



SENIOR SPRING Interrupted

Members of the Class of '20 chronicle how their lives
have been upended by the COVID outbreak

For the past decade, Corey Earle '07 has taught a popular class on Cornell history—but this spring it felt like he and his students were living through it. Dubbed “The First American University” and offered through the American studies department, the class—like all others on the Hill last semester—switched to an online format as the University suspended in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While online learning has its limitations, for Earle’s class it provided an advantage: a course whose enrollment, for space reasons, had been capped at just over 400 students was now open to all. Some 1,100 people logged in each week for the rest of the semester, with more than 2,500 viewing at least one lecture. Attendees included not only alumni but parents of current students, who made watching Earle’s lectures a family affair. “It’s been fun to hear from people all around the world,” he says. “We had people from thirty-five different countries watching live.”

During the three weeks between the University’s suspension of classes and their resumption online, Earle devised a series of optional lectures; topics included other crises Cornell has weathered, such as Ithaca’s 1903 typhoid epidemic, the 1918 Spanish influenza pandemic, and two world wars. He also explored how such events have shaped the University. For example, the typhoid epidemic—when twenty-nine students died due to a contaminated local water supply—spurred the construction of dorms on the Hill. “The president used the epidemic as an opportunity to say, ‘We need to invest in housing to make sure our students are safe,’” Earle says, “and within the next decade they decided to build West Campus.”

With Earle’s current crop of students living through another public health crisis—this one a global pandemic—he teamed up with his brother, University Archivist Evan Earle '02, MS '14, to give them an opportunity to contribute to the historical record. For extra credit, students

could pen a personal essay describing how COVID-19 had affected them; with their permission, the memoirs would be included in the archives in Kroch Library. More than a third of the class—some 150 students—turned one in. “I was worried at first that maybe I was asking them to relive a negative experience, but most of the students said they enjoyed getting their thoughts down,” Corey Earle observes. “A lot of them said that writing the reflection was cathartic and helped give them closure on a difficult semester.”

The memoirs share some themes common to people around the world at the present moment: anguish at the loss of life and widespread economic suffering; anxiety that the virus may harm friends and family; fear for the future. And since most of the class’s students are seniors at Cornell, there’s also sadness and frustration at the loss of traditions such as a final Slope Day, a long-anticipated Senior Week, and a May Commencement; uncertainty about grad school plans; disappointment at having a job offer withdrawn; and concern over how a pandemic-driven recession will harm their prospects. Of those who participated, nearly all consented for their essay to be included in the archives—where it will give future generations an intimate look at life as a Cornell undergrad at a historic moment. “I hope,” says Corey Earle, “it helps people understand the human experience, more than just the headlines.”

Condensed excerpts from several dozen essays, reprinted with the students’ permission, appear on the following pages.

SHARE YOUR COVID STORY

In addition to compiling the student memoirs, the University Archives is collaborating with the History Center in Tompkins County to gather information on how Cornellians and local residents are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. Alumni are invited to complete the online survey, which can be found at tinyurl.com/CUCovid19. Questions can be directed to Evan Earle at efe4@cornell.edu.

On March 10, President Martha Pollack announced that in person instruction would continue for just two more weeks, until spring break; the rest of the semester would be conducted online. Just a few days later—on Friday, March 13—the increasingly dire nature of the pandemic prompted the administration to take urgent action. That afternoon, an announcement went out that classes were suspended as of 5 p.m.; barring an exemption due to personal circumstances, all students had to vacate their on campus housing by March 29.



EMMA JACOB

I read the message surrounded by three of my closest friends while we tried to eat dinner. We ended up crying into our spaghetti, in a state of sadness and disbelief. Less than an hour after the announcement, I had to play a chimes concert. The final piece on my set list, “Keep the Home Fires Burning,” was a way for me to think that Cornell would recover from this and would be standing strong, ready to welcome back students in the (hopefully) near future.

One thing that has been particularly challenging for myself and many other graduating seniors throughout the world is that there is no sense of closure. Without graduation, it is very difficult for me to feel like I’m done. Am I done when my last final is complete? When I receive my diploma? When I leave Ithaca? When I say goodbye to my friends? What I’ve learned to take away from this experience and my four years at Cornell, however, is that I will always be a Cornellian. I will always cherish my memories made here, the opportunities I had because of this institution, the lifelong friendships I’ve made, and the multitude of new experiences I’ve had as a result of being a Cornellian. Nothing, not even COVID-19, can take away those things from me.

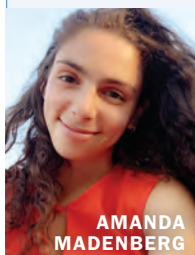
— EMMA JACOB '20

The first week after we got the announcement felt like at least a month, maybe even longer. Each day was filled with so many emotions. Highs included reminiscing with my roommates as we cooked dinner, lows when I remembered yet another event I’d miss. The list seemed endless: senior gala, Senior Week, my last Slope Day. I even longed for the seemingly routine aspects of a semester at Cornell: studying in each library one more time, walking from one class to another, hearing the clock tower chimes throughout the day, late nights at Ruloff’s or Level B, getting caught in the rain.

