

Young Writers ages 14-19

First place, *One People, One Heart*, By Ayelet Friedman, 15 years old

At first, the news of this novel coronavirus was told to me as if it was a situation of little importance. But as it started to spread like wildfire, my feeling of normal contentment immediately changed to anxiety for the well-being of our future and our safety. People have not stopped dying and the cure may remain unknown. What once seemed like an insignificant virus turned into a frightening, international pandemic, striking the most vulnerable victims without warning. Through this disastrous time, we can only depend on Hashem, and our hishtadlut, our personal effort, to look out for our community.

Throughout the trials of Jewish history, no matter the circumstance, there has been a continued strong sense of community. Especially during these extremely difficult times, we must be there for each other. As a true nation, we must exemplify the phrase, "כאיש אחד בלב אחד," or "One Person, One Heart," to the fullest. Through the celebratory and heart-wrenching times, Jews have made it a priority to unite and support each other. There is innate relief knowing that our shared Judaism and our beliefs make us more than just individuals who abide by the same rules. Really, we are something more. In our hearts we are a family.

When people are defenseless or when they need aid or mitigation, they frequently turn to others. And as the virus wreaks havoc, even though physically we cannot come within 6 feet of one another, we continue forward with one heart. This is the will of Hashem. No matter what we endure, we must band together, because together we are stronger.

But what really is a community? It is typically understood as people who live in the same area or have common interests and goals. But a Jewish community, and our Baltimore Jewish community, surpasses this simple definition. We tend for our neighbors as if they were our own sisters and brothers. Although this is an obligation, as it says in the Talmud, "Kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh," or "All of Israel are responsible for one another," we view this to be a privilege that we happily execute.

Through this pandemic, we constantly hear of people, maybe even our friends and family, getting sick. Jews immediately will daven (pray) and recite Tehillim (Psalms) for those in the community, and use their time -- time that they can never regain -- even if they have never met the afflicted person in their life. The amount of love and effort that Jews continuously shower upon strangers is astonishing. Because deep in our hearts we recognize that it does not matter if they would return the favor or carry out the action we have done for them; rather that that person that you may have helped is a member of our nation, and this is enough.

One may begin to wonder about the importance of supporting each other. We are all strongly empowered individuals that can alone conquer what we presume as the inevitable if we are willing to put in the time it will take and the energy it undoubtedly will consume. With assistance from others, though, the burden of that heavy work may be lifted from upon you, and over time may even disappear, being replaced by a happier life filled with appreciation for others. Over this past year, though it may have been extremely hard, and the future remains murky, I regularly witness Jewish people who remain optimistic as they are assisting others. The idea that I may have helped to support someone in our community leaves a sense of warmth in my heart. When you are selfless, it is a gain for yourself because it is on the path to becoming a more exceptional human being.

Our Jewish community is built of this fabric. We are embodied with a benevolent heart, and filled with leaders, laypeople, and unsung heroes we all rely upon. We are blessed with people that are so willing to give over what they have, and those who will support community members through simple or deeper troubles. Jews may have built this sense of community, but that community has in turn created within us a deeper connection for one another, and even more so, one strong heart.

Second place, *Connected in Quarantine*, By Anja Prien, 19 years old

I've never considered myself to be exactly Jewish. I've always been a Jew, -ish. I never had a Bat Mitzvah, I rarely went to synagogue, and my only Jewish experience is the summer camps that I attended and worked at as a kid.

Joining Hillel at Towson was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Before we were sent home, I got to help plan Hillel's Pesach celebration. I knew next to nothing about the holiday, but I felt that it was important for me to learn. I was welcomed into the community with open arms. After we were sent home, I was able to continue working with the group and we celebrated Pesach virtually, with different events for each day.

The first few weeks of being quarantined were manageable. I FaceTimed my friends, caught up with former teachers, and found ways to keep myself active and entertained. I thought that we would reopen soon. After the third week, things changed, and I felt myself go into a downward spiral. Just about everyone in my family suffers from some form of mental illness. Being stuck at home exacerbated all of that. We were all arguing with each other, and my sister and I considered moving into my father's empty house for a while to get some space from my mom. It was really hard. There was one night in April when I realized that my sister was going through a really hard time. I couldn't leave her room, because I was so afraid of what would happen when I left. It was just the two of us, sitting on her bed, crying because I didn't know how to fix her problem. I slept on the floor outside her room that night.

