

Bliss & Blues

Personal account on Covid-19

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I, Samriddhi Shrivastava am a design student at NU, Ahmedabad. I live in a small town called Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh that is at a distance of 70kms from the state capital Raipur. There are four members in my family including my pet.



For a year, I had been just wishing to come home but the distance and studies did not allow. I pitied myself seeing my peers returning to their habitats in the weekends. The cycle of supressing emotions started last year when my father passed away and I was sent to college. The college routine kept me sane.

I came home in the mid of March'20 for my father's barsi. It had only been three days and on the fourth, lockdown was announced. I feared staying home for long; due to high probabilities of my emotional breakdown. On the positive side to discover how the year went for each of us and to fill the bonding gap; we cooked together, watched movies and had the time of our lives. This period allowed me to revitalize my relationship with family and my pet. This break from academic tasks provided with a chance to pursue online certification courses. This was different from university's studio learning but still helpful to nourish my skillsets.



My mother, a government worker in Women and Child Development Services, worked 226kms away from home in naxal affected rural premise. As lockdown prohibited travelling work became messy. The authorities announced urgent reporting to work and she moved back to her workplace during the second stage of lockdown. Turmoil took a seat in our living room with Covid in the air. Having already learned cooking in the previous weeks made things easier for me. But I still had a hard time managing tasks at home with my sister due to this sudden change.

My online classes were about to begin and honestly it felt like a road to nowhere. The idea of 'virtual studio' was blurry and disarray. On top of household duties, academic performance became a concern. There was chaos in the background along with emotional rollercoaster edits.

Adapting to virtual studio practises and to comprehend things the right way was getting difficult. Living in a small town I initially had poor-bandwidth issues which was followed up by tangible and intangible issues at a later stage. Visualisation and conceptual understanding suffered hinderances from my end of the virtual stage. Due to complete lockdown, neither online nor offline means functioned to avail material for the courses that were going on. It became a habit to work with the household items, from using utensils for cooking purposes or for creating moulds for my 'Basic Material' course. Even when lockdown was less strict and the world started working, material unavailability stayed the same. The local stationers said, there are no usual demands for the materials like: cartridge sheets, ivory sheets etc but just copier papers. Since material lists were provided just 4-5 days before the course began, ordering material online was not a way out for me. I took a chance and delivery of the materials took place after completion of two more modules since I had ordered them. I was stressed out. Anxious and frustrated with the house and work I was not able to produce the best that I could even with the given resources.



Buying groceries and essentials or managing bank affairs, etc was the job of my sister. She, due to her Lipoma close to her shoulder and spine; cannot take up work that requires exercising hands like cleaning, cooking or dishwashing. Thus, I handled cleaning, cooking and my ASSIGNMENTS. Every day I woke up early to prepare breakfast and lunch before my class began its first session of the day. It started feeling like the whole concept of learning was getting lost in the midst of assignments. There was nostalgia all around me. 140 miles away, my mother felt helpless watching me though her phone's screen, working my guts out. By then I had started measuring time in terms of tasks and rituals that I did in a day.



Before the third lockdown we got the news of my mother's ill health and claudication. She returned home and got treated. This treatment had a sequel where she had to undergo a minor surgery. Me and my sister's daily routine involved caregiving 24*7. We regularly visited the hospital as the surgery left a cut open to allow wound drainage. Cleaning and sanitization became a full-time job for us. Our routines were more packed than ever. My sister, a Civil Engineer is currently preparing for IAS and other govt. exams. The work and care hours did not allow her to sit and study at all. She stayed tensed and stressed; further carried diagnosis uncovered ill-health. All that could have been done was to rest and retain good health. Trials with recipes were reduced to simpler meals with heavy prescriptions for the ill in the family. By this time, I had detached myself from people, I preferred not to talk and only work. Exhaustion paved way to anger and it worsened the situation sometimes. But somehow getting used to the new normal I found my way to overcome from everything that held me back. Things took a positive turn as I learned to manage time.



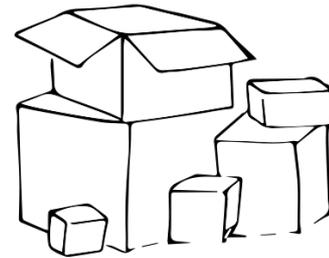
At a later stage my mother and sister achieved good health. The work was again shared amongst us and I started getting back to normal. All this while my classes were a task too but it was also an escape for me. While the household work exhausted me, the virtual learning sessions allowed me to sit and introspect. There were still difficulties adapting to the virtual learning when most things required in-person studio-based practices. When professors adapted these new trends of teaching, I adapted myself to material handling with hundreds of trials and errors. My network/connectivity issues left me with half understood concepts. Due to my hesitant nature, instead of reaching out to faculties, started researching for myself. Sometimes when situations forced, I also took extra classes from peers. It actually helped me to communicate more since the detachment period.

My mother's health got better and she being the only earning person in the family, was willing to work. Only to avoid economic crisis from our lives. For my mother



who just recovered, even walking our dog was a bliss in lockdown. My pet dog Oscar, has been the only happiness that roamed around us in all difficulties. I became appreciative of the time that I got to complete tasks. Lockdown shaped everybody's routines differently. This period taught me to use my time effectively. Even though the obstacles were there but with accomplishing academic work, I felt good. Academics became my go-to when I wanted to dodge the worries of health-uncertainties of people around me.

We decided to move to my mother's workplace, to be by her side in case of any health emergency. Due to the fact that moving places will affect my online classes, we decided to delay it till my semester came to an end. I had time to work on things better than earlier. We did the necessary paperwork and packed the essentials after my semester ended. Just a day prior to our travel, again my mother suffered pain and it was discovered that her knee's cartilage was damaged. She was back to bed arrest. These four and a half months were a little too hard for my mother than for me and my sister. She had emotional, mental and physical trauma all together.



We have somehow accustomed to this pattern of life, where home is a place with tasks to do and the reward is sleep but caring is a 24*7 job along with the work and career deal. Me and my family are together walking in a new abridged version of living. The pandemic made us more prepared and responsible while virtual classes challenged and eventually nourished my adaptabilities and capabilities.

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