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## UA94/6/1 COVID-19 Diary

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Missy Thomas

Professor Alexander Olson

Honors 251

September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### Pandemic Diary: Introduction

As a member of a household that only watches Fox News, I was extremely aware of the current events that were happening in March. Honestly, I was not really worried about the virus at first because I thought the media was blowing it out of proportion. I continued to work at Kroger, and I did not cancel my plans to vacation in Florida over spring break. As the days passed, the shelves quickly started emptying. "Look down aisle four," someone told me. Aisle four is where all the canned goods and boxed foods are. There were only a few dented cans left. People were rushing, and I was so busy trying to manage everyone at work, I made sure I kept myself busy enough to not think about so many rude customers. Toilet paper was gone. So was bread. Somehow, it was the fault of the people of Kroger. I felt like I was spinning every moment of the day. Whirlwinds of customers were buying thousands of dollars' worth of food, and I had never seen anything like it. A strange thing to note is that many people were paying for their groceries in cash. I remember thinking how strange it was to supposedly need to reduce contact with others, and then there were all of these people handing me their cash. The night before I went to Florida, I worked one thirty to ten, and at ten o'clock at night, Kroger had all eight check lanes open, and there were still customers backed up five carts deep. I remember telling the manager that I was sorry, but I have to up so early to drive the next day.

In Florida, we did not go to a single beach, but we spent our time watching the news and staying away from people when possible. People seemed a little more civil in Florida than they did in Tennessee. The panic was a lessened, at least while I was there. I wanted a normal vacation. I wanted to be able to push away the current events and breathe. I had never been to Florida before, and I tried so desperately to enjoy it. I remember my dad calling me, asking me to come home early because the news talked about how COVID was spreading rapidly in Florida. I didn't. I stayed for the week.

No, I never got COVID, but when I returned home, and every time after I came home from anything at that point, I had to strip down to my underwear, spray bleach water on my hands and forearms, and immediately shower. I continued to work, and I never stopped working. I needed something to keep me occupied. At first, masks were suggested, but not mandatory. I didn't wear one. After a while, I decided to after I read enough research and truly understood their benefit. I would never want to transfer a deadly virus to anyone. Soon after, Kroger made them mandatory, so I would have ended up wearing one anyway. One time, a special needs boy started coughing because he choked on something in the checkout lane. I felt bad when everyone turned to look. Every checker stopped checking, and the customer behind that woman and her son went to another lane. I was scared too, but I mostly felt bad for everyone feeling the need to react like that at all. I felt bad for everyone.

Missy Thomas

Honors 251

Professor Olson

October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### Pandemic Journal Part 1

August 23<sup>rd</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>

I am a little anxious about beginning this first week on campus. This is my second year as a student, but the first that I will be living on campus. I have been told numerous times that this is a mistake and a waste of money, but I felt like it was time to move away from my family after spending so much time with them. I thought it would be good for me to focus on school more than work, at least for one semester. It was lonely this week. People seemed more reclused, and hardly anyone smiled in passing. I thought that I had made a mistake. What was I thinking when I thought that I would be able to meet people despite most of my classes being online? I was afraid to take my mask off, even when I was outside. I feel like COVID is just hanging in the air, and, somehow, this cotton mask will protect me from falling ill.

My roommate and I had to fill out a roommate agreement, and one of the questions was about the mask preference between the two of us. One of those options was that both of us agree to wear masks at all times when both of us are in the dorm and awake. Okay, first of all, I find this extremely silly. Even if one of had COVID, and we wore masks during the day, we would still be breathing in the same air at night, and there would be no protection. I don't understand how that can be an option. It just doesn't seem well thought out.