I was able to connect with Mikey and with the rest of the Hillel community. They gave me a place to focus on myself. At home, I had to put my own feelings on the back burner so that I could make sure that my sister was safe. In Hillel, I could have a little bit of respite from my family and be a part of my own separate community.

I still am going through a pretty challenging time. I feel really lonely, even as things reopen. Putting myself back into the Jewish community this fall will help me get myself back on track to succeeding. I can't really imagine my life without Hillel at this point, and it's crazy to me that I feel that way less than a year since joining the community.

Honorable Mentions

***Dual Perspectives*, By Gavi Masiner, age 14**

Reverse Poetry – (Read in both directions)

This will be the end

Don't tell me

There will be a cure

Some say there is hope
But don't believe
Newsmen say
Thousands more deaths
The economy is ruined
Don't believe that
There is hope
Love and community spirit
Don't exist
Total poverty and sadness
That is true
Family, community and joy
Are lies
What we don't need
"Our community is great!"
Instead, acknowledge
What's important is hate
Don't listen to
Everything will be okay
All depends on perspective
Look down
Look up

River Blank, By Sheva Goodman, age 16

I sit on the ground.
On the warm, sun kissed grass.
Looking down at the sparkling water before me.
The sun begins to set, and a cool breeze picks up into the atmosphere.
And as this scene takes place I notice something about it.
On the river bank lies the image of a family of ducks and another of deer.
They peacefully coexist on that simple river bank.
Not interacting, nor mingling.
Just there to exist.

To fulfill their potential in this world fraught with chaos.
 The ducks go about themselves.
 In water, out of water.
 The dear frolic gracefully.
 Up hill, down hill.
 May their differences be potent, and their abilities divergent.
 They both thrive.
 So let me ask you...
 Why can't we?

Life behind Bars, By Hannah Turner, age 15

After months of quarantining inside, it feels as if we're in jail.
 Fresh air is a rarity when constantly inhaling through a mask.
 As this virus continues, more and more houses are up for sale.
 But there is no need to worry when all you have is a flask.

Lives are at risk, just hitting 6.1 million.
 Scientists are at work, while we sit in our cells.
 I do not know about you, but it feels like a gazillion.
 Life is not easy when you are always stepping on eggshells.

With the death of George Floyd matters only worsen.
 As hard as it is to breathe from a mask, it is even more difficult when you are dying.
 Another White man killing a Black person.
 For some, destruction is the answer that feels most fortifying.

As the first wave dies down, we are starting to be liberated.
 But as freedom continues, people will soon become devastated.

Repeat, By Aaron Gorbaty, age 16

older ones say history repeats itself
 and that's because the younger ones allow it.
 if I see anti semitism rising in my story
 I will not allow it

but what will my silenced voice do
 in this world of screams-
 gun shots seem to be louder than all
 that's why I keep it on me

The Importance of Helping Our Community, By Katie Kwatinetz, age 14

One definition of the word community is a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. Right now, we all are a community with one common goal. To fight against a deadly virus that has caused more than death. It has caused unemployment, illness and loneliness. We can only do two things now to help our community. One is obvious, stay inside whenever possible. Yes, we want to go and do things, but we shouldn't unless we are socially distanced and wearing a mask when needed. The second thing we can do contradicts the first a bit but it's more important, we need to help the people in our community who have been impacted by the virus. In the last couple months as it has become safer to go out of the house, I have been volunteering at multiple places to help those in need. I have stood outside in the heat handing out bags of candy to kids who came with their parents to get food and supplies. I have put vegetables in people trunks outside of Baltimore Hebrew to help those who have lost their jobs and can't afford or don't have access to healthy food. I have also volunteered in a warehouse for hours pricking my fingers on needles as I put them on papers to help make 3,000 kits that will be handed out to others to put together and then given to schools. While handing out candy to kids, it was nice to see the smiles on their faces as they thanked me, which made the sunburn I got worth it. Those smiles are why I like helping not the sunburns or the community service hours or the sweaty hands or the pricked fingers but the smiles I see while helping those in need. Yes, I don't see the face that are getting the supplies from the warehouse, but it was fun. I had a fan right next to me and music playing, which made the experience a good one. In conclusion, during this time where we don't know what's happening and what's going to happen, I feel staying safe but helping others is the way to go.

