



Blessings through Pandemics and Pollution

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In this brief but vivid reflection, Abigail Dulle recalls how the COVID-19 affected her senior year while living in Kyrgyzstan, renewing her appreciation for life's simple and fundamental joys. This essay was written for Writing I with Dr. John Bruce.

THE PANDEMIC OF 2020, COVID-19, has had a tremendous effect on the lives of many people throughout the world. Upon its discovery, some countries took immediate precautions—canceling events, closing parks, and quarantining citizens—while others waited, hoping the virus would not reach their borders. “Social distancing” entered daily vocabulary as it enhanced isolation and feelings of depression for many, and people worldwide griped about being kept inside or forced to wear masks. Meanwhile, I was in the small country of Kyrgyzstan, trying my hardest to graduate high school and not get bogged down by increasing case numbers.

When COVID-19 first came to Kyrgyzstan in March, the immediate effects were school being closed, everyone quarantining in their apartments, and the city entering martial law. Instead of physically going to school and learning how to analyze *Hamlet*, I learned how impactful and significant a single trip to the store could be. Our parents would rotate my three siblings and me, letting us take turns

to get a breath of fresh air to last us for the next two weeks before it would be our turn again. I learned to count my steps joyfully and stare up at a polluted sky in reverence, being thankful for trips that had previously been nothing more than a chore.

Being closed in the apartment gave me a lot of time. I heard stories over the internet of the virus negatively impacting families, driving them to abhor one another, but I was given time to sit and build forts with my sisters. We played endless games of UNO. We made art together. Instead of hanging out with my school friends, I grew closer to my family. And while it seems very cheesy and clichéd (it should be noted that arguments still ensued), we were able to build memories of laughing around the dinner table, dancing to KPOP, and having nonsensical conversations in the few months before I left for college.

The final effect of the virus was the cancellation of spring. We went into quarantine wearing heavy coats and pollution masks to keep coal dust out of our lungs and came out wearing sunscreen, shorts, and medical masks. We did not get to watch the flowers grow. We did not see any newborn kittens. We did not get to pull hoodies on and wade through tall grass. There were no quiet walks under trees—no making pictures out of clouds. By the time we were free, summer was in heat, drying up the grass and throwing sweat on our attempts at peaceful walks.

This past year has made its mark through the challenges brought about by COVID, but it was still a year in my life nonetheless and I therefore refuse to look back on it through darkened glasses. Yes, vacations were canceled, graduation was online, and I was inside instead of exploring. I lost the chance to participate in typical senior activities. There were no more coffee-shop talks with friends. But I learned to cherish simplicity: walks along broken pavement, card games under bed sheets, and spring. The virus may have brought hardships, but it scattered some blessings along the way. ▶▶