



No, this is not how I had expected my Senior Year would end

By Nicole Rene Svetlov

"Somewhere in the world, the wrong pig met up with the wrong bat." proclaimed Dr. Ally, one of the CDC's leading virologists. "You know," the woman paused, "it is impossible to monitor the majority -" Dr. Ally stood passionately, "It is impossible to monitor even a *small fraction*" she emphasized this point with her fingers, "of these interspecies meetings. In the middle of the night, I sometimes lie awake, and I ask myself: *What if-*" the virologist stiffened mid-sentence. Her eyebrows furrowed, and with a comical furor, she quiet-yelled "Stop touching your face, Dave!"

"Ding... Ding... Ding...", exasperated groans flooded the classroom. Every day, at precisely 1:47 P.M., the High School's intercom would belt five, two-syllable chimes, which would reverberate throughout the expansive, multi-story compound. Immediately following this catena of lifeless chimes - and their accompanying groans - was the screeching of chair legs and the shuffling of papers. These noises signified that, for today at least, the movie was finished, and that students ought to stop diddle-daddling and, instead, head to their next designated classes.

In Psychology, we had been watching 'Contagion' - albeit groggily (what did you expect!) - a riveting blockbuster that depicts a realistic, modern-day global epidemic. My instructor had assigned my peers and I the task of analyzing this film from a psychological perspective; I had taken-up the assignment with vigor. However, somehow, in only a few minutes, I was daydreaming about microwaveable food and late-afternoon snacks. Despite my delirious state of mind, I distinctly remember underlining the singular word 'Panic'. Little could I have known, that only a few short months after I would submit my essay titled: "*How global epidemics inspire panic in the common individual, and how large-scale panic wreaks havoc on a society*", the events of the movie(the movie I had fallen asleep watching!), would no longer be confined to the big screen. No, on the contrary, "Quarantine", "coverup", and "false cure" would soon join my list of every-day conversational vocabulary. And today, fast forward to the present time, I am living through a world health disaster that very closely resembles the epidemic I had, not so long before, absent-mindedly watched in my 6th period AP Psychology classroom.

"30,000... 100,000....500,000... 3.5 million Covid-19 infections confirmed worldwide." ... "Greg Abbott closes Texas schools for the remainder of the Academic Year." This is not how I had expected my Senior Year would end. I had expected my Senior Year to end with me, donned in an empowering "IB Done" t-shirt(It's an inside joke), smiling at the booming end-of-year bonfire, which feet high, would have signified

the end of an era(only four years actually.) I had expected my senior year to end with the symbolic moving of the tassel and a brief, but emotional, walk across a stage, with a diploma triumphantly clutched in hand. I had expected the last two months of my High School career to be grueling and unforgiving, with the expectation that sleep would wait... until the end of the exam season. But with little warning, these expectations were thwarted. Covid-19 and the social-distancing measures which accompanied it have made my senior year unlike any other.

Instead of the familiar, light-hearted bliss which typically accompanies the onset of summer, panic is, in its stead, running rampant. I can feel it when I leave my house, fitted with a felt mask, on my way to H-E-B for my weekly grocery haul. I can feel it when I scroll through my Reddit feed. Heck, I can even feel it in the heavy, melancholy atmosphere which surrounds my suburban Houston home. It spreads almost as fast - if not faster - than the unforgiving coronavirus itself. Fear of death, or hospitalization; fear of economic turmoil; fear of public scrutiny; and a fear of outsiders, have fueled this aforementioned panic.

The societal impact of this fear, anxiety - and its associated panic - has, so far, been shamelessly evident, especially in the world of international politics. From the noticeable China-US rift to the Trump administration's denouncement of the WHO, global politics have sashayed, pirouetted, and completed 180-degree turns. This virus

has, as a consequence of its political influence, left individuals, whose safety depends on their home - and adopted - country's relations, in a state of inescapable anxiety.

As a first-generation Russian-American, I have been given an