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Standing alone on a poorly maintained outdoor basketball court, I tried to conjure up the image of opponents to make my workout more challenging. I started toward the basket and made a move around the imagined defender. BAM - the ball careened off of a crack in the pavement. I slipped on some gravel and ended up face down in a dirty puddle. Frustrated and wet, I asked myself, "How the heck did I end up here?" Just a few months ago I was at the regional basketball tournament with all my friends and teammates and we had just qualified for state. It was the first time in years that Seward High had made it. Cancelled. Now, unable to practice indoors, or scrimmage with my friends, I'm reduced to practicing on a dilapidated outdoor court, alone.

I take my academics seriously, and basketball is a great escape for me. I can just hang out with my friends and play a sport that I love without worrying about my next assignment or project. Then it came to an abrupt stop, I was devastated. On top of that, school was cancelled. I spent several weeks in isolation from my peers and teachers. Motivation was hard to come by. Online classes slogged on and it seemed like we learned very little in the final weeks of the 2019-20 school year.

When school started up again in August, we were meeting in-person and it was a huge uplift from the way we ended last school year. But before long, school was shut down again, and I knew it would take more effort to stay motivated and connected to my teachers and classmates. In online classes, I made a conscious effort to ask questions in order to stay engaged. I also worked together with friends on homework through texts and calls.

Journalism stood out as a class that really helped me stay connected with the student body. With everyone stuck at home, our online school paper became more important than ever. It was a place where we could see what other students were doing. I am the sports reporter, and dealing with COVID-19 issues was a big part of the story for every sport this year. I reported not only on the sporting events themselves, but more interestingly, I interviewed students on how they were replacing sports that were canceled. Conducting the interviews provided some extra interaction with my classmates, which helped maintain connections. It also allowed me to learn how they were dealing with the impacts. Many students were getting outside where they could more safely be with people. Snowmachining, skiing and hiking were popular activities. Others were playing video games online with their friends where they could at least connect virtually. Hearing how my fellow students were dealing with it helped assure me that I wasn't facing the challenge of COVID-19 alone, that we were all facing isolation together.

Some of the changes that came with working remotely were very beneficial. Having more freedom in my daily schedule forced me to learn how to more independently manage my time. I was able to learn how to use technology more effectively for video conferencing, file sharing, and collaborating remotely. There is no doubt that these skills will be useful in my future. The virtual setting seemed to open up more opportunities for classroom guests, as former students joined from their colleges to offer advice and help. Experts were able to join our classes, and virtual field trips created opportunities to explore while isolated.

Thankfully, with the use of masks, social distancing, and vaccinations, we have been able to get back to something closer to "normal." We are back to in-person learning, and we were able to salvage our basketball season in a modified format. Both of those have been great for restoring our learning environment and our personal connections and have been a huge boost to morale and motivation. I did learn that, while not ideal, it is possible to continue to learn and grow and maintain relationships through a pandemic.