

Alexia Veltri

Senior Independent Project

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Finding the Light in the Darkness

I sit and watch as the minutes, hours, and days go by. Who would have thought that my senior year of high school would have been impacted by an uncontrollable, worldwide pandemic? Not me, that's for sure. I sit at the piano staring out the window as my fingers transform myself into solace. It is an excursion to an undisturbed serene world. Hitting the piano keys and giving rise to masterful sounds is my refuge from this harsh reality. It is no surprise that the piano is my sanctuary from such struggles since the word piano derives from the Italian word *pianoforte*, its two terms of "piano" and "forte" meaning "soft" and "loud," respectively. This concept reminds me of the pandemic. I have the ability to approach it as being harsh and stressful or instead, approach it with a sense of calm and control. Practicing the piano in order to gain proficiency in meeting these contrasting challenges provides me with therapeutic opportunities and perspective when considering my approach to the challenges of being a senior during the coronavirus pandemic, with every strike of a key.

I remember seeing the news when the first case of coronavirus was confirmed in the United States back in January. I left for spring break without a care in the world hoping that everything would get better once I got back. How wrong I was. It seemed as if the cases were spreading at the speed of light. I was sitting in the car, listening to music when I received the first email from school, stating our return from spring break would be postponed for another week and that the United States would be going into a lockdown due to the rapid spread of COVID-19

cases. I didn't really think too much of it but had an inclination that things would continue to change and worsen. I took each day as they came but noticed how it became increasingly difficult to stay in my house without physical contact with the outside world.

The term mental health refers to a person's psychological and emotional well being. The coronavirus has had a serious impact on each and every person's mental health. As a human species, we depend on social interaction which helps boost both our physical and emotional well being. While it is important to social distance for the health and safety of others, due to being locked away in our houses, there has been professional concern with the rising rates of the mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety. According to a federal emergency hotline, people in emotional distress have "registered a more than 1,000 percent increase in April compared with the same time last year." In addition to this, the "online therapy company Talkspace reported a 65 percent jump in clients since mid-February" ("The Coronavirus Pandemic Is Pushing America into a Mental Health Crisis." 2020). Coronavirus related feelings of anxiety and depression have dominated these patients' concerns.

Being a high school senior, I looked forward to experiencing all the end of year festivities. After all, people always say that it will be the best part of high school. Unfortunately I had to face the fact that these events would not take place. When I entered the Holy Child community in freshman year, I always heard about all the traditions you get to experience in your senior year before graduating. Some of which include, dressing down for the third trimester, college cakes, college t-shirt day, senior pranks, senior sleepover, college skirt signing, yearbook signing, and of course graduation; all of which we were unable to to experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. For me personally, I have also been involved with playing piano in

Chamber Ensemble since I entered the school in freshman year. Stage fright has always been something that has challenged me throughout my musical career, but over time I was able to surmount this fear and let my love for music guide me while performing. Each year, I remember seeing how the seniors in the program would be honored at the spring concert for all the hard work they put in to learning and performing each piece of music. I looked forward to my spring concert of senior year where I could be recognized for overcoming this challenge and be acknowledged for the work I put in over the years. Because the state of New York was the hardest hit state by the virus, it was very difficult to think that we might not even be able to hold a normal graduation ceremony to celebrate all of the hard work and accomplishments we've had throughout our high school career.

As more and more days have gone by, I have become more educated on how to deal with these unexpected and stressful changes. Although this childhood milestone of graduating high school has been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, I've learned to appreciate the fragility of life and look forward to a brighter and healthier tomorrow. I have also grown to appreciate my family and the friends who have stayed by my side and kept me feeling balanced on this rocky terrain. Just as music has also given me a sense of hope and comfort during this difficult time, I know that it will help to guide me throughout the different stages in my life and overcome any new challenges life throws my way.

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