Coronavirus Pandemic Essay, By Tova Landman, age 14

"On three things the world stands on: Torah, Prayer, and acts of kindness. (ethics of our fathers, 1:2) During this coronavirus pandemic, acts of kindness, generosity, and sensitivity have been displayed. Our Jewish community has and continues to work hard to give constantly, people find ways to show their appreciation to essential workers, and lots of us still find ways to get together with our elderly relatives, social distanced of course.

To begin with, there is food packages given out daily, for all three meals. The food is geared for all ages, and it proves to be delicious while still being good old fashioned nutritious. Though it's a long wait in line, it is so worth it. "It's amazing how people volunteer to help others. They're willing to stay outside in the heat and work," says Rachel Hamaoui, age 14.

"As I wait in line, it continues to inspire me how these volunteers work to give people food, and how the Jewish Community is just so full of unity," says Miriam Liebman, 13 years old.

Next, people all over the globe are constantly showing their appreciation to essential workers. When I was driving with my mom a couple of times, I passed by houses with huge banners thanking the essential workers who also work so hard every day! I know my mother has shown her appreciation by buying the bagger at 7Mile Market that has helped her for years, small gifts like a cold drink on a hot day, ice cream, and a spray fan to cool down with. She has also put together a small jar of a variety of snacks for the mail carriers, UPS, Amazon, and Fed Ex workers.

And I would like to finish off by saying, that I think it's incredible how lots of us still find ways to visit our elderly relatives, and friends social distanced of course! A couple of times before we were able to go into my grandmother's apartment, we visited her in the parking lot while she sat on her porch and

she loved seeing us!

To conclude, our Jewish Community has and continues to work hard to give constantly, people find ways to show their appreciation to essential workers, and lots of us found ways to visit our elderly relatives and friends, social distanced of course! And the JCC, which is a huge part of our family (everyone knows that it's part of my mom's mental health) has continued to offer virtual classes, which my mom is still able to benefit from.

The importance of Community, By Gaia Peled, age 15

Aliyah is a 15 year old girl living in England. She attends the local high school, but hardly speaks any English. Her mother, who struggled to find a job, works at the local gas station. Not only does Aliyah wear her hijab to school, but she also prays with her family every single day; they are proud of their religion. But she is ignored, has no friends, and is constantly bullied. "Terrorists", her classmates whisper as she walks by. Her family has no money, no friends, and nobody to turn to when in need. They are alone, and they are afraid.

John is a young man living in Alabama. After coming out as gay, his father kicked him out, leaving him on the street, with nowhere to go. His homophobic teachers and friends no longer speak to him, and he lost contact with all his family members", they whisper, as John walks by. He has nobody to talk to, nobody to laugh with, and nobody to support him. He is alone, and he is afraid.

Daisy and her family moved from China to California last year. Her dad lost his job due to the coronavirus, and he struggles not only to feed his family, but also to pay rent in their one bedroom apartment. Once the virus hit, they lost all their friends, and had nobody to help them, nobody to talk to, and no one to comfort them during their difficult time. They are avoided, considered contagious, and experience racism every day. "Dirty Asians", others whisper, as Daisy and her family walk by. They are alone, and they are afraid.

Shlomi is a young Jewish boy who recently turned 13. His community is extremely anti-semitic, so he did not put up a sukkah on sukkot, did not set a menorah on the windowsill during Chanukah, and does not wear a kippah when in public. His father recently died due a stabbing at their local synagogue, a synagogue which they no longer feel safe attending. They are called horrible names, have no friends, and lack someone to turn to when in need. "Filthy Jews", whisper their neighbors as Shlomi and his family walk by. They are alone, and they are afraid.

Anna is a 17 year old girl living in Long Island, NY. She goes to a private school, participates in several after school activities, and receives straight a's. She frequently talks to her neighbors, hangs out with her friends almost every day, and has an amazing support system; an extremely loving community. Yet, Anna feels isolated. Suffering from depression, she constantly feels sad, lacks motivation, and rarely gets out of bed. However, Anna wears a fake smile, and conceals her true feelings, allowing nobody to understand what she goes through. She is alone, and she is afraid.