As time has gone on, I’ve adapted to a new way of life—now living at home with my family. I do my Cornell homework and take my Cornell classes at the desk I occupied for all of my middle and high school years. I cook and eat dinner with my family, I do at-home workouts, and I typically Zoom or FaceTime with my friends at night. I am still grieving the

loss of senior year, and I’m sure I will grieve it for years to come. Each bone in my body longs to be in Ithaca.

— AMANDA MADENBERG '20



AMANDA MADENBERG

Between the time of the announcement and my departure from Cornell, I wanted to do so many things. I wanted to maximize the time with my friends. We were all West Campus residential staff, so we took senior photos at the War Memorial and Baker Tower under the chilly, cloudy March sky.

During this time, I was also working on my biology thesis. Earlier that week, I had thawed cells and was preparing for an experiment. However, with the suspension of classes came the closing of all labs. In the few days the labs were still open, I gathered as much data as possible so that I could do data analysis and work remotely.

Graduate students were throwing away and bleaching thousands of cells and even taking home lab equipment to work at home. We also made hand sanitizer since none could be bought anywhere. I spent all of my Cornell years in this lab, and the last thing I ever pipetted was hand sanitizer.

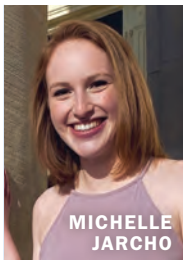
— JUSTINE SHIH '20



JUSTINE SHIH

While those of us living off campus were not forced to leave, we were strongly encouraged to do so. I was devastated. I wasn’t ready to leave the friends, classes, and clubs that had made my college experience so special. One senior made a GroupMe with over 2,000 members called “Martha Can’t Make Us Leave,” where upperclassmen vowed to stay in Ithaca through the end of the semester. We didn’t understand the full scope of the situation and figured that we could still save our spring semester if we just stayed in Ithaca.

I took a trip to Wegmans with my roommates that day, and the atmosphere felt apocalyptic. The shelves were empty of all staples including peanut butter, pasta, and toilet paper. Strangers glared at each other and gave each other a wide berth, as



if every other person was going to give them coronavirus. It wasn't just Cornell that was panicked; the whole Ithaca community was.

— MICHELLE JARCHO '20

Although we'd been hearing about the coronavirus in China for a few months, no one was really taking it seriously. Being in Ithaca, it feels like nothing can reach you because you are in the middle of nowhere. That Friday we got the announcement around 2 p.m. that it would be the last day of in-person classes. I was in my research lab, setting up for an experiment that I would never finish, leaving my senior honors thesis incomplete. (They still let me submit the write-up and graduate with honors.)

It is extremely hard, especially as a senior already suffering from senioritis, to focus on my classes now that I have been ripped out of the academic environment and thrown into my childhood room. Somehow having nothing to do besides school has not stopped me from procrastinating my work and being more apathetic than I was already. Overall I know I am in an extremely privileged position, including reliable wi-fi, a room to myself, no financial distress, etc. If I'm having trouble completing my classes, I know it must be so much harder for many of my peers.

— TALIA OSTROW '20



TALIA OSTROW

The first few days of no school were carefree and fun; parties were on every corner. The end of our celebration came with a stern e-mail from [Vice President for Student and Campus Life] Ryan Lombardi with the subject line "A public health plea." He begged us to stop the parties and start social distancing. There was a huge annual



CHASE FANG

block party scheduled: the Catherine Street party. Initially, all seniors—if not everyone who was still on campus—were at least contemplating going. However, as the days crept by, fewer and fewer people seemed as excited; many started shaming anyone who mentioned going.

When I finally left campus, it didn't feel real. The timing was off: exams hadn't happened, there was no Slope Day, and worst of all there would be no graduation send-off. The next few weeks were confusing. It felt like summer, except I was still

'When I finally left campus, it didn't feel real. The timing was off; exams hadn't happened, there was no Slope Day, and worst of all there would be no graduation send-off.'

— CHASE FANG

expected to remember all my coursework after the break was over. Picking up where we left off was incredibly difficult. I had this new commitment to my family, who all live together in a one-bedroom apartment, since we aren't expected to be home all at once for extended periods of time anymore. This pandemic is not only a health crisis but also an economic one. I am no expert, but I do know that this is a tragedy—an international, multigenerational, tragedy.

