

Ben Schuckman (submitted July 3, 2020)

It wasn't the first time I heard of a deadly disease in a country far from here. You don't really think of the impacts of diseases like these because it's not in your backyard. You read the headline of the article as it passes your newsfeed, feel sad for a moment, and then continue with your day. But like a quiet noise in the background, the news of this new disease quickly got louder and louder. No cure, spreading into the US, cases rising, closer and closer to my home.

At first there were rules to just keep washing your hands, no handshakes, and anyone who had traveled abroad should quarantine for 2 weeks. We took this lightly. I had planned on March 14th for a group of friends to come by and go axe throwing and then get dinner. One of my friend's parents had just gotten back from a trip abroad and the rest of us were unsure whether he should come. He ended up coming which when I look back now was a huge risk that we shouldn't have taken. We joked around, drank some coronas, elbowed instead of high-fived and had a good night, yet just a few days later the entire state shut down.

The expectations of the lockdown were originally a few weeks. I thought this wasn't so bad since I get to work from home and have extra time for video games and Netflix. But the weeks went on and the quarantine wasn't let up. The spike in cases but then in deaths continued to climb. Grocery shopping was now an ordeal, let alone the lack of products due to panic buying, but just the idea that you now need to avoid everyone you come into contact with. This hit harder when the CDC finally instructed everyone to wear masks. I remember sitting in my car placing on the mask which I had constructed from a bandana and rubber bands and getting a pit in my stomach. Seeing everyone wear masks throughout the store only solidified this feeling of how much the world is changing.

I am fortunate enough to continue working for my job at home and have not been affected by layoff or pay cuts. Unfortunately, a lot of my friends weren't as lucky. Some work in grocery stores as essential workers and continue to take daily risks every time they go into work. Others have been furloughed or fired due to lack of work. Others struggle to take on responsibilities they didn't before, look for new avenues of revenue, or have been put out of work due to the nature of their job like optometrists and dentists.

My routine pre-pandemic had finally been rounded out. Get up and get ready for the day, drive to work, gym after work, dinner, play some video games and then to bed during the week. Since I had just moved into my own apartment I also planned out as many weekends in advance as I could to gather and hang out with my friends. These plans always gave me something to look forward to when work was stressful or some of my weeks felt monotonous. When the pandemic hit my schedule fell apart. Stay up late then wake up, roll out of bed, and clock into work was now the blurring normal. I tried to do body weight exercises but quickly lost motivation and drive. The act of going to work creates a need to get dressed, get ready, interact with others, signals the start and end of a day. Now I wake up and walk right over to my computer. Somedays I don't even get dressed at all. The days blend in with one another as there isn't anything to distinguish one from the next. Even now I am trying to set more constraints for myself to get back into the habit of having a productive schedule to stick to day by day but it's an ongoing struggle.

I go back home to visit my family once in a while but only when outside and safely socially distancing. My fear is less about contracting the virus myself but somehow spreading it unknowingly to my older at risk parents.

The feeling of the pandemic has shifted over the past few months. Constantly understanding the progression of the virus, how we have worked to try and contain it (and the lack thereof). How a vaccine could be made and what the timeline would look like for it. The real possibility that we may never have a vaccine created. The idea that this was one pandemic and another could strike at anytime. How the world moves forward but how do we psychologically move forward? Every time I go for a walk I cross the street when I see people on the same side of the sidewalk coming towards me down the road. How do we move forward?

My ideas on moving forward would be either the creation of a vaccine that completely prevents a person from contracting COVID-19. Another solution could be producing enough medicine to treat the symptoms the same way you can go to the pharmacy and get medicine for common colds and other illnesses that in the past were more deadly when they couldn't be controlled. For now I'm just trying to create a routine that allows me to continue making progress in a few different aspects of my life like fitness and personal goals. I'm fortunate to still have my job and a roof over my head, but I know others are in a lot worse situations.

If I was telling this story to someone 100 years from now, I'd say to be grateful for the positives in your life because one day you might not have them. Real human connections are the most important thing in life. Technology helps us in connecting but it also takes away something when communicating through a screen. The next time you hear of a deadly disease spreading in a country far from you, ask what you can do to help.