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Where Were You When COVID-19 Hit?

Matt Parks, Staff Reporter

It was a day that started like any other, but that depends on who you ask.

In early March 2020, life was different than what it is today. Masks weren't yet a universal necessity. Large event gatherings weren't limited. Schools and universities weren't functioning on Zoom or a hybrid format. But come March 6, 2020, all of that changed and ushered in a new normal.

When COVID-19 first hit, not all members of the Seattle University community were in Seattle. Assistant Professor of Communications Victor Evans was in Florida for a conference and then went on a week-long Caribbean cruise, before heading to Disney World for his father's birthday.

He remembers how oblivious he and everyone else was in Florida—only a few people wearing masks amongst the places he went, a stark contrast to Seattle where a large majority of the population was wearing masks and public transportation was empty.

“Coming from Florida, you never would have guessed things were bad because nothing was going on,” Evans said. “In Seattle, everyone was wearing masks and saying we're going virtual, to mask up and to stay home. On vacation, I had no idea what was happening, so it was crazy coming back.”

At the same time, the men's basketball team was in Las Vegas, gearing up for the season-ending Western Athletic Conference (WAC) tournament. Fourth-year Communications major Riley Grigsby was watching the women's team complete the night before their tournament started when the news broke that an NBA player had COVID-19. Although the rest of the women's games were canceled that night, the men's team was told that they'd still have to play in the morning.

“A lot of players thought we weren't going to play, but we still had the mindset since it's not canceled yet, we're going to have to play,” Grigsby said. “We woke up and found out every conference had canceled their tournaments. Players all flew to their hometowns—I flew to California. It was crazy—we went from ‘you're going to play’ to going home in 24 hours.”

The Women's softball team was also on the road, so they first heard about COVID-19 while at the University of Hawaii for games. Returning to Seattle after a tournament at the University of Oregon, the team got the news of the school's shutdown.

“No one knew what was going on,” said Graduate student Carley Nance, who is working towards a graduate certificate in crime analysis in the Master of Arts in Criminal Justice program. “We got the President's email that classes and everything was canceled. It was really surreal.”



Back on campus, things were just as chaotic. Following President Emeritus Fr. Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.'s email, classes shifted online March 9, winter quarter finals were no longer in person and students were told to vacate the premises immediately.

Fourth-year Theatre and Arts double major Sophie Collins was preparing to put on her show the next day as a part of the quarterly student-led Scratch show that the performing arts department holds.

The department approved her show's performance since the lockdown didn't officially take effect until March 9. She recalled sitting in a Starbucks that Monday when things got "really scary."

"I was hearing a lot of people saying we were going into a lockdown and I didn't know what that was, but I frantically booked a \$200 dollar flight home to California and left that night," Collins said. "I just knew I could not be trapped here."

The pandemic forced a change of lifestyle, which caused many major events in people's lives to be altered as well.

Second-year Psychology major Christina Beavers was at El Toro High School in Orange County, Calif. when the pandemic hit. After returning from a run, she found out that her school was going to be closed for two weeks. She never returned to high school in person and started at Seattle U in 2021 with COVID-19 restrictions in place.

"It was weird being on campus during that time," Beavers said. "Everything was super limited. UREC wasn't open and the food options were limited. I was able to safely get into the city and see Seattle, which is why I came to campus, even though we were online."

Second-year Biochemistry student Kobe Williamson, a native of Melbourne, Australia, shared that the biggest change during COVID-19 was moving countries. He said that the hardest thing about the pandemic was being away from his family for nine to ten months while he was studying and beginning his men's basketball career at Seattle U last year.

The pandemic can also be defined as a period when many things didn't happen. Evans was expecting to get married in 2020, but due the pandemic, his wedding is now planned for 2023 when things will hopefully look a little more normal.

Third-year Film Studies student Dani León described the last two years as really traumatizing. She was in Seattle at the start of the pandemic, but caught wind of the news from family members who lived in China.

León said that when Seattle was the first place in the U.S. hit by COVID-19, she went into a state of panic and dealt with a number of academic and personal shifts—missing out on graduations, starting college online, the loss of a family member and her parent's separations. Two years later, she looked at the past with resilience.

"I have had to regain and relearn what family looks like and means to me, and I also had to find my own closure for many huge events in my life that I was unable to fully enjoy in the way I had pictured them," León wrote to *The Spectator*. "I am grateful for what I have learned and gained and the changes I have made, because it is all I can do with everything that I've gone through."

León isn't the only one who's felt growth during the last two years. Second-year Forensic Science major Zachary Dar shared that during that time, he worked a "myriad of different jobs ranging from retail to camp counselor."

"Over the last two years, I've grown tremendously physically, mentally and morally," Dar wrote. "Today, I can guarantee I'm a better person than when quarantine began. It's definitely been a long two years, and strangely enough, things are starting to seem 'normal.'"

24 months later, it would appear that the world is emerging from the pandemic. Seattle U performing arts is back—their next show, *Eurydice*, will open in spring quarter. Sports are back to playing full seasons and this quarter saw the return of indoor events like track and field meets.

Starting March 12, in accordance with the state public health guidelines, the indoor mask mandate will be lifted in King County. Seattle U plans to lift their indoor mask mandate March 21.

Fresh off becoming WAC champions in the 2022 regular season, Grigsby said that the men's basketball team is returning to Las Vegas with renewed energy and confidence that the tournament will be played as scheduled. A similar sentiment is relayed by Nance about the women's softball team, which is coming together after a reduced 2021 season in which the full team did not train together.

The second anniversary of when COVID-19 first hit marks a shift in perspective. A time when hardships have, for the most part, become rearview lessons and the journey back to normalcy seems more tangible than distant. What comes next remains to be seen—will life return to a pre-pandemic state, or will another variant emerge?