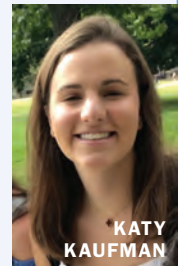
— CHASE FANG '20

First, everyone in the dorms left, and seniors who had originally been set on staying were beginning to feel the severity of the situation as bars had closed, CTB had removed all their seating, and the number of people wearing masks on campus started to increase. Since I had my car and lived off campus, I could leave at any time. As the

days passed, as sad it was to face that I was leaving my college experience, it only got more and more sad to be on the empty and shut-down campus.

One of the best memories of those sad days was that many seniors would go and sit on the Slope and watch the sunset. One day a group of frat boys brought a huge stereo and was playing music and tossing a football around. It was a nice way to celebrate the beauty of the Ithaca campus and be in solidarity with your peers, but also know that none of us was in it alone; we all had each other.

— KATY KAUFMAN '20



KATY KAUFMAN

Within an hour of Martha's announcement that classes were canceled, Collegetown was abuzz with activity. It seemed that the entire Class of 2020 was out and about, hell-bent on purchasing as much alcohol as they could carry. The entire senior class, without any coordination, overran the Slope. Later that weekend, my friends and I decided to greet the sunrise at Schoellkopf. The strangest thing about that morning, in that familiar

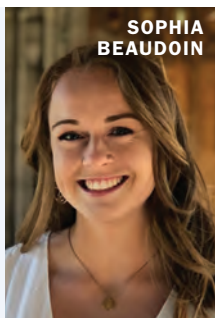
stadium, that familiar landscape unfurling before us, was how cold it was. The cold was omnipresent—every senior event was tinged with that bitter Ithacan cold, reminding me that this was not how it was supposed to be: that by May, Ithaca can be cold, but not like this bitter winter's bite.

— SERGEY SMIRNOV '20



SERGEY SMIRNOV

I had been accepted into the Peace Corps in September and had spent seven months waiting anxiously to finish college and be sent off to Indonesia to teach girls

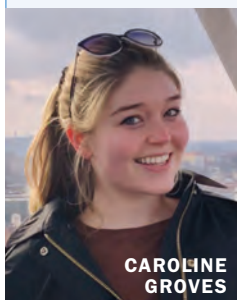


**SOPHIA
BEAUDOIN**

English. One day, I got an e-mail that the Peace Corps was ceasing operations. It's not the worst that could happen, but what I felt more than anything was a sense of injustice: my plan—and I realize how self-indulgent this sounds—was good. It was for what I perceived as a common good. And I had been agonizing over the details of it all since my acceptance, beginning to process missing holidays with my family, waking up in a humid room alone in a foreign place. But I had known that every sacrifice would be worth it. And then I found myself, that evening, back at square one.

This loss of structure in virtually every aspect of our lives has at times felt debilitating. The good days, though, are the ones that I balance creating a routine while also indulging in the freedom of this new normal. For me, learning to cope with this strange global event has looked like reading an entire novel in a day and cleaning my room religiously. It's also looked like the "corona fifteen" settling in with every cookie devoured. And that seems all right, for now.

— SOPHIA BEAUDOIN '20



**CAROLINE
GROVES**

Both my parents are healthcare workers—in New York City and Connecticut, respectively—so I've heard from them the horrors of this pandemic and I've seen some

of the toll it's taking on my own family. My father now works eighteen-hour days at his hospital; he's lost twenty pounds and there's a tiredness that lingers over him even on the rare day off. The stories my parents tell about the courage and tirelessness of their colleagues are inspiring and incredibly humbling.

With my parents' long hours and prolonged absences from our home, I've become the de facto head of household. I have taken over all of the responsibilities, which is helpful in keeping me occupied

but also odd for me. A month ago I was a student wholly preoccupied with my own life and my own future, and now because of this pandemic I see how privileged I was to be so self-oriented. I took so much for granted as a student at Cornell.

— CAROLINE GROVES '20

I miss the Cornell that I remember—the vibrancy of the student body on a sunny day, the parties and late nights, the crowds in bars. The small things: the walk to class while the clock tower chimesmaster plays a concert, the casual hand wave or smile as you meet people you know on a daily walk to class, lectures with a professor, and waiting in line to grab a coffee.

These are things that I treasure even more because they are things I didn't realize I would experience the "last" of when I did. With graduation, there's a warning: things will come to an end. Here, there was no warning; it just was the end. And I have had to learn to accept that and move on—and I hope that I did.

Today, April 6, was a beautiful day in Ithaca. The sun was shining on a sky of brilliant blue punctuated by fluffy clouds. Those who remained were on their roofs, music was blasting, and people emerged from their houses to enjoy the day. That's hope, and that's a beautiful thing.

— ERIC HU '20

I would argue that COVID-19 is our first defining generational event. Like the class that graduated in 2008, our class will be



**ERIC
HU**

'I would argue that COVID-19 is our first defining generational event.'

— SIENNA PERRY

walking into a falling economy. And we have to finish this semester in a totally different environment than we're used to. Some of us are in different time zones, some don't have a good Internet connection, some have to share a computer with siblings who



**SIENNA
PERRY**

are also at home taking classes. It's hard to concentrate and function at the same capacity as a full-time student on campus.

