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COVID Chronicles: A Journey of Coping with the Unknown

3/22/20

Today I packed up my dorm as classes are officially canceled for the rest of the semester. Now we make the transition into becoming an online “Zoom University”. I don’t think the severity of what is going on in the world with the virus has hit me yet. I am relatively unscathed by it so far but I know that eventually, I won’t feel this secure and okay. Packing up my dorm felt fine. While I knew it was happening a couple of months prematurely, I still do not feel jolted yet by this “global pandemic.” Maybe it's good that I feel a relative sense of calm. My mom, on the other hand, grieved for me. “This is your last year living in a dorm and with your roommate Estelle,” she said. While I’m not overjoyed about leaving I don’t feel too upset that my dorm experience was cut so short. I guess I know I had a good dorm experience. Coming home early is comforting in a way because I know I will be with my family and not worrying about them from afar. An early goodbye wasn’t the hardest thing to process. There is so much that is unknown right now. It feels good to be home and safe with my family. At least I won’t have to worry about not being able to find toilet paper.



Goodbye Kirk 534. Your big windows will be missed, but your co-ed bathrooms will not.

3/25/20

It is my official third week of being home. I have fallen back into the rhythm of my house and family. It's easy settling back into the daughter and sister role. It's comforting to be home, especially during such a turbulent time. Regrounding myself in my home environment is very easy but I know I will begin to miss the life and freedoms I enjoyed at school. Living in northern Minnesota in the middle of nowhere has become a retreat for me to escape to when the stresses of school and the city become too much. At home, I take walks, enjoy movie nights with my sister, and eat the best home-cooked meals. Up in the woods, it is quiet and isolated no matter what. It is easier to self-isolate due to COVID-19. My life at home hasn't changed drastically. However, I worry about some of the people here not taking the virus seriously because of their political leanings. In rural Minnesota, many people hold highly religious and conservative views. Therefore, where we live, a lot of people have yet to take this pandemic seriously due to Trump constantly claiming it isn't worth sacrificing our economy in order to ensure the safety of workers.

Today, my mom and I went on a walk and I remembered how at peace I feel when present in nature. During this time I've been reflecting on what keeps me grounded when facing

uncertainty. I realized that prior to this pandemic, my life has been very stable. I also realized I have always had what I needed. Although I never experienced extreme poverty, growing up I did see noticeable differences between the kids I went to high school with that came from upper-middle-class families and my family who has always belonged to the lower-middle class.

However, I am grateful that my parents never shielded us from life. I had an understanding of inequality and of our financial state from a young age. Now I find myself thinking of the people I love who do not have it so easy and how these precarious times will only make it harder for them to live since they didn't have much before Coronavirus. I have hope that people I know who may not have a lot of money will be okay. I take comfort in knowing that my family continues to support our community and friends in the ways we can. It may be small, but I feel better about the state of the world when I know we are helping.