August 30<sup>th</sup>-September 5<sup>th</sup>

I've been finishing up as much work as I can this week. I've found that I spend almost all of my time in my dorm, cooking meals for one in my crockpot that I'm sure about being able to keep in my room. My roommate and I discovered that we have the same Honor's 251 class, and I've enjoyed being able to talk about the class in depth with her. I think beekeeping will be a good project for the class. I have the opportunity to be outside, and, hopefully, I can find someone who is willing to teach me the art of apiculture. My 20<sup>th</sup> birthday is the 6<sup>th</sup>, and I am really excited about reaching that milestone. What a year to reach the second decade of me being alive. I feel like horrible events are happening more often and progressively worse, but I think life has always been this way. I always think about people being alive in the midst of the Black Plague. They must have thought the world was ending then too. This pandemic can't be worse than that one. Work this weekend was especially hard. People in Robertson County, in Tennessee, have begun to not wear their masks in public, including the Kroger where I work. I don't mind. It makes me feel as though we are returning to some form of normal. When walking into work this past Friday, the 4<sup>th</sup>, I had a lady tell me to put my mask on under her breath. It angered me that I couldn't walk through the door and take my last deep breath of air before putting the mask on without someone having to say something. I have to wear it for eight hours at a time. It's an extremely long time to wear the same mask. Also, did that lady not see that my hands were full carrying my lunch and textbooks that I brought to read during any free moment? I have enough on my plate. I think I am just ready to celebrate my birthday.

While standing in line at Chick-fil-a at work, a group of guys walked up behind me. They were standing extremely close, less than a foot away from me. All of them were talking

extremely loudly, and I could feel the hair on the back of my neck tingle from his voice. I eventually turned around and asked him to step back. He goes, “oh yeah. COVID.” It wasn’t the worry about catching anything though. He was too close, and they were the only people in line for food at DSU who were not social distancing. Standing out was freaking me out and making me feel anxious. I wanted to explain that to the them, but I decided it wouldn’t have mattered. It probably would have sounded like a lie anyway.

### September 6<sup>th</sup>-September 12<sup>th</sup>

Canoeing on my birthday was the best experience I could have had. Being able to row away from land made all of my stress disappear. My boyfriend and I traveled south an hour to find the perfect place. It was so freeing being able to row and wear my bikini, my body no longer hidden from the wind and the sun. A dragonfly followed us the entire 5-mile stretch, and it was nice for something to enjoy my company. I know I needed that. When we got back to my house, many friends and coworkers from work had a Hawaii themed surprise party for me! It reminded me of the last time I felt free before all of this mess started. I took a Geography 451 class in January, and I miss the days where strangers were excited to spend time with me and share their life experiences. This time really was the best time to celebrate a birthday. We all needed the fun. All seven of us piled into a 5-seater truck, and we brought leis to everyone at work, including the managers. Spreading joy to everyone I had worked so closely with since March felt like things were finally turning for the good. They needed that.

I felt much better about returning to school that Monday morning. I am extroverted and being around so many people refreshed me for the week. I started getting to know the guy that lives beside me and my roommate. We went out for lunch and sat in the square or whatever

the name of the space is between The Pod and Northeast. Being outside and fairly comfortable after a bit of conversation, we took our masks off. I've noticed that people are more likely to do so when they are comfortable with the people they are with. The masks, coupled with social distancing, are an analogy for the level of trust one person has with another.

#### September 13<sup>th</sup>-September 19<sup>th</sup>

I have a proxemics centered fieldwork assignment for my Ethnography class. I think I'm going to do it at my work since that's where so many people will be.

My roommate and I are getting closer. We have started going to get food together and stay up later and later at night making conversation. We have also been using knocking to communicate with our male neighbor next door. He talks very loudly (he plays video games), and I enjoy hearing his voice through the wall. I am used to my three siblings making a lot of noise and hearing his makes me feel less alone and more at home.

The proxemics project went well! My professor thought it was interesting that so many of us brought up the use of masks. She put it into the words that the air we exhale has become an extension of ourselves, and we use the masks and social distancing to accommodate this newly recognized part of ourselves. She's right. I feel like I have to run away from people when I feel a sneeze coming on. When I'm on a register at work, I duck down and sneeze into my trashcan when I have a sneeze. I'm always afraid someone is going to say something or back out of my lane.