This virus and quarantine have made me realize just how important having a full day was, how routines are a necessity to normal living. Being lazy and lounging around was fun for a week, until the reality of it all hit. Being stuck in my apartment, watching the news and how this virus is playing out both around the world and in my own personal life, it really gets to you. It's made me think more about the safety of my family and friends, wanting to constantly check in and make sure they're OK.

— SIENNA PERRY '20

Five-thirty a.m. at the Ithaca airport is usually quite calm, but that Sunday the line for the security check was almost to the door. The plane was oversold, and the guy who shared a cab with me had to be put on another flight. Every seat was filled by Cornell students. When I boarded my second flight in Philadelphia, the plane was less than half full. The family behind me was fully



**THERESA
LI**

equipped with masks, gloves, and goggles. I wasn't sure if that made me feel safer or more anxious about the whole situation.

My family decided that I should self-quarantine in my house because someone I came in contact with showed symptoms of coronavirus and had travel history. When I woke up in my room the next day, it really hit me. It was the middle of March. What am I doing at home in my room? After three days, the result of my friend's test came back negative and I was allowed to leave my room. When I went to the grocery store, 80 percent of the shelves were empty. I knew it was probably temporary, but it made me realize how vulnerable we are. All the prosperity can collapse in a second. It made me treasure more of what I have at the moment.

— THERESA LI '20

The road trip [to get home to Washington State and drop off a friend in Arizona] was quite harrowing because we went through so many states as they began to lock down. We went from New York to Indiana, near the Illinois border, in one day. We ate St. Patrick's Day food in our cars for lunch and Cracker Barrel for dinner at the hotel. We "Cloroxed" our room, went straight to sleep, woke up, and took the next trip to the end

of Oklahoma. We were very tired but made amazing time through empty highways. At some restaurants we were able to eat outside together, which was a welcome change. The next day we went to New Mexico. Finally, we went to Arizona, where my friend lived, to rest for three days, and then shortly thereafter I left to drive all the way up to Vancouver, Washington.

This was one of the most tumultuous times to be a senior at Cornell. I am saddened at the large loss of life, because as of the moment I am writing this, over 57,000 people have died in the U.S. alone from the virus, with many more every day. Quarantine life is getting old for a lot of people, but I know I am staying inside for the greater good.

— VINCENT FORAND '20

I live in Westchester County, New York, and the National Guard was sent just a couple miles from my house, making my decision [about whether to go home] far more complicated than many of my peers. I ultimately stayed on campus, which has been an amazing decision. I have grown incredibly close with the eight members of my fraternity who stayed over the past month or so.

Obtaining food and groceries continues to be a challenge, but I have been able to utilize friends with vehicles as well as eating in the one dining hall still open on West Campus. Boredom has not been a problem due to the social nature of my housing; however, it was depressing to watch earlier today as the basketball hoops were taken out on



**VINCENT
FORAND**



**ALEX
GELFOND**

West Campus, and the general malaise I feel walking around Collegetown or campus is at best eerie, but more accurately described as depressing. The past month or so has not felt like Cornell. The charm that makes this place so special, especially when it's warm out and people are scattered throughout campus, is entirely non-existent.

— ALEX GELFOND '20

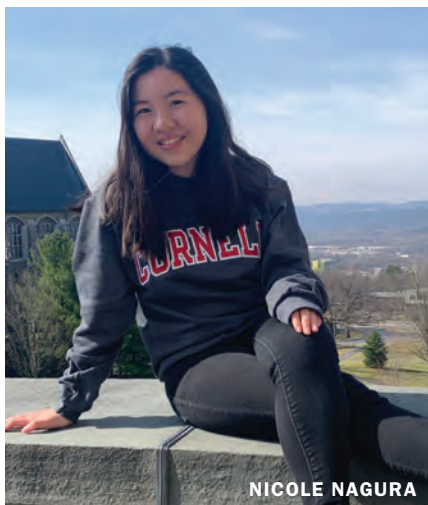
We have these things called "Big Red Bucks" (BRBs), which are part of the meal plan and can only be used to buy food on campus. All the students started panicking and buying all of the food so they could finish spending their BRBs before they left, because we were unsure if Cornell would refund any of the meal plans. I went to the Dairy Bar and bought ice cream to bring home in pint containers because my family loves it and I thought that would be a good way to spend my hundreds of dollars of BRBs that I was planning to spend over the next three months. All of the places that sold food were completely sold out; the shelves were bare.