During these times, the importance of a community becomes extremely evident. Your community is your support system, the people you trust, who care for you as much as you care for them. When the coronavirus hit, and so much uncertainty flooded the air, we were scared, fearing the unknown. But because of our neighbors, teachers, family, and friends, our community understood that we are not experiencing this alone. However, not everybody has this amazing privilege. Thousands of individuals do not have a community and are forced to endure these times abandoned. They are neglected because of their religion, race, gender, income, or beliefs. It is our jobs, as the lucky ones who do have a community, to reach out to those who need us the most, and constantly check up on our happy

friends, who are usually the ones yearning love and kindness. Now more than ever, it is crucial to reach out, to make sure that everyone understands that no matter what, they should not be afraid, because they are never alone.

An Unexpected Senior Year, By Ryan Joseph, age 16

I've seen a lot of movies that tell you how Senior Year is supposed to go, a lot of parties, with a dash of responsibility thrown in. Normally, in Senior Year, one has more freedoms, not less. Now, listen, I'm not necessarily the guy who would be invited to, or who would go to parties, yet still, that is the presumption when one becomes a senior. This year, however close we may be, we have to stand six feet apart. No matter how much we want to stand shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, we have been placed under a responsibility, to keep ourselves and our loved ones safe, and to do our best to stop the spread of this pandemic. Despite our individual struggles, COVID-19 presents a deadly common enemy, driving us together. Although we may be physically separated, in spirit, we have come together as a community closer than ever. Although I cannot see my friends or touch them, I know they are there, waiting, like I am, for this nightmare to be over. Although I do my best to avoid politicizing civil, colloquial conversations, it sickens me that we have politicized and trivialized having empathy for other human beings. When you won't slightly inconvenience yourself for the good of others and yourself, or will support racism and bigotry based on individual anecdotes rather than data, it's easy to see something is wrong. Honestly, 2020, to me, seems reminiscent of the 10 plagues. I mean, we've had fires, earthquakes, war threats, murder hornets, global warming, wild beasts returning to public spaces, even power outages and a literal plague. Although we may have made progress in idealizing earth, I personally believe that this is HaShem's way of telling us we still have a long way to go, and that it's about time we kicked it up a notch. I think that although we have technological advances to connect with people digitally, we have relied upon those superficial digital connections, valuing follower counts over friends. Part of what this pandemic has taught me, and what I think others should learn from it as well, is that we underestimated and took for granted interpersonal relationships, and as the old saying goes, you don't truly appreciate something until you lose it. This senior year, I was expecting to see my classmates and friends through the windows of my car, as I drove to school, not through the Windows operating system.

The Importance of Connection, By Sophia Klaff, age 14

"Encourage, lift and strengthen one another. For the positive energy spread to one will be felt by us all. For we are connected, one and all." To me, this quote by Deborah Day, describes a community. A community close to my heart is the Ner Tamid Synagogue. The Synagogue has given our community hope and joy while the world is experiencing tough and frightening circumstances. One inspirational undertaking that the Rabbi and board of directors have made a priority has been to call members to simply check in and make them smile during these unprecedented times. The congregation knows that they have support and love from not only executives, but also each other. During sponsored Zoom events, one could always hear the members shouting out well wishes to one another. These were the sounds of love, the sounds of support, and the sounds of connection.

Connecting through Zoom or any online platform is a difficult task, but the synagogue has created many unique ways to accomplish this. The social committee has put on family game nights, prayer services each morning for the children, and even a series called COVID Heroes. COVID Heroes gave the

synagogue an opportunity to spotlight members of the congregation who were on the frontlines of the healthcare world, small business owners affected by the shutdown, and the executive board members who have been tirelessly trying to keep the synagogue alive. These “Heroes” were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences and good deeds pertaining to pandemic. This allowed the congregation to connect with the fight even if it was from their homes. If that isn’t already enough, the board of directors, Rabbi, and preschool teachers of the Ner Tamid owned Montessori school, had a drive by event to share a wave and smile to their students, friends, and fellow members while providing challah for the Sabbath. Sadly, since the Synagogue was closed for services, the kiddush, or after services socialize and snack, did not continue. This was one of many events that made the shul special, so they came up with an idea to keep it going and connect even more. Volunteers from the synagogue delivered food baskets, warm wishes, and smiles to the many houses, apartments, and even nursing homes that our members live in. The members and volunteers were able to see each other while maintaining social distancing. Moreover, they were able to maintain something far more special, their connections to one another.

