

Overcoming Quarantine

In 2020, my life as previously known changed. While most tried to take it in stride, some people, especially youths, were left with their lives uprooted. Living in fear and robbed of childhood; I was one of these kids. The 2020 quarantine was detrimental to the mental wellbeing of the U.S. population, and, as happens too often, youths bore the brunt of it. For myself, it left me not only socially and emotionally inept for years, but also cemented a deep fear and dread inside me which I had to overcome.

Since infancy, I've had an unusual proclivity for solitude. This manifested very early and persisted for the whole of my development. Despite this, I still engaged in the customary exercises: I had the occasional friend over, Facetimed, and actively pursued new friendships. When the Covid-19 lockdown was engaged during my 6th grade year, frankly, I was excited. I thought of it simply as an extension of Spring Break and an opportunity to relax. Hearing it would be prolonged throughout the rest of the school year dispelled my prior illusions. This was real and was likely to affect me. As the year waxed and waned, I stayed home for days and days on end. I began ignoring people's calls. I rarely left bed, and leaving the house was rarer still. At the beginning of the new school year, I presumed that my experience of isolation was a universal one. That, however, was not the case. Completely unbeknownst to me, everyone else had taken advantage of their free time and developed those tempestuous yet uniquely earnest friendships that characterize early adolescence. My refusal to fraternize with others did nothing but isolate me. I felt more ostracized than ever. To escape this "hermitic" behavior I had to step out of my comfort zone. I had to actively forge meaningful friendships that I simply ignored. I began to fear infection less and found people who I can truly call confidants, even after all this time.

Not only did the pandemic prove to be a social obstacle, it planted the seeds of dread and fear inside me. I was at the age where one begins to develop a more realistic perspective of the world and transition away from the idyllic fantasies of childhood. It just so happened that during this transitional stage, the world underwent a major change. The ensuing global pandemonium made the world seem harsher and colder than it truly was, especially to a burgeoning youth like myself. The years during and after the pandemic saw me become unbearably nihilistic. Why should anything matter? What truly brought me out of this sinkhole was my discovery of philosophy. I still vividly remember selecting *Emotions* by Jean-Paul Sartre from a book sale on Amazon. This book opened a multitude of doors for me. My understanding of the human condition was heightened to such an extent, I could hardly bear the thought that nothing mattered. People often say that books and philosophy are pointless, but when one is directionless, they couldn't be more poignant.

Though this struggle may seem trivial, it has been the greatest challenge of my life so far. I had to heal and reacclimate to living a normal life after my world was uprooted. The whole ordeal taught me that one cannot let themselves be paralyzed by fear. I overcame the obstacles set before me because I opened up to people, read eye-opening works, and stopped letting fear control me. To quote Marilyn Monroe: "We should all start to live before we get too old. Fear is stupid. So are regrets."