This would be an indication of what it would be like across the country for the next couple of months. At home, all of the grocery stores were sold out of most things. It was pretty scary. Of course, all cleaning products were sold out, as was toilet paper, but what was surprising was that there was no produce or dairy products like milk and cheese. There was (and still is at the time I'm writing this) a lot of uncertainty about what is going on, and that caused a lot of panic. When we get food from the grocery store, we have to spray and/or wipe it down with Lysol. When we get packages or mail delivered, we also spray it and we wait several days before opening it. Whenever my father returns from work, he showers immediately before touching anything else and we put his clothes in the wash. When we visit my grandparents, we only sit out on the lawn, and we sit far away from them.

— ARIELLE GOLDBERG '20



**ARIELLE
GOLDBERG**



NICOLE NAGURA

In February, I went to Japan for job interviews. Japan was a CDC Level 2 country, but I took the risk since most of the cases were from the *Diamond Princess* cruise and I felt I had very low risk. [In early March], the University sent out a mass e-mail stating that anyone who had come from a Level 3 country, as well as Japan, would have to self-quarantine for fourteen days. My last day of quarantine, I was notified that students should evacuate Ithaca immediately and that classes would be suspended for three weeks.

As soon as I went home, I had to start working around fourteen hours every day in Manhattan to help my family's business. As an Asian American, I was always in fear of being attacked. I was called "chink" and people yelled, "It's China's fault" as well as "I need to get away from you." There were many times I was fearful for my life. I carried keys as my protection while I walked to work.

I wanted to go to Tokyo after graduation to

work, but all my post-grad plans began to fall as well. Borders are closed, and Japan does not want people from New York to come.

— NICOLE NAGURA '20

A lot of people, myself included, do not live in a household that allows me to learn to the best of my ability. My mother is not in the best of health, so I had to take care of her. My father was on business calls almost all times of the day, and that made it difficult to focus. And news of relatives falling sick due to the coronavirus was never easy and kept me on edge. I was lucky that my professors decreased our workload significantly and so, despite the difficulties I faced, I was able to perform well in my classes.

A debate that broke out in the Cornell subreddit concerned the grading scheme for this semester—whether to allow students to have a choice in keeping their grades lettered or pass/fail or to force all classes to become pass/fail. Those in favor of "choice" said that graduate schools and other scholarship programs required a GPA, and so need letter grades, while those in the "universal pass/fail" camp argued that letter grades are unfair and the decision to allow choice is extremely biased against students in households with a poor socioeconomic status. At the end of the day, the University faculty opted against universal pass/fail and decided that the drop deadline would be extended to the last day of classes.

— ARJUN CHATTORAJ '20

I found myself nervous to participate in my small, discussion-based class, SOC 3850: Mass Incarceration and Family Life Course, because of the unfamiliar [online]



ARJUN CHATTORAJ

format. Speaking aloud on Zoom felt almost like a job interview. Wines and Vines class no longer included the allure of tasting multiple flights of wine each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. And the First American University went from taking place in a large lecture hall—full of the camaraderie of fellow seniors booing and hissing at the mention of Harvard—to my bedroom, following along with my two best friends on FaceTime but still lacking the energy that used to run through the room.

My life has slowed down in so many ways. I went from always rushing—from class, to work, to the library and lunch with a friend—to being stagnant. I appreciate this newfound quiet, but I also miss the busyness of having a life overflowing with things to do,



ALEXANDRA MACDONALD

places to be, and people to be with. I am grateful for my health and the health of my family, who are home in New York City, the epicenter of the pandemic. I am thankful for the privilege we have to shelter in place, when many are putting themselves at risk to do their jobs. But still, while incredibly small compared to the losses of lives that this pandemic has taken from us, I feel as if I have experienced a loss. I no longer have graduation to look forward to in May, to celebrate four years of hard work at Cornell, together with friends and family. My status as a "Cornell student" will silently change to "Cornell alum," with little fanfare.

— ALEXANDRA MACDONALD '20

I am taking all but one of my courses pass/fail. I am terrible at online learning and I don't think the grades I would receive now would match the grades I would have received if I was still on campus. Mostly, though, I took these classes pass/fail



GRACE
MASTRIANNI

because I cannot deal with any more stress. Going to the grocery store is stressful. Going back and forth between my mom and dad's houses is stressful. My stepsiblings going back and forth between their two houses is stressful.

I have no clue what my future is going to look like. I do not have a job waiting for me when this is over, like many of my friends do. I'm living at home, which was never a part of my plan. Applying to jobs seems so pointless when almost no one is hiring. This is the first time in my life where I have absolutely no clue what my life will look like in six months, and that feeling does not sit well with me.

— GRACE MASTRIANNI '20

My printmaking class was severely impacted from the cancellation of in-person meetings. The course met every week in the Johnson Museum study gallery, where we could physically see each print. Switching to slideshows, while still effective, makes it more difficult to appreciate the pieces for their size, any inscription on the back or watermark, or the quality. As someone looking to enter the museum field, this period of time is fascinating with regard to people's interaction with museums from a virtual standpoint. Like for the printmaking class, the experience is totally different. But I think that the lack of access to physical art right now may make people appreciate museums and history centers even more.