Ner Tamid has supported me throughout the quarantine without even knowing it. My family and I, having to stay at home on the Sabbath, would try to find things to do since there was no synagogue services taking place. Even though we were alone and bored there was always one thing we would look forward to at the end of the Sabbath. Ner Tamid had a zoom Havdalah where we sang songs and prayers while being able to see the smiling faces of friends and other members. This always gave me hope that, someday soon, I would be able to stand less than six feet apart from the Ner Tamid community and maybe even give them a hug or two. One moment that really filled my heart with joy, was when I sent a card to a special person from our synagogue. Irma is an older woman who lives alone at home and has been by herself during the quarantine. I put the card by her doorstep and later received a call from her telling me how it made her day and how special it felt to be a part of such an amazing community. I cannot wait to see what more they do to help me and other members stay connected through these hard and scary conditions. Connections are all around us, but sometimes we might need a pandemic to remind us how special they really are.

The Concept of Community in Today’s Society, By Ava Kazin, age 15

Experiencing the affliction challenging today’s society, the concept of community lingers. This year especially, the world has faced multiple obstacles including racist actions and remarks, various natural disasters, and a deadly virus; however, confiding in others and accepting assistance have helped many persevere through the tragedies. We are struggling through the advancing coronavirus, prejudice against African American lives, and recurring anti-Semitism along with many other communities worldwide and therefore we are not alone.

The Covid19 pandemic initially began in Wuhan, China; however, spread to multiple countries over time due to airplanes and ships carrying infected passengers and cargo. Stores and individuals have taken action to discontinue the spread and as a result, act as a community devoted to assisting others. Simply reading signs and posts or watching videos created by others experiencing similar circumstances aid those uneducated on the virus in learning the symptoms, facts, and ways to stop the rise. Although gathering together with family and friends is prohibited, applications such as Zoom and FaceTime allow communities to stay together. I, along with students across the world, have continued my learning online and remained connected with teachers and friends through Zoom. With many dying from and affected by the coronavirus, communication and company are vital. Recent protests lead by the Black Lives Matter movement shed light on the unjust police system and

ongoing brutality towards African Americans. The unlawful death of George Floyd sparked change as activists peacefully fight for a righteous government and police force. Protestors from every race and religion join with the black community to spread their beliefs and help them gain basic humans rights, including the right to live. Since Floyd's death and before the tragic incident, various black lives were taken by racist police officers without a chance for a peaceful arrest. Most of the black deaths are not reflective of the criminal actions they did since Floyd was murdered for a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill as opposed to pursuing his right for a trial. Together the black community, with other communities helping and protesting, have made a stride in stopping the corrupt police system. Understanding the struggle, multiple minority groups have stood together recently to end discriminatory stereotypes. Throughout history, the Jewish people have faced death and torture for their religious beliefs. Swastikas painted on Jewish tombstones and synagogues remind Jews of their beloved family members who passed during the Holocaust. In addition, celebrities are given free passes when quoting Hitler and saying anti-Semitic remarks towards Jews. News stories do not advocate for the safety of the Jewish community against neo-Nazis, therefore community and togetherness are essential in stopping their hateful acts. Thus far, the Jewish people have built a strong community despite the anti-Semites, in spreading awareness and helping those affected by the anti-Jewish efforts. Jewish organizations such as the B'nai Brith Youth Organization, offering a community and engaging activities to young Jews, and the Chana association, allowing Jews with mental health issues to seek help, remind the Jewish people that they have a loving community to guide them. With the rise of Covid19, systemic racism towards African Americans, and persistent bigotry towards Jews, many feel overwhelmed. Finding a group to support your beliefs and choices is essential and may improve ones mental health. Reaching out to those who feel alone and helping them find a community to confide in can significantly aid in restoring the world from the recent and ongoing misfortune

Remember When, By Alma Melamed, age 17

The sun shone bright that day. Pulsifying heat clouded the outdoors, evaporating the showers it succeeded. The humid climate yielded a subtle relief from the horrid conditions of the prior day. It was a nice day- perfect for a field trip.

Ms. Letterman herded her students off the busses and guided them to the entrance of the Natural History Museum. As the children pondered each exhibit, Ms. Letterman directed them through various time periods in history. The students eyeballed each exhibit, every so often spotting a display that briefly captured their interest. However, no one could overlook the 2000s exhibits.

