THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE YEAR 2020

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As the clock finally struck 12:00 and the countdown hit its last digit, it was finally the new year! A wave of celebration and joy swept through my cozy family room and we were wrapped by the gentle warmth of the excited room on this cold day. If 2019 wasn't the year for me, I was determined to ensure that 2020 would be. All of the chatter in the room was about the hopes and aspirations for not only a new year, but the start of a new decade! 2020 was the year that was referenced when talking about this "future," but usually with some sort of weird or nonsensical innovation like flying cars. But as New Year's Day passed, and the days continued to roll by, we began to become shocked at what 2020 had in store for us.

 Instead of getting flying cars, we were greeted by the possibility of World War III when Iranian General Qasem Soleimani was killed by an American airstrike near Baghdad International Airport. It felt like everything at the time and that the year could not possibly get any worse! We had literally started off with a chance for being thrown into a world war that could have easily been avoided. This was supposed to be 2020! A chance for everyone to reinvent themselves and better their lives for the decade. As the days continued on, we were hit with more unfortunate events that many have grieved over. The terrible brush fires in Australia, which destroyed millions of acres and wildlife habitats. The tragic passing of NBA legend Kobe Bryant, who had inspired millions. And finally, the discovery and spread of the COVID-19 virus that originated in China and had slowly made its way across Asia and Europe. It was truly unsettling to see all these unfortunate world events happening in such a short period of time, but I tried to make the best out of the situation like I always do.

At that time, those events seemed like the defining characteristics of 2020. But those same events soon drifted away from the media's eyes and the passion of the people. Why? The COVID-19 coronavirus, which we had only observed from afar in other world countries, had finally made its way to the United States. When the general public first heard of the first few cases of COVID-19 in the U.S, it is safe to say some people lost it and panicked. Soon came the apocalypse style hoarding in preparation for a nationwide lockdown. Hand sanitizers, masks, non-perishable food, and even toilet paper were nowhere to be found in stores. I was truly surprised by the selfishness of these hoarders; there was no mention that the stores would be closing so why would they do this? My family really struggled because they were essential workers at this time that worked in the hospital setting. My mom came home crying, devastated about the lack of personal protective equipment and how scared she felt going to work every day, with such high risk of infection. I had always wanted to go into the medical field one day, but at this unprecedented time, I began questioning the reality of my future career path as well.

Out of all this unordinary, I held onto the last ordinary thing this year had brought to me, - school. It was nice having a structured environment and a place where you can interact with a variety of different people. I was in many extracurriculars and even the vice president of three clubs at the time. I was ready to display my months of hard work planning three different projects for each club. For Asian Cultural Club, we had been planning a charity school talent show for over a year and were ready to show our hard work and dedication after months of preparations. For Student Council, I was organizing a new mural for the club members to work on, in order to revitalize a dull part of our school's staircase. For Quiz Bowl team, I was preparing for a new competition that my team had coming and practicing my Quiz Bowl skills. I was so excited about my extracurriculars and truly did not believe that they would be taken away so easily.

In the most unfortunate timing, the city of Philadelphia, as well as the school district, decided to close for two weeks. I was initially happy about the government's decision to finally take action instead of waiting out the global pandemic and endangering many more lives. But as those initial 2 weeks turned into a month and then many months, I found myself becoming increasingly unhappy about the school situation. Not only me, but thousands of other high school students were feeling anxious about the whole situation. Personally, it was difficult to adapt to the virtual learning environment. I am someone who needs to be interacting with my classmates and teacher in order to learn effectively and having that taken away from me was not good. That structure of school helped me feel productive with my time, but when that was taken away, I could find little motivation to get my work done. Learning, which I had loved more than life itself, felt unfulfilling and meaningless.

For my school specifically, they didn't have any mandatory Zoom call classes where lessons would be taught virtually. Instead, they had reading material or videos we would watch in order to learn content. It was good for the first few weeks, but I soon realized no one was going to retain the information because the testing portion had been taken out. I realized how necessary those tests were, even if students hate them. They basically motivate students to retain the information. At the time, I was preparing for all of my standardized tests. I decided at the beginning of the year to commit to taking four different Advanced

Placement classes and all of the exams that came with them towards the end of the school year in May. On top of that, I still had to take my SAT, which was canceled right after the initial 2-week lockdown. I was basically left to my own devices to do well on these exams that would play a crucial part in determining my future.

I decided that even though I was not at school, I should work hard to ensure a good future despite all of its uncertainty. I pitied the class of 2020 because of how badly their senior year ended. But in that chaos, I totally forgot about the struggles of my own class of 2021. We still had yet to be accepted into college and our entire futures were still on the line. In all honestly, we did not know if we would even get a senior year. Class of 2020's senior year was ruined, but no one was mentioning the amount of stress high school juniors would be under. The juniors who had struggled to get through one of the most notoriously difficult years in a virtual set up. The class whose plans were cut short or cut off because of a worldwide pandemic. The class who lost precious time and opportunities. The class of 2021.

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