— CAROLINE KLEINER '20



CAROLINE
KLEINER

'My life has slowed down in so many ways. I went from always rushing—from class, to work, to the library and lunch with a friend—to being stagnant.'

— ALEXANDRA MACDONALD

Coronavirus has meant a complete shift in my family's lifestyle. A few weeks ago, my family was financially stable. As a matter of fact, my dad was just days away from selling the travel company he has built up over the last twenty years and we were looking into buying an apartment in Tel Aviv. However, just before the contracts were signed, coronavirus hit and my dad's company's revenue fell to zero. Travel has completely stopped and the business is now struggling to last through this summer.



ARIELLE GORDIS

In addition, my family and I were all supposed to be in Israel for Passover to celebrate with my grandmother who is very sick, my brother who has been away on his gap year, and my boyfriend.

I have been in a long-distance relationship for all of college with a guy who lives 5,000-plus miles away, and the plan was for me to visit over spring break and then make *aliyah* (move to Israel) a few days after graduation. However, the virus has caused Israel to close its borders to any non-citizens, so I am legally locked out of the country and we have no idea when we will be able to reunite.

— ARIELLE GORDIS '20

I think that Cornell's dining facilities, and dining facilities around the world, will change forever after this. I can't see anyone wanting to ever eat from a salad bar, buffet, or self-serve pastry case again; even the little bar in coffee shops where you add your own milk and sugar will probably be gone, too.

One thing that I think should be documented is how reckless some Cornell students have been. Tompkins County hasn't had many cases, and reckless students who don't care about the severity of the situation risk changing that. It's really trendy right now to post "Thank you, healthcare heroes!" or a selfie of yourself wearing a mask on your Instagram story. But people really don't want to give up their social lives, so they'll make their Instagram posts and then go to their Collegetown darty [daytime party] on the same day.

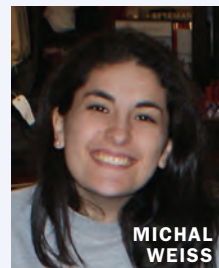


HANNAH
HYAMS

I really hope that my class gets to have a graduation. Martha sent out an e-mail a while ago saying that we'd have an in-person graduation at some point, but nobody really knows when it'll be possible to be in a crowd again. I miss Ithaca with my whole heart. I feel like I was robbed of the capstone of my Cornell experience, and I'm counting down the minutes until I can be back.

— HANNAH HYAMS '20

The emotions really do go in waves. Some days I am OK. I am distracted by TV or by the copious amounts of work that I still have. And other days, I find that I have cried



MICHAL
WEISS

three or four times. Granted, the playlist I have on Spotify, entitled "Farewell Senior Year," doesn't really help. But I have also come to accept that I am allowed to both acknowledge that there are people who have it so much worse than me and also be angry and sad that my senior year and all that I worked for came crashing down in a matter of days. One of the days when I was crying, my mom said to me, "I would be more upset if you weren't upset. I am so happy that you loved it so much." And truthfully, I think that sums it up.

— MICHAL WEISS '20



**AASHKA
PIPROTTAR**

This crisis reminded me how ambitious, resilient, driven, compassionate, and absolutely amazing the students, faculty, and staff at Cornell are. The administration fought for us—keeping us updated through e-mail, taking precautions to support the underprivileged, allowing us to change grading options, and extending the add/drop period. Professors not only redesigned their entire courses to accommodate students but offered personal help to students in need as well. Barton Hall is currently full of members of the Cornell community sewing masks for healthcare professionals.

Cornellians are always criticized for “living in a bubble” and not understanding the real world. Today, the real world terrifies me and I am more grateful than ever for the protection, love, safety, and support within the Cornell bubble.

— AASHKA PIPROTTAR '20



**DIANA
LOZINA**

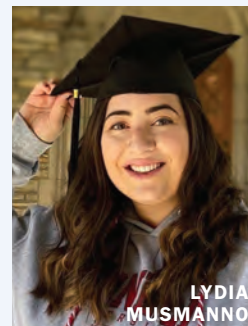
I never was able to grasp the magnitude of Cornell's effect on me until it was taken away. The seemingly meaningless moments now seem

so treasured. I remember at the beginning of the semester I walked into my first class of the day to find that each seat was accompanied by a small, pull-up wooden desk that was six inches by six inches. I remember grappling with my notebook to try and fit my paperwork, hitting nearby classmates with my elbows by accident in the process. Taking notes or completing exams was tedious and troublesome, and I never missed a moment to complain about it.

I was so angry with this little wooden desk. However, today I would love to cherish just one more moment of sitting elbow-to-elbow in an overcrowded classroom with my peers, taking notes on that desk.