"The Climate Destruction Era, or the 2000s," Ms. Letterman explained, "fostered several decades of rapid technological changes, especially during the coronavirus pandemic when more and more technological innovations were created. However, this vast shift in industrialization resulted in the decimation of the earthly environment. For example, due to fossil fuels used in factories, the atmosphere started to shift more quickly from one temperature to another, and experienced more extreme weather conditions. Up until that time period, most of the world experience around three months in cold weather, three months of relatively mild weather, three months of warm weather, and then three more months of milder to cooler weather. I believe they called this 'seasons.'"

"They used to have three months straight of hot weather? That's crazy!" shouted Sophia standing in the front.

"Yes, the temperatures gradually shifted from one climate to another. In fact, each day someone called

a 'weatherman' broadcasted the daily weather to inform people of their climate for the day."

"Wait, they used to be able to predict the weather?" gasped Johnny in utter disbelief.

"Didn't anyone warn them?" Sophia bursted furiously.

"Well actually scientists attempted to warn the public multiple times, and urged them to change their practices. However, most people ignored the scientist, some claiming the environmentalists are exaggerating, and some denying the evidence altogether, claiming it was simply a hoax."

"A hoax?" boiled Sophia, "Are you serious? Is it a 'hoax' that millions of people are dying from spontaneous climate conditions? Do the oxygen masks we've all had to wear since birth due to the eradication of trees simply not exist? Do you mean to tell me that the leading cause of death nowadays, dehydration, was not caused by any human actions? These are facts! Who doesn't listen to facts?"

The whole room bursted with furious adolescents. Hurricanes of despair flooded the atmosphere. Currents of shattering hopes burned through the floor from the boiling rage within the children- their world ruined by the ignorance of their ancestors. While the world faded away with new diseases and ecological failures, their attention merely shifted to their own comfortability and unfavorable conditions. All they cared about was their own individualized groups, disregarding communities of minorities, communities of the sick, and communities of their descendants. The point of no return had passed, leaving the future generations helpless.

My 2020 Battle, By Samantha Birenbaum

When the clock struck twelve on January 1, 2020, the world was abuzz with emotions, as a new decade had begun. A time to restart after a long year, which at points seemed endless. Some dreaded the inevitable, as it was a sign that the times were moving on. Others gravitated toward the feelings of new beginnings and hope. My feelings were mixed- on one hand I had the opportunity to start fresh, but on the other I was leaving behind a large segment of my childhood. But I kept my eyes open and ahead of me, as I stepped into a new part of my life.

There were many tragedies in 2020. But I did not know about any of them until I learned about COVID-19. I was recovering from a case of the flu, and remembering that the symptoms were like COVID-19, I could not help but wonder if I too had come down with the virus. As worried as I was, still I knew it was not possible since the virus had not come to the U.S. yet. That was late February. Soon enough Purim arrived, and my thoughts were not focused on the crowds or the touching. But once the Megillah reading came, every cough and sneeze made me cringe. Noticing not everyone covered their mouth when sneezing, it made me quite uncomfortable. At this moment, my eyes were opened to how easily this virus could spread.

Soon, the number of closed establishments began to grow. That week, our school closed. In the beginning I was a little nervous, wondering how the everyday school activities would be accomplished. But once the first days past, I was enjoying the new way of learning. The freedom and flexibility of deciding when and where I wanted to do my work was a gift to me. Unfortunately, after a few weeks that magic wore off. Now I was feeling lonely, and desperate for some quality time with people who were not in my nuclear family. Thankfully, I was staying sane by taking daily bike rides. They helped me refresh, and anything relaxing was well needed. My parents began encouraging me to visit my friends while on my bike rides. That began to help with my lonesomeness, and before long, summer arrived.

Summer was a relief to me, yet a burden. I was enthusiastic about the fact that I no longer had to worry about work, but without those activities, what was I to do with my day? My family was originally planning on sending my brother and I to day camp, but when our day camp announced they would be closed we were at a loss for ideas. So, the only thing we could do was stay at home. My Dad works from home, and my Mom is at work four days a week. That meant our parents could not take us anywhere, and even if they could, where would we go? Sometimes my Mom was able to take us to parks, and out for ice cream. But for most of the time, we were at home. I would carry on with my bike rides but as the days grew hotter, it was a bit discouraging. We did, however, take vacations outside of Baltimore. We spent a week in Bethany Beach, visiting my Dad's family. I love the beach, and it was a great change of scenery. A few weeks later we also spent time in Cleveland, visiting my Mother's parents. So overall, summer was an enjoyable experience.

