

The Marvelous Adventures of a Gen-Zer During a Pandemic

March 12, 2020. You are waiting in line behind fifteen people at the University Starbucks. It is 8 am, and the sun is shining bright, making you wish you hadn't forgotten your sunglasses in your dorm. You curse yourself for leaving most of the studying for your biology exam on the day of the test. While waiting for your drink order, you chat with the workers who are ecstatic that college will be online after the spring break. Before you can respond, you get a notification that the 8:45 pm exam has been canceled for the safety of the students. You are so thrilled at the news that you almost forget your drink. For the rest of the day, you watch trashy reality shows with your roommate, feeling the happiest you had in a long while.

March 24, 2020. It is almost the end of a two-week University break and your entire family is exhausted from eating banana bread for the fourth time in twelve days. Scooping up flour into your measuring cups for your new baking creations has become as much of a routine as checking the COVID-19 case tracker. Day by day, hour by hour, the cases go up but you still have hope. Or at least that is what you tell yourself to help alleviate the anxiety you are feeling. You push the thought away and decide to watch productivity videos to make the best use of your free time. You download organization apps and start using sticky-notes for daily affirmations. "You got this!" "You are unstoppable!" "Nothing can break you down!" With a bit of time, you allow yourself to think that you and your loved ones will survive this and come out stronger than before.

March 30, 2020. It has been four days since the United States has become a hot-spot with the most number of confirmed cases, 147,848. One hundred forty-seven thousand eight hundred forty-eight. The bit of anxiety you felt turns into panic. The panic slowly starts creeping into your heart and your mind. You distantly remember how only a couple of months ago you were

living on campus, with no forethought on a global pandemic that you would be stuck in the midst of. You take a few breaths and keep writing affirmations to trick your mind into thinking even a pandemic can't slow down a badass like you. However, you can't ignore the facts. Your parents are essential workers who interact with people at the highest risk. You have no time or money to be stuck in a hospital. You live in the city with the highest number of cases. The only bit of protection you can find is a five-dollar disposal blue mask that should last for no more than a day. Feeling exhausted of your own mind and its spiraling, you sigh, you move on.

April 10, 2020. It has been 11 days since the start of Zoom University. You get at least three notifications a week about how the syllabus of your class has changed. Your exams have been moved to different dates at least five times. You feel as though months and months of schoolwork have been piling up and you cannot seem to find where to start. You don't even look out the window anymore and the daily affirmations you had been writing feel like nothing more than white lies. The panic has now settled at every bit of your body, head to toe. And it's not like you help it by checking the COVID-19 updates every three hours. The numbers blend together. Was it 501,905 cases an hour ago or 510,095? Does it even matter?

You get enraged at the people "protesting" the social guidelines on TV, claiming that their rights are being violated. Every time you watch the news or go on social media, there are people who paint the pandemic as a hoax. The president himself does not take it seriously. But what can you do except feel hopeless and angry and upset that this was the hand you were dealt?

April 17, 2020. You can't stop the tears that fall down your face as your professor makes your tests ten times harder to avoid cheating. You read your textbooks, answer discussion board posts, and test yourself through flashcards but you get your first C in your entire academic

career. You cry yourself to sleep that night, scared for your parents' lives, and disappointed in yourself.

April 21, 2020. Before your mind can register the sound of your alarm clock, you instinctively fling your arm and press the snooze button. After three more rounds of the torturous sound, you begrudgingly open your eyes, willing them to get used to the stream of sunlight from the window. As you punch in the passcode for your phone, a notification pops up: "The US has reached 807,770 cases of COVID-19." Without letting yourself linger on the fact, you go on Twitter and scroll through endless tweets of GoFundMes of people who have recently lost their jobs or their loved ones. What a marvelous start to the day! You force yourself to lock your phone and go get ready for another day of quarantine. While washing your hands for at least 20 seconds, you can't shake off the feeling of déjà-vu. Maybe it's just because you have lived through the same day of online classes for the past three weeks.

Before you can even look at your schedule for the day, you type in the CDC website to check the number of cases and notice they have gone up by two hundred in the last hour. You feel nothing except the growing irritation at how slow your WiFi is. You check your email to see there has been no response from your professor on the format of the exam coming up in three days. You sigh, you move on.

April 29, 2020. You wonder if there is something wrong with you. How could a person possibly feel absolutely nothing when faced with a tragedy? How did the panic turn into numbness? You avoid your own gaze in your reflection, hating yourself for the person you have become. But what else can you do? You are merely one human being, grappling with the hand you were dealt with by the universe. You even contemplate turning off your notifications and deleting social media, but even the mere thought of the suggestion feeds your guilt. You are

lucky enough to be breathing and not having to risk your life for survival, so the least you can do is stay informed for your family's sake. You ignore the small part of you begging for a way out, just for a second to breathe, and you move on.

May 15, 2020. It's been three hours since you took your last final. You thought you would feel happy, even proud of yourself for how far you have come. But there is nothing there. Even though you still get daily updates about the pandemic and check social media for news, you have never felt more disconnected from the outside world. There is no more anxiety or panic or sadness or anger or irritation or guilt, just emptiness. You don't even have the countless BlackBoard assignments to distract you from how you have become a shell of your former self. Where can you go from here? It feels like the void has swallowed you whole and you have no one to blame but yourself.

May 20, 2020. It has been five days since the end of the semester. You finally convinced yourself to turn off your notifications and go off-grid if only for a week. You suppose the only good thing about feeling numb is that your guilt can no longer terrorize you for not constantly thinking about the world.

After throwing out 343 pages of notes, printed articles, and syllabi, you open up your laptop, and for the first time in a while, you search for Netflix instead of the CDC website. After fighting the urge to unlock your phone and start your endless journey of scrolling through Twitter, you settle on watching Avatar: The Last Airbender. You push away your thoughts of the impending doom and take in the story of a twelve-year-old tasked with saving the world.

May 22, 2020. You lose track of time as you watch teenagers battle using their "bending" powers to defeat their enemies in the show. You can't help but wish you were alongside them, at least then you would have some purpose in life that did not drive you to madness or gloom. After

watching them lose countless encounters with their enemies, your eyes can't believe when the three fictional characters you have come to love in a few days have finally emerged victorious. You can't stop the smile forming on your face as a glimmer of excitement blooms inside you. But how could that be? It felt like your heart had become the frozen tundra and would not melt for hundreds of years. How is it that a simple show about kids having magical powers managed to bring back a fragment of your former self?

You wonder if this was the solution all along, whether you had been a fool to push yourself over the brink to keep up with the chaotic state of the world. Before your mind can go down its path of self-criticism, you thank your heart for giving you another chance and savor the bit of happiness you feel for the first time in three months.