A picture from our walk at the Tamarac Wildlife Refuge

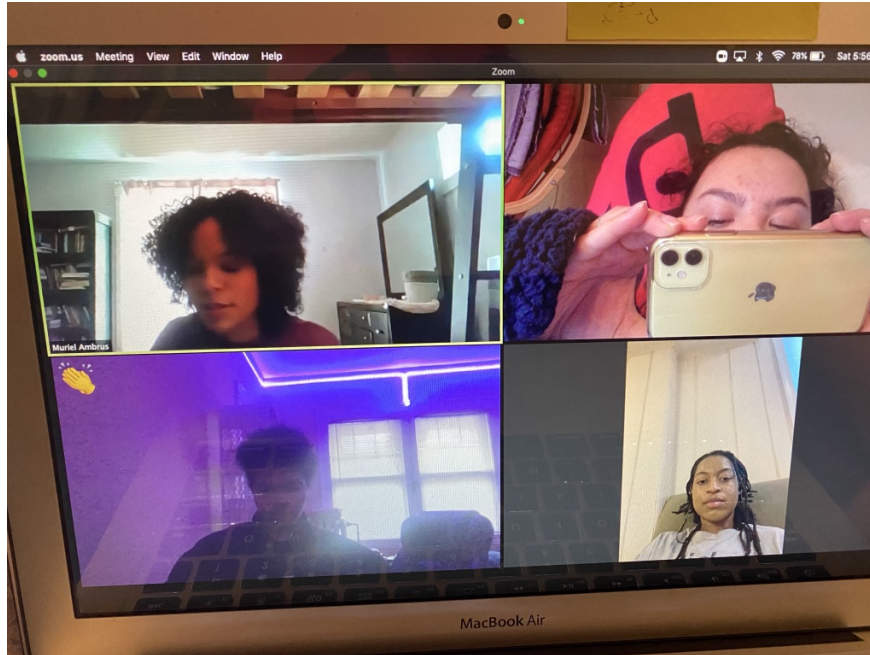
3/30/20

Today marked the first day of online classes. While I now have a lot more time on my hands I still enjoy class meetings. I miss my professors and classmates, therefore, not having the option to be social is a struggle. Classes might be less stressful but also more difficult with all the distractions that my house creates. I am not sure how I will motivate myself to get assignments and final projects done with the news on the pandemic worsening every day. Today I am grateful for the Governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz, who issued a state-wide stay-at-home order on the 27th. Unlike our current President, Governor Walz is staying on top of the issue and listens to experts on how to deal with this pandemic. I feel really sheltered and safe at home. We aren't going out or seeing anyone instead we remain in the bubble that is our house. However, the state

of the rest of the country is not as comforting. While President Trump continues to downplay the issue of Coronavirus by relating it to the seasonal flu, people continue to die.

Sometimes my mind swings from thinking that school will be a good distraction to thinking it will only stress me out more. Although school creates a break from everything else as it provides structure and purpose, it is also ridiculous to expect students to be productive during a global pandemic. On top of the ridiculous notion of productivity, there is an even more ridiculous expectation held by some professors that believe that students can handle the same caliber of work. While many of my professors have drastically changed their syllabus to adapt to our current reality, some have not. It's hard to believe that anyone right now would expect the same rigor out of their students with our school shutting down and students having to quickly move off-campus and go back home. Some students can't even go home due to financial, or safety reasons such as their home country being closed-down like in China.

Meanwhile, other students may be going home to places where family tensions run high and they have to face other stressors such as uncomfortable living situations. Some friends have families that do not fully accept them for being a part of the LGBTQ+ community. In this time it has become even more clear of how unique and special the Macalester campus and community are. Not only is our school a site of rigorous academics but it is also a safe place for many students to express themselves and feel comfortable regardless of their identity. Although I am lucky to belong to a family that is accepting of me no matter what, I know that not everyone has this same privilege. Therefore, I am trying my best to be there for the people who I know are struggling at home. I keep coming back to the things I can do to help myself and others during this time. I know I will feel less helpless and alone if I continue to connect and check-in with the people in my life.



Zoom Call With Friends :)

4/7/20

We are now on week 4 of quarantine. I have gotten used to things but I still have hard days when reality sets in and I realize I can't do the things I normally would. Simple activities like seeing friends, eating at restaurants, or going to class in person are no longer possible. There is no telling when things will return back to "normal" or if they ever can. It's hard not to give in to the hopelessness that is being perpetuated by the media. So much is unknown. However, when I force myself to be present with my family at home, I come to realize that we have so much to do. We keep busy with things that connect us to our culture. For instance, we have begun sugarbush and tapping Maple trees to make maple syrup- a yearly occurrence for us in the spring. Following the seasonal life that surrounds us by being Ojibwe and living in the reservation we "Sugar Bush" in March/April.

This time now is confusing because spring signals a time of socializing, of coming out of our homes and celebrating the end of the school year and the onset of summer with friends and family. However, the Coronavirus has prevented any socializing from occurring. It almost feels like winter again because we are expected to stay in our homes and "hunker down". Now the difference is that we can at least start gardening and being outside. Although I get lost in my

thoughts and ramblings on the virus and the overwhelming fear of it all, I continue to take the time to step outside and feel the earth. I remind myself that while the outside world rages on with uncertainty, I can always find solace in what is known to me.

