

Fiona Ferguson

I roll over onto my side, sighing. The olive green carpet scratches against my face, and my heater blares over my body, warming me, a weary person enveloped in fleece pajama pants and a fluffy, sky-colored bathrobe dotted with cloud-like sheep. Ten minutes until class. This is how it goes, mostly. I sit on a wooden stool at my paint-stained desk, and move from there to my bed to my floor, and over again. Staring at myself reflected back in a tiny box on my laptop, my eyes become sore.

I am an introvert, and that identity has not changed through the pandemic, but I now realize how important social connections are. I would crave to hang out with a friend, just to talk about philosophy, college, podcasts, zucchinis... anything. This loneliness was new. My family was there, but being with them in such close quarters was utterly exhausting.

My parents are some of the strictest of my friend group, which limited my socializing possibilities. I would FaceTime with my friends, intending to do homework, but instead talking and laughing and living side-by-side through our screens, simply enjoying the novel company.

My best friend Audrey and I would attempt to start a movie at the exact same second on our respective computers. We sent letters to one another, complete with decorated envelopes and teabags enclosed. My neighborhood friend Tava and I walked for miles, up and down the hills, admiring sunset and clouds, complaining about the antagonizing dullness of our lives, all while maintaining social distancing. The three of us hiked the mountain in our backyards time after time. A two-hour climb, the dusting of snow accumulated to ten feet by the time we reached the precipice, our legs sinking in snow past our knees, the frigid air against our sweaty bodies a welcome pull away from the apathy that had crept over us.

School was fine for me, mostly. I am self-motivated and able to time-manage well, which set me up for success in the classes that posted assignments and expected work to be completed individually. However, some of my classes required Zoom attendance, which I despised. I have a hard time talking in class, but coupled with having to strategically unmute myself... it was a bit of a nightmare. It wasn't just school, either-- YSF, the youth-led environmental group I belong to, started meeting on Zoom, and although my dance lessons were pre-recorded, our class met virtually as well. My eyes throbbed with the hours on-screen. I grew to dread every mention of Zoom.

However, I read more books in 2020 than I had ever read in a year. I broadened my knowledge on a multitude of topics, including climate change, religious fundamentalism, and toxic masculinity. I also dedicated hours to creating art for a local fundraiser, which led to multiple commissions. It was a wonderful way to pass the time and hone my skills. In fall of 2020, I enrolled in an Honors English course where the majority of the class was spent discussing the reading. At first, my anxiety was high with each videoconference. However, my passion for the texts pushed me to speak up, and I slowly became more comfortable presenting myself over Microsoft Teams. This carried through every aspect of my life, and I was able to enjoy sharing my ideas in YSF, and in every other class I took. Ironically, quarantine helped me become comfortable with public speaking. Through this difficult time, I have had opportunities to grow in countless ways, and I am grateful for the resilience that it has allowed me to develop. I've had the time to reflect deeply on my life and the values I hold. Because I still only go to school in person every other day, I frequently look forward to it more than the weekend, which is a feeling I never dreamed I'd have. My loving cat, Lumos, and I have watched my backyard go from yellow to lush and green, to leaf-strewn, to snow-covered over the expanse of time spent in my bedroom. I've learned to appreciate modern technology in education, but ultimately look forward to the offscreen world so much more than ever before. No, I am not the same naive, busy, cheery person that was preparing to go to Guatemala with her Spanish class on March 13th, 2020. I have become stronger, come to know myself more fully, and understand where my values lie-- in my close relationships, and love of learning.