

## **Mitchel McFall - 11th Grade**

*University Heights High School; Bronx, NY*

In the fall of 2019, I cowered with the rest of society as tiny armies of microbes ran rampant and took the world hostage. It was quite an interesting experience, to say the least. I believe that this is the first time that the entire world was forced to band together in the face of a global crisis to try and stop the spread of disease. What made this historical event more intriguing was that our obsession with technology and our connectedness via the internet helped us adjust to the new way of life we had to live in quarantine.

For me, the pandemic was a blessing in disguise. Like the rest of the world, my family was together all the time. My classes took place online, which allowed me to spend a lot more time with my family. I could do other activities that I would not have been able to do if I was attending in-person classes. I got very good at my gaming skills. My parents could not object much to the primary source of my social interactions, which was my gaming friends.

For all the positives, there are quite a few negatives. My grades took a bit of a hit due to the massive change in the normal school day routines. There were no early wake-ups, hot morning showers, rushed breakfasts, uniforms, or mad scrambles to make it to school in rush hour before the school bell. It was quite nice to walk from my bedroom into my living room for class. I did not miss the subway commute, where I was usually packed in like a sardine.

It was fun for about a week, and then my teachers began to get the hang of virtual teaching and started to assign work. The work itself wasn't too bad, but I noticed that I was becoming too lazy in the comforts of my home. With a lot of time on my hands, the worries started popping into my head, "*What if we never get out of quarantine?*" or "*What if I catch COVID, and then what will I do?*" Those thoughts lasted until the end of my ninth grade.

In the summer of 2020, I went to basketball courts every day and just played for hours. It was the first time in months that we kids had been permitted outside, and we were very happy. Playing basketball made any worries that I had seemingly vanish from my mind. I did not worry too much about playing basketball without a mask on as we were playing outdoors. It was good to end the long summer days feeling physically tired after months of lethargy. I tried not to focus on the fact that I would have to spend the next school year, my entire 10th-grade year, at home. This would mean not trying out for the basketball team, not seeing friends every day, and not attending normal classes. Another long, tedious year of online schooling.

Luckily, after spending a good half of my ninth-grade year in quarantine, I knew what to expect for the coming year. I did better in my classes and did not let myself get too comfortable and lazy. And suddenly, another whole year had passed. Just like that, I had completed my

sophomore year of high school. It was jarring at first, knowing that a chunk of my life had gone by in quarantine, and I was never getting that time back. I quickly snapped back to focus on when I could play basketball again. Summer flew by, and then it was back to school in the fall of 2021. *“Real” school!* Former New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio had announced that all New York City public schools would return to in-person sessions. Parents and teachers stressed out about the consequences of schools reopening, but my friends and I were happy. And, as far as I am concerned, it has been great. Although I live in a densely populated city and everyone is still cautious of the COVID virus, it feels good to be back physically in my school building.

It is crazy to think about how I managed to stay cooped up in my small apartment home for over two years of my life. I was a wee freshman in high school when I started quarantine. Then, fast forward two years. I am preparing to go to college in the fall of next year (UPenn, I’m applying). Honestly, I feel like I had it easy over this time of quarantine. I never actually got Covid or lost anyone close to Covid. Although I am very glad it is almost over, I realize that I was part of a historic time and unique experience. I can tell my kids one-day obscure stories that never actually happened (like how I was vaccinated at Yankee stadium during a game and caught a fly ball batted by Aaron Judge with my vaccinated arm). They will have to believe since I am a lucky survivor of the pandemic of 2019 and all its mutations.