, and one of my favorite songs came on first: “I Wouldn’t Be.” The song is about how the narrator has grown into the man he has become because of the love and guidance he received from those around him. However, with the quarantine offering new context for the lyrics, one line in particular struck an especially resonant chord in me: “I wouldn’t be who I am / Without the people / We don’t see no more.” Well, I wouldn’t be who I am without the people I don’t see no more. And I really miss them, too.

Looking back on the time since I left school, it’s surprisingly easy for me to see that most of my favorite moments have just been seeing those I care about through shaky webcams or hearing their voices through unreliable microphones. It was calling Anthony to make sure he was awake for course registration and then talking for five minutes about what courses he was going to take. It was watching my grandparents sitting way too close to the camera but smiling and virtually hugging their hearts out when we gave them a call. It was Zooming one of my new ASB friends (who, *by the way*, I was going to ask out until quarantine came and there was no way in hell I was going to try and start a relationship with six months of long-distance) and checking the time after what felt like ten minutes and realizing we’d been talking for five hours. And it was playing cards online with the boys like we did twice a week, every week, all year long. Seeing and hearing the people I miss the most builds an irresistible illusion of normalcy and helps me forget the mounting heartache until I inevitably have to say goodbye.

Fortunately, though, I know I’m not the only sentimental one out there. Last week, a friend of mine who I hadn’t spoken to in a year and half texted me and asked if I had an hour or so to catch up. The week before that, as I was finishing up a season of *Game of Thrones* in my bed, I could hear my dad downstairs laughing out loud with his college buddies about the good old days. It takes two to make a phone call, and so every call I make, every call my sisters make, every call my friends make, and every call their friends make only go through because someone wants to reconnect. People around the world miss each other and we are finding ways to spend time with the people we love and need. In spite of the pain and loneliness, we are reaching out to the people we care about, and, though it’s not quite the same, it’s better than seeing what our horoscopes say about which movies we should watch next.

So, do I hate the Coronavirus? Yes. Do I wish it never happened? Yes. Am I starting to hate the color I painted my walls? Absolutely. But did I find my elusive silver lining? Yeah, I think I did.

Carpe Diem. “Seize the day.” I don’t know how I forgot that the people I love are what make my life worth living and that each second with them is a gift, but I still did anyway. After another six weeks of this, though, I better not forget it again. Coronavirus may not be sympathetic, gentle, or kind. It takes without asking and kills without caring. But it taught me something, so, I guess for me, it could’ve been worse.