— DIANA LOZINA '20

This entire experience has been something out of a science fiction novel. I don't really know what tomorrow will bring, let alone a few months from now. The news and laws seem to be changing every day. I am now used to long hours spent on Zoom and have invested in blue light glasses to stop the constant headaches, and soundproof headphones to quell the sounds of my roommates making lunch or having meetings during my lectures. I am no longer



**LYDIA
MUSMANNO**

surprised to put on a mask before entering a building and I have stopped touching my face when outside the house. It's scary that this has all become normal. I don't know if the world will ever truly be the same again, and I have stopped expecting it to.

— LYDIA MUSMANNO '20

One thing that is getting me through these unprecedented times is that everyone is in the same boat. We're all in this together, and although it has been incredibly difficult, things will go back to normal soon enough.

The future is still so uncertain and my job search has been put on hold; companies are on hiring freezes. This aspect of the

‘One thing that is getting me through these unprecedented times is that everyone is in the same boat. We’re all in this together.’

— OLIVIA CHATAIN

I live in Rockland County, New York; my mother is a doctor and my father is a firefighter, and they both work in Manhattan. Because of the essential nature of their jobs, they have continued to commute in every day. I am concerned for their health and safety, but I am also concerned about the ethics surrounding me moving in with them. If I do move home and interact with them, for how long will I be forced to quarantine in the house, out of fear of contracting something from them and then passing it on to others? The sense of responsibility that I feel to stop the spread of COVID-19 has been confusing and overwhelming.

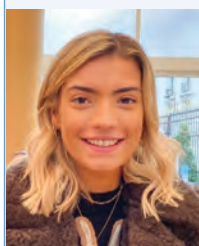
— CASSIDY MCGOVERN '20



**CASSIDY
MCGOVERN**



**CHRYSOULA
KAPELONIS**



pandemic has been the most difficult for me, because I really don't know what I am doing after graduation. There was already so much pressure to find a job, and now it seems like an even more daunting task. I know that everything will work out in the end, and for now I need to do my best to stay positive and try to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Someday I'll tell my kids this unreal story about how my life got turned upside down because of the coronavirus.

— OLIVIA CHATAIN '20

My dad came to visit me from Queens because all my housemates had left. However, just a day after he came he started to get really sick. For the next two weeks, he stayed on my couch and exhibited all of the symptoms of the coronavirus. He never got tested, but I am pretty sure that he had it, considering he had come from the epicenter of the pandemic. I am so lucky that he was able to recover and not have to go to the hospital. It was also surreal, because I never imagined that I would be living in my

Collegetown house with my dad, especially at the end of my senior year of college.

I still need to find a job in what will probably be a recession. I had planned on being a field organizer for a Senate race or the presidential election, which involves a lot of knocking on doors and organizing volunteers. I will most likely still be an organizer, but the logistics of this will almost certainly be different in the face of the pandemic.

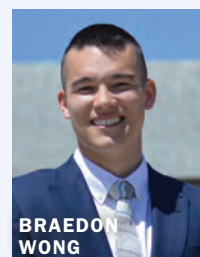
— CHRYSOULA KAPELONIS '20



Most universities, including Cornell, have rightly not yet made decisions [about fall semester] because it is impossible without a clearer understanding of the social and geopolitical circumstances that will define fall 2020. But it presents some difficult challenges for students like me, attending graduate school next semester, who have yet to secure housing in a new city and still have no idea if they'll be expected to physically be there. I have nothing but sympathy for the university administrators across the country that are being forced to make this seemingly impossible choice.

— MICHAEL JOHNS '20

Because of this pandemic and the world standing still, I realized I have the time to raise a puppy. I have wanted a dog since my childhood dogs passed away but felt that I would never have time to properly train him. But with this pandemic I was able to adopt Rover, a puppy from a shelter. He is my best pal and I am excited to continue our adventures together.



**BRAEDON
WONG**

— BRAEDON WONG '20

'I wonder if, once this is all over, the social divides in our country that this pandemic has made so clear will be engaged with on Cornell's campus in ways they haven't before.'

— NATHAN REVOR

One thing I think about frequently is the relationship between this virus and climate change. It is interesting how everyone is taking this pandemic so seriously, saying that we have to enact social distancing measures to



LAUREN RUTZEN

protect each other. However, when it comes to climate change—which will eventually kill off the whole human race—many people seem indifferent. I have seen several articles discussing how the Earth might be different if we talked (and panicked) about climate change like we do about coronavirus. Other articles have shown that the quarantine in China cleared the polluted air and the lockdown in Italy has restored the beauty of Venice's canals. As someone who routinely fears for the future of the planet, I am curious whether, when this is all over, the individuals who are apathetic about climate change will start to care more.

— LAUREN RUTZEN '20

A little over a week after I returned to Michigan, the job offer I had secured in November of 2019 was rescinded. That day, however, was the day my little sister got into Cornell and became a member of the Class of 2024. That seemed to be the tone of the virus: loss shrouded by bits of optimism.