#### September 20<sup>th</sup>-September 26<sup>th</sup>

Corbin, the guy next door, is a regular in our room now. We take turns binge watching a show the three of us like in each other's rooms. He also brings us food as an apology for being

so loud all the time. His roommate moved out, so Corbin is alone. I feel bad. I don't think I could make it through this semester without my roommate or anyone being there all the time.

September 27<sup>th</sup>-October 3<sup>rd</sup>

Robertson County has removed its mask mandate, and, after watching the customers for a week, I'd say there is about a fourth of the people that do still wear their masks. Customers don't seem to be giving each other looks for or not wearing masks. It seems to have simply become another article of clothing, like a hat or jacket. Not everyone has one, but no one thinks to bring up whether or not one is wearing one. Now, the same cannot be said for people on campus. I swear the guy that lives on the other side of us (not Corbin) stares out his peep hole and reports people who walk by without a mask. He is always complaining on the floor group chat that people are not abiding by the rules. It gets tiring, but I understand where he is coming from. It's so strange going back and forth between the two worlds I travel between each week. I feel as though I am becoming two different people because the way I can act in one place is much more restrained in the other.



Missy Thomas  
Honors 251  
December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Dr. Olson

## Pandemic Journal Part 2

November 7<sup>th</sup>

Until now, I have been ignoring time to write because I have had so much going on. I've noticed quite a few people buying large amounts of food and toiletries, but there is a lack of panic in the air. It's not everyone either, just some people stocking up. As of yesterday, Robertson County Tennessee has started the mask mandate again. People are saying that Covid cases are spiking again, but I haven't been paying much attention to the news. My siblings have adjusted to all of the new rules in the public-school system, but it is sad to me that they are expected to perform just as well despite all of the changes. However, they are, as are many other children. That's what people do. We rise to the challenges and overcome.

My Mom left my dad for a while. She said it was due to all of the time they have spent being so close together from them working from home. This was why I took a break from updating the journal because that was an extremely emotional time for me. I came home for the weekend, started a three-hour test, and my parents began throwing each other and screaming in the other room. I left that Sunday night not knowing where my mom was, and it was hard focusing on school knowing how hard it was for everyone at home. She came back a week later, and I come home the following weekend to find out that my sister had begun self-harming.

While all of this was happening, my application for Target was accepted, and I am writing this now after finishing my last day at Kroger. I worry about not having a job if another wave of Covid shuts down our country again, but this is a necessary step in me trying to move out. Luckily, Kroger has promised me my job if anything happens. I am thankful for the kindness, but I hate that I have to consider a pandemic when making plans for my future.

In lining up with the last thought, I have changed my major to Forensic Psychology in the hopes that I will find a more stable job in the future. Research sounds like a wonderful endeavor, but at the end of the day, I need to be able to take care of myself and my future family under any circumstances.

I have made the decision to live at home this spring semester in the hopes that I find more stability from staying in one place. I am worried about a second wave, and I don't want to be spilt in between two places or put money into a dorm and have to leave. I only spend three nights a week in my dorm as it is. I started the semester in the hopes that I would connect with people and perhaps find some friendships, but now all I want, and all I have succeeded in finding, is a clear path about how I need to start organizing a future for myself. I need to make money, I need to save, and I need to create a plan for my life that guarantees a stable future. I am sacrificing, for now, dreams of travel and research in order to be present and stable for current and future family.

November 16<sup>th</sup>

In catching up on last week, I had a successful first week at Target, and I can now say my job is not stressful. Not as stressful as being a floor manager at Kroger anyway. Folding clothes alone gives me time to think, and I'm also not around as many people. Sometimes I wonder if I

will catch something because I touch so many clothes, but what is the difference between food and clothes? I probably am safer where I am now, and I do feel much cleaner after a shift at Target than I did after one at Kroger. Cases are rising again, but I did see something on the news about a Covid vaccine that is 90% effective. What? That number seems awfully high to me, but I am excited about returning to normal soon. I'd take anything at this point, especially since the flu vaccine is about 45% effective. If we can run under business as usual with the flu vaccine then we can certainly do the same with the Covid vaccine, even if the percentage turns out to be much lower.

