

Sereene Darwiesh - 11th Grade

Annandale Highschool; Annandale, VA

On March 10th, 2020, quarantine started for me. I came down with a mild cold, but all of the talk about this "wide-spreading virus" called corona paranoid my parents, so I quarantined. I missed the last two days of school before everything shut down. So it began. I remember when I heard the news that my school district was closing for "two weeks." I was in Costco with my family and my brother, who was a senior at the time, shouted, "THEY CLOSED SCHOOL FOR TWO WEEKS."

That's when the severity of the situation hit me. I began to panic with the rest of the world. I immediately called all of my friends to check on them and see how they were doing with the news. In all honesty, I was thrilled that I didn't have to go back to school. At the time, I was struggling academically, so this news seemed like a well-needed break. I remember my dad telling me that it would last longer than two weeks, and there was no way we were going back. I didn't believe him. I was so sure that we were going back after two weeks— maybe even sooner. Boy, was I wrong.

Like the rest of the world, I spent most of my time in quarantine with my family. We bonded like never before. We played games like Uno nightly, and we ate almost every meal together. I found my love for baking. I tried new recipes for treats like scones, brownies, beignets, and so much more. Since my birthday is on March 29th, I was one of the first in my friend group to celebrate a "covid birthday." Although I was turning fifteen, I felt a pit of emptiness and loneliness linger within my mind throughout the day. The day did get better as it went on, and my neighbors even sang me happy birthday from all of their decks.

Although I didn't get to see any of my friends, I still felt a sense of love from my family on that day. Close after my birthday came the holy month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims are obligated to withstand without food or water from sunrise to sunset. Every night we break our fast with iftar, and it's a nightly obligation to have a family dinner. Although the world was physically divided, I have never felt a stronger sense of unity throughout the Muslim community than during Ramadan. Since we were all in the same home situation, many of us bonded over our struggle and our religion overall. I felt a lot of peace in my life during this time, and it was very relieving.

Soon after Ramadan ended came summer. Although things weren't going back to "normal," restrictions were starting to lighten a bit, and people grew less scared compared to the beginning. We as a family stopped wiping down our groceries after each shopping trip, and we decided to start seeing some close family and friends after months of isolation. I was finally getting used to our new "normal." It felt great to finally see my friends that I didn't know I would ever see again during quarantine. Although that may seem dramatic, when the pandemic started, there was a lot of fear inciting news propaganda floating through social media. In a sense, I felt like the world was ending. You can imagine my sense of relief when I was allowed to spend an hour of socially distanced time with my best friend after not knowing when the next time I saw her would be. Although quarantine gave me a lot of time to grow and really find my passion, it was very isolating. When restrictions slowly started to lift, it felt like a weight lifted off my shoulders. Life wouldn't seem as lonely anymore.