2020 was a mix of emotions. There were tears and mental breakdowns. But there were also smiles and laughter. Some might wish they could change this year in some way; make it better or change the outcome of some scenario. Would I want to change something about it? Here are my thoughts; While now my feelings reside somewhat on the lonely side, it is comforting to know that eventually, this too will pass. And I can look back on it and know that I have grown because of it.

Quarantine Life, By Sarah Harris, age 14

The COVID-19 virus has changed our city, state and our way of learning. Quarantine began off with to be fun, no school for 2 weeks; having fun with friends and family. When school added another 2 weeks I was still happy but my happiness started to go away.

In the middle of April the school system finally declared that everything was going to be online. My friends and I had mixed feelings about everything we thought the world was about to end. Now that I think about it; it did in away. My teachers was so confused because they did not know how to teach. Since they did not know how to teach in this situation they depend on use to help them teach. When my teachers asked me and my best friend to help them out. I was excited because, they finally asked students how we wanted to learn. Usually they would have thought about what top administration thinks. Not what students thinks, we were like it's our education why can't we make the decision for our education.

School was hard since now it's virtually, some classes was harder then others like math since I'm a visual learner but I stuck with it. Some classes were just stupid to have virtually like gym what's the point of going to gym class. My parents told me it's important because everyone needs movement and I said the reason why gym should be in person since gym was everyone's free period and break time. Now if students need a free period or break they won't got to class. I don't know about you but who really did the gym actives, I just read the power point/article and did the test.

Coronavirus tested everybody's emotions especially the people who were going to graduate like college seniors, high school seniors and middle school seniors. I was supposed to walk the stage with my friends and to get my 8th certificate. I know that might sound a little bit selfish because college seniors that's their last time graduating, high school seniors that's might be their last graduation if they do not decide to further their education, 8th graders have 4 more years for a big and milestone graduation.

That's just a couple things that happen in the year of 2020. Another things that happen in that crazy year was the Black Lives Matter Movement. This movement opened up some many eyes in the education world in my school. In every class that I had we talked about it and I was so surprise because the only time that I have learned about black history is in February. Also to hear what my friends, classmates and teachers said just opened up my eyes even more. I think in education we need to stop learning about African-American history in February it should be every month, along with that stop learning about the big top people we should be learning about all the African Americans who contribute to African-American history.

Alright let's stop talking about school for now. Over this COVID-19 fiasco, I have been shopping, decorating my room, working on myself, bring more positivity to my life, missing family moments/actives, reading more and learning more about the anatomy (I will explain that later). Since the mall has closed, I have been sad but that does not stop me. Online shopping has became my mall but just like the mall it is a enemy of mine. There is some positive things like it helped me decorate my room and expand my closet but the most negative is that online shopping is starting to break the bank and not in a good way. My parents, close family and friends are tired of me getting packages, and are wondering do I ever save money.

I never thought I would miss family moments and actives as much that I do now, guess since I'm so used to have them every year but not this. Around this time I would be pack up my suitcase and go to Delaware with my great aunt. Delaware was escape, it would just be me and her on a little vacation. Me and her would get eat, go swimming and go shopping for hours. We never wanted to leave but we had to but Delaware is just our special spot to hang out. When we came back I was packing for 2 more trips. The first that I pack for was to Pennsylvania with my family. The only thing we do there is go swimming for and hours and on our last day their we going shopping at the outlets for hours. My second trip, is when my whole family gets together and have a family reunion. It's so much fun, I get to see cousins that I have not seen in a awhile

I bet you are wondering about why am I learning about anatomy, the reason why I am learning about is because I applied to Randallstown High School for their Academy Health Professions magnet program. When I grow up want to be a pediatrician and so since I have free time I am learning now and school starts less then a month.

Ocean of Grief, By Francesca Plovan, age 14

It had been one year since Otto lost his light in shining darkness. His wife, Eliza. She passed away from a heart attack after fifty-eight years of marriage. Otto hadn't been the same since. He slowly got out of bed and reached for his cane. He hobbled his way over to the closet where Eliza's clothes still hung, collecting dust.

Otto saw the lavender and yellow dress that Eliza loved so much, and wistfully remembered giving it to her for her birthday many years ago. Otto finished getting dressed and shuffled into the kitchen to start a cup of coffee, when his phone rang.

"Hello?" he grunted.

"Uncle Otto?"

"Frank?"