In my opinion, coronavirus will define this generation of young adults. We are watching future political leaders arise and current

political leaders stumble. We are seeing services like food, education, and medicine transform before our very eyes. I think we all understand the fragility of our situations, and I hope that this horrible international event turns into positive change and increased advocacy for basic human needs to be met across the board.

— ANUSHRI SUBRAMANIAM '20

At Cornell, we are surrounded by students of all economic backgrounds, from first-generation students in rural areas to the children of some of the wealthiest individuals in the world. But when we're here, those differences are easy enough to tuck away. We all go to the same classes, have access to the same facilities and high-speed Internet, and live in the same structures, for the most part. While some of us might wear Balenciaga shoes to class while others have to go home and work the family restaurant over breaks, for the most part the "university bubble" functions as a great equalizer.

This is quite sadly not so when everyone has to leave. Some of my peers headed straight off to country homes and beach houses. Some of my queer friends went back to spaces that weren't accepting of their identities. Others went back to situations where they are expected to bear a large volume of household responsibilities. Without the great equalizer of the Hill, our abilities to successfully complete classes, maintain mental and physical health, and get the jobs we were supposed to get after graduation are suddenly not at all the same. I wonder if, once this is all over, the social divides in our country that this pandemic

has made so clear will be engaged with on Cornell's campus in ways they haven't before.

— NATHAN REVOR '20

At home, my life consists of waking up, having a morning cup of coffee, working out, watching the news on the latest updates, going stir crazy, eating dinner with my family, and sleeping. Not very thrilling; definitely a change of pace from Ithaca, where I was involved in three research projects, took nineteen credits, and was active in my sorority. I expect that when I go back to Ithaca for our graduation ceremony—shoutout to President Pollack for postponing Commencement and not canceling it—a lot of things will be different. Depending on how



NATHAN REVOR

long people are made to stay in their homes and not venture outdoors, I can see local restaurants and cafés having to shut down.

As a senior about to graduate and join the "real world," the fluctuations in the market have been terrifying. I have heard many horror stories of people losing internships and jobs or having their start dates pushed back for months. This is not the way any senior wants to be spending their senior spring, worrying about if they will have a job after graduation.

— JESSICA WILLERSON '20

ANUSHRI SUBRAMANIAM



These times of forced self-isolation test people's ability to handle difficult situations. There are maybe five categories I could place people into: the baker, the self-care enthusiast, the workout fanatic, the sleeper, and the do-it-yourself junkie. Personally, I am the workout fanatic and the baker. I have always been enthusiastic about exercise, but cooking? Not so much. However, I really enjoy eating healthy, and the best way to do that is to cook. Since I returned to my home in Saratoga Springs, New York, I have cooked vegan quiche, spicy seasoned chicken, and a lot of soups. Additionally, I have expanded my baking capabilities to include cinnamon rolls, macarons, and blueberry muffins. I am excited to apply and grow my cooking skills once this pandemic is over.

— BROOKE TRAVIS '20

I was planning on working as an intern at the NIH; however, that got canceled. Fortunately one of my professors said he could pay me for work over the summer, so I plan on staying in Ithaca.

Next year I'm going to be a TA and PhD student at the University of Maryland, but if classes are still virtual I'm not sure how that will work out. Do I need to get housing? Should I live with my parents for a year?

One thing that inspired me and gave me hope was having a Passover Seder with my roommates and family over Zoom. I thought



NATHAN
ZIMMERBERG

it would be a disaster and impossible to do over the Internet—but despite me setting off all of the smoke detectors while trying to cook a meal, and missing my mom's cooking, it was a great experience. After the Seder and lots of wine, my roommate and I got a wireless speaker and danced all around the abandoned campus late at night, which was very liberating.

— NATHAN ZIMMERBERG '20

The coronavirus pandemic has had an incredible impact on the ability for the Class of 2020 to search for jobs and keep the commitments we made. I have chosen to defer my acceptance to Columbia's School of Social Work in hopes that I would be able to fully see out my field placement in person by fall 2021. This entire experience is sending individuals back into their childhood homes,

and I believe that we must all be more accepting and patient with each other in the coming years.

— SOPHIE JONES '20



SOPHIE
JONES

Getting the e-mail that graduation was postponed—not canceled—came as a huge relief. Martha Pollack's e-mail to seniors was so well written; the upbeat and animated tone gave me hope and faith that maybe the Class of 2020 would have some sort of normal closure. I am excited that I will be able to see all my friends again, be proud of them while they get their diplomas, and have our parents meet each other like we had originally planned. We can hopefully eat at our favorite restaurants again, check off a few more boxes on our bucket list of activities, and have a chance to celebrate and say, "We did it! We graduated from Cornell University, and we did it together." ■

— NIDHI DONTULA '20



NIDHI
DONTULA



JESSICA
WILLERSON