4/13/20

As the weeks go by, I am struggling more to keep up with school work and my mental health. I keep having an inner dialogue about not being productive enough and not caring about productivity because what is the use right now? I'm constantly torn between wanting to push myself to do well in my studies regardless of the current situation while also knowing that life has never been so scary. I should be using this time to spend it with family and not stress about work. I also keep making routines for myself to have some structure in my day but as hard as I try, I cannot stick to them. One of the hardest obstacles during quarantine is my own obsessive thoughts. It's extremely difficult to not fall into a negative headspace and feel completely out of control. Classes right now feel extremely overwhelming with the added pressure of uncertainty. However, some course materials have helped me to analyze the world and create some distance between the high emotions that the news seems to run on these days. Rather, my studies have provided me with some tools to see through the obvious and recognize the deeper patterning and tactics of fear and outrage that seem ever-present. I can tell that all of this is beginning to wear down my parents more. I had to remind my mom to only watch the news once a day because we all become overstimulated by the never-ending influx of information.

We recently did a reading in my American Studies Research Methods class that talked about the body and its social construction. I took a lot out of our conversation and began to think about the body in other contexts. Especially in our current state of the pandemic, our bodies and movement are being controlled on the federal and state level. Although the stay-at-home order is for the greater good and safety of the state it's interesting to see how some people obey and others revolt. I began thinking about how some bodies and their movements are always controlled, especially black and brown or "marked" bodies, through the heavy policing and racism that runs rampant in our country. I've also been thinking a lot about how some people will be completely untouched by the long-lasting effects of this virus because their money protects

them. I hope that these issues will become more unignorable to the point where something will change. Something has to change.

I often think of how incredibly insane it is that one virus can stop the world and can make all the cracks and faults in our systems even more fatal. However, one of the things that scare me the most is the unwavering effort to not change. The push to “carry on with business as usual” regardless of the virus, has been exemplified in the protests to “reopen the country” occurring on the steps of state capital buildings or in front of governors’ houses. It's ironic and extremely telling how armed, white, protestors can occupy government buildings and public spaces with the claim that their rights are being infringed upon and are met with little to no police response. Meanwhile, Indigenous water protectors and Black Lives Matter activists that engage in peaceful protests are meant with police in riot gear, dogs, and arrests. I think people of color and Indigenous peoples are reaching our boiling point as well because we continue to face the brunt of this pandemic and are the least protected. For instance, every day there are updates regarding the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Native is severely feeling the effects of the virus as many people do not have running water, reliable electricity, or enough access to healthcare providers. Living on the White Earth Reservation I think about how we have similar issues facing our people of not enough resources and extreme levels of poverty, however, I know we will all continue to take care of one another regardless.



Therapeutic Coloring

4/23/20

I started walking every day and it feels really good to get out and move. I keep reminding myself to spend time outside or pause and breathe when I become overwhelmed with the worries of the world. Lately, it has become too easy to constantly focus on the negative and my mental health has been suffering because of it. Now, I am doing my best to practice self-preservation so that I don't feel burnt out 90% of the time. I can't help people or myself if I am completely drained from the weight of the world's problems. Therefore, I've been limiting my social media intake and interacting with nature more. When I am able to get out of my head and feel a part of something close to me, something tangible, is when I am taking the time to sit outside, garden, or walk in the woods. There is something about taking in the world around you and realizing how small you are in it that is truly humbling and grounding. As I continue to come back to what I know I continue to return to the land. My interaction with land is helping me find comfort and peace during such a turbulent time. Once school is over I am looking forward to gardening more and working on worrying less about the things I cannot control. While I will remain informed about what is going on, of course, I have to let go of the things I cannot control while still expressing care and compassion. As I continue to learn more about myself during quarantine I also am learning many lessons that I hope to reflect on someday beyond this pandemic.