"Hey, Otto! How're you doing?" Frank chirped

"Oh, You know, I'm eighty- two." Frank laughed.

"I'm having a dinner party this Sunday, and I would love it if you could make it."

"Sorry, but uh, I'm busy Sunday."

"Doing what?" Frank asked skeptically.

"I have things. Really sorry, I would love to come but I ju--"

Frank interrupted abruptly. "Otto, cut the crap. I know as well as you do that you have nothing going on. You're gonna stay inside and watch the news all day. I hate to do this, but you've barely left the house since Eliza."

Otto rubbed his temples. "Okay. Fine."

"Thank You! I'll have Anna pick you up at five, got it?"

"Yes, yes, don't get too worked up about it."

"Have a good day, Otto. I'm looking forward to seeing you!"

Otto hung up. What was he doing? He should be grieving, not going to dinner. God, he missed Eliza so much. And suddenly he was crying. He missed her citrus scent, her long hair and failed attempts at cooking. He missed hearing her sing along to the radio. He missed her laugh. He even missed the way she chewed her nails. Otto blew his nose and turned on the TV. Screens helped distract his mind from the gaping wound in his heart. But they were playing reruns of I Love Lucy, Eliza's favorite show. A wave hit him, binding him underwater. He was crying again, drowning in his ocean of grief.

The days blended together into Sunday, not that the days of the week mattered to him. As he was sipping his usual morning coffee, Otto heard the doorbell ring. His nineteen-year-old grandniece Anna was waiting outside.

"Hey."

"Hello." Otto grunted. He climbed into the passenger seat of her Camry.

"Gum?" She offered.

"No thanks." Anna fiddled with the radio before sighing and turning it off. A minute of awkward silence into the car ride, Anna spoke.

"Do you read?"

"I- I don't know. I used to." Otto hadn't read much recently. His eyes were tired.

"I love books. Have you read 1984 by George Orwell?"

"I think I read it a long time ago, but I don't remember much."

"I read it last week, and I thought it was fantastic. You should read it again. But my favorite books are the Lord of the Rings."

"Really?" Otto said, surprised.

"Have you read it?"

"Yes! I used to go to the library after school and read it." She laughed.

"I'm so happy, I don't know anyone else who's read them."

"Have you read The Little Prince?" Otto said. It was Eliza's favorite book. She used to read it aloud during the holidays. Anna grinned.

"Of course! I love that book."

Otto gave a watery smile "It was my wife's favorite." He said softly

"I know. She was the one who gave it to me."

They sat there in silence for another couple minutes. Otto tried to hold in his sadness.

This was the first time he had talked about Eliza since her death. People usually avoided the topic around him. Even though the memories pained him, it felt good to talk.

"I know how it feels." Anna said. Otto looked at her, confused. "I lost my best friend Lauren a couple years ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Otto said. Anna laughed.

"Heard it hundreds of times. Doesn't do much." Otto looked away guiltily. He knew exactly what she meant. "It still hurts everyday. At first, it was a struggle to get out of bed. But life goes on."

Otto hesitated, then whispered, "How do you do it?"

"I learned to live again, because Lauren never got to. I went to group therapy. I found a community to work through my grief." Anna sighed. "It never goes away, not entirely. Last week I was grocery shopping, and started crying in the middle of the aisle." Anna looked at him, her gaze piercing into his soul.

"But if you need anyone to talk to, I'm here. You can do this. You can move on." Otto promised her that he would.

Embracing a Virtual Community, By Callie Krosin, age 16

There is no dispute that life before the quarantine imposed by COVID19 was busy and fast tracked. As a student I felt like I had so much to do, with so little time. The various commitments I made to clubs, sports, internships, and organizations helped me build a network and find a sense of community within each sector, however when these groups come to a chasing halt, it was not up to the physical commitment to define the community that it creates. Community is not only commonality, but a feeling of fellowship—and with distance and the help of technology—these qualities are embraced in a time of difficulty.

The stay at home orders due to COVID19 were life changing, to say the least, but with a communal understanding and respect for the health and safety of others, I believe that we were able to get through the tough time together. While I personally felt connected to the outside world through reading local publications, others sought social media as a way to feel a sense of togetherness while apart.

Moving forward, I plan to be present and engaged within all of the communities I exist in. Community and the importance of a support system shined during these unprecedented times, however the situation has proven in many ways that we should not take a community for granted.