

The Longest, Fastest Year of my Life, By Evan Rosen, age 13

Many lives have changed forever inside our community, nation, and the world over the past several months. At the start of the pandemic, I honestly didn't think the situation would be too bad, but I learned very quickly that I was mistaken. As a middle schooler, the first major impact on my regular life was virtual school. It wasn't the best experience, as I didn't enjoy learning from a distance and my education was limited. After a week or two in quarantine, I learned that many people in our community lost their jobs while others were becoming ill and suffering other unfortunate hardships.

As in most communities, we have elderly people who are very sweet, but vulnerable and isolated. The mere thought of them getting a virus and becoming sick turns my stomach and I could not bear to lose anyone, especially those close to me. Our elders have given so much to our community and I hope for them to stay strong, and know they have an extended community here to support them.

Prior to the pandemic, I personally enjoyed spending time at my friends' house to play football every day, however we quickly became restricted from doing so. I'm aware that this wasn't the worst of things, but it was still upsetting considering it was fun. Isn't that what being a kid is all about?

Of course, there are silver linings to everything. Even though I couldn't be with my school and social community, I was privileged to spend a lot of great time with my family. We played many games, watched movies, and enjoyed spending quality time with each other. All our meals were homemade, our house was clean, electronics were charged, and activities were a blast. My family also supported me in a volunteer activity that I identified to help provide meals to members of our community in need.

A good thing about quarantine is that I was able to socialize virtually with my community of friends who live near and far. While I played more video games than usual, it was always an interactive game with a school friend down the street or a camp friend several states away. I spent a lot of time with people who I don't interact with frequently and I can confidently say that some of my relationships have expanded due to the pandemic.

Another positive outcome is that I was able to workout more and get into better physical shape. I used my free time lifting weights, riding the Peloton, and biking - a lot! My father, sister, and I took long bike rides throughout our community at least once a week for about eight miles at a time. This was not exclusive to me, as I heard about other friends who were working out and staying healthy during quarantine.

Now that we're allowed to leave our home with restrictions, our community looks very different. Whenever I leave home (socially distanced, of course), I see masks everywhere. It's troubling to realize that our world and community requires us to be isolated and apart in order to stay safe. However, I've learned that the definition of community extends beyond physical space and now includes meaningful interactions in a virtual world. The 'novel coronavirus' forced us to conceive novel ways to engage as a community, and for that we should be thankful.

I am happier now because I can go outside and do some activities without being isolated at home. In order to reduce our Covid stress, my neighborhood friends and I are able to safely play kickball and home run derby as well as touchless football. Other nights we ride bikes around the courts or simply

talk in person. Of course, I still spend much time with my family.

As 2020 continues, this has been the longest, but fastest year of my life. There have been a lot of happy and sad moments during the ongoing pandemic. Unfortunately, some people became ill and passed in our community, and we pray for these lost souls. We still have to wear masks, remain six feet apart, and limit interactions with family and friends. Despite these challenges, I am able to spend more time engaging with family, work out more frequently, volunteer to support others, and work toward long-term goals. I have also enjoyed communicating with more friends throughout the quarantine and hope that these relationships will grow over time. My sense of what it means to be a part of a strong community has been redefined and bolstered during the pandemic. In conclusion, this journey has been a roller coaster of emotion for me and our community and I am confident that we will soon be back together and stronger than ever.