

I'll never forget the day the news broke of the shelter in place order. At 22 years old, I had just gotten back from my shift work. I had about 45 minutes until I was supposed to log on for my class, as it had been moved to online due to the spread of COVID-19 throughout the Bay Area. When I walked through the front door of my sorority house I was met with chaos. Everyone was freaking out, saying how we were going to be on lockdown and stuck inside for 2 weeks. While we now know that is not what shelter in place means, in the moment everything was so uncertain. Everyone was panicking and calling their parents to tell them they were coming home. I was reluctant to call my mother because no official government website had announced the shelter in place, but everyone told me I should.

After a couple of phone calls back and forth with my mother, it was decided that my friend would drive me to Sacramento, where my mother would come pick me up. Unfortunately, I still had to attend my online class for the day. It was difficult to focus with everything going on. Immediately after my class finished I rushed to my room to begin packing. The shelter in place was originally supposed to only last 2 weeks, so I only brought clothes to last me that long. That was a big mistake. At the time of writing this, it has been 2 months and I am still living only with the clothes that I packed that day. We all said our goodbyes and left for Sacramento, not knowing that it was the last day we would all get to live in that house together.

I met my mother in Sacramento and she drove us both home. It was the first time I had been home in months, and I was only expecting to stay for 2 weeks. It was a long day, full of surprises. Waking up that morning, I had no idea that I would be back in my hometown by the end of the day. I brought my suitcase upstairs and dropped it in my room. I facetedimed my roommates from back in San Jose to talk about how crazy this day had been, before going to bed for the night.

A few days after my return to my hometown the shelter in place order in San Jose was extended. It was time for me to face that I would be permanently living back at home for the rest of the school year. To say my transition moving home was hard would be an understatement. I had so many plans for the remainder of my senior year that were canceled. I was supposed to run a 5K, go to concerts, and even go to Mexico with my friends for spring break, all of which were canceled. While I was obviously upset, I understood the need for it and could move past my feelings.

My breaking point was the email from the university, telling me that graduation was canceled. I knew this email was coming, but it did not soften the blow even a little. Graduation, the one thing I had left to look forward to, was canceled. The one day I had worked tirelessly for the last 4 years was being taken away from me and there was nothing I could do about it. While I was content to just wallow in my own sadness, I knew I had to let my family know. This turned out to be harder than I thought it was going to be. I'm terrible at sharing my emotions and I did not want my family to know how torn up I was about the cancellation of my commencement. This day was not only for me, but for my family who had supported me both emotionally and financially the last 4 years. I was not the only one who was losing this big day, we all were.

After I let my family know that they needed to cancel their flights and plans for my commencement they kept calling. My attempts at hiding my disappointment of the cancelation failed miserably, as my family called everyday to see how I was doing. It wasn't something I liked talking about and I avoided the subject as much as possible. I knew the reasoning behind the cancelation and I knew that it was unavoidable, but I still felt as if I had been robbed of my final moments of college. All the plans I had were thrown out the window, while my world felt as if it had been turned upside down.

After living with so many people for months, I had become accustomed to always having someone to spend time with. Moving home was the polar opposite. Being an only child with a single mother who was still working, as her work had been deemed essential, I was home by myself a lot. I went from having 14+ hour days to only having class to attend. I was alone with my thoughts, with nothing to distract me. I felt lost, living in a place that barely felt like home anymore.

It got better though. The room I was living in began to feel like home again and, while still upset over my canceled commencement, I accepted that it needed to happen. While I will always be disappointed that my commencement experience was different than I had planned, I have learned a lot about myself during this global pandemic. First, I learned that I hate online classes. This is a great realization for me, as I now know that an online-only graduate program is a terrible option for me. Most importantly, though, I learned that I am resilient. My world, along with everyone else's, was turned upside down due to COVID-19, but I did not let that stop me from finishing my degree. My lack of commencement ceremony does not diminish my accomplishment and I have learned to be proud of being a member of the Class of COVID-19.