I am not happy about this week and all the work that has to be done, but I am so relieved to have almost made it through the semester. I wouldn't want another one like it, but I'm proud of myself for accomplishing everything that I have.

On a celebratory note, my mom got a job despite Covid, and she will be a speech pathologist at a school within the county where we live in Tennessee! She'll be on the same calendar schedule as my brothers, and she is grateful for that. Hopefully things will be getting better from here for all of us, and quickly as well because I have a stress boil forming on my shoulder. I can't believe that this thing has waited all year and is just now coming out, but it may start going away before it gets too big after I get through these next few weeks.

#### November 23<sup>rd</sup>

I feel as though this semester is a real-life version of Cutthroat Kitchen. I have all these sabotages that I can't tell anyone about, and I have a hodgepodge final product that is supposed to be my best work. I'm sure this is how everyone feels right now, but I just want to be in a position where I can actually do something that I know is my best. Hopefully I'll have a better grip on everything next semester and being at home next semester will certainly help. I major stress reliever is working, and, somehow, I've ended up filling my time with work instead of doing my assignments. Everything is turned in on time but working feels more productive at the moment.

I've been conducting a lot of interviews for my classes, and I've been grateful for the opportunity to talk to people even though it is under more remote and professional circumstances. It had led me to get to know some really interesting people, and it has been an opportunity to expand my knowledge on the world. Interestingly enough, Covid is only rarely talked about, and when it is, it is mentioned as a passive comment. I wonder if everyone is getting used to the circumstances or just tired of talking about it.

#### November 25<sup>th</sup>

Someone told me Kentucky is in a shutdown again. This explains why some people drove an hour down to Hendersonville, Tennessee to get some toilet paper. There were people who came into Target to ONLY buy toilet paper. At the Kroger where I used to work, my boyfriend put out 7 pallets of toilet paper and paper towels. 7. In one day. I didn't realize Kroger had stocked up so much, but, nevertheless, the reserves are gone, and the toilet paper wasn't gobbled up by the residents of Tennessee this time. I hope Tennessee doesn't shut down again. Now that I have the time to go out and spend time with a few people, I really don't want that to be taken away. My spirit would be crippled.

I do see that Covid is coming closer to home. My brother's friend's mom had it, but said it feels like a weak cold. She feels totally fine. Lots of others are finding that they have it, and I'm trying to remember back to the spring, but I don't think I personally knew anyone that did have Covid until late summer. I guess it just takes time to spread to less populated places. I don't know if this is true or not, and I suppose I could look it up, but, supposedly, Covid is mutating, but it's mutating to be weaker. I don't know if I believe that, and I guess that's why I haven't cared to look into it. It seems to be too good to be true, especially after the way the whole world reacted.

November 28<sup>th</sup>

This Thanksgiving was the first time I had seen my dad's parents since New Year's. It was really nice to spend time with them and catch up on the year. Everything felt normal that day, at least for me. The next day, my boyfriend and I got up early to shop. Pulling into the Opry Mills Mall parking lot, we were surprised to see as many people as there were. I saw police officers on horses for the first time outside of an urban area, and the sea of people was overwhelming. We saw more people this year than last year, and I really thought most people would be shopping online. We sat down for a while to eat some Auntie Annie's pretzels on the floor because all the seats were taken. I felt lost. It reminded me of the time I was in downtown New York City, and I was so overwhelmed, I couldn't think about what I needed to buy. I thought it was strange that all of these stores had capacities, but the mall itself didn't. Each store was a breath of fresh air compared to the large amount of people in the mall. There was hardly room to move around.

This concludes my Pandemic Journal entries, but that does not mean Covid and the impacts from it are over. Some have told me that the events following this year will be worse than what has happened in 2020, and I can only hope that somehow none of that will be true. This assignment has inspired me to continue to write, and I have found that it calms me. Writing, sometimes poetically, about what is going on in my life makes me feel as though I am important and that I may survive what is going on to tell it to future generations myself. I hope someone finds my written account of the year useful, but know it only grazes over the depth of how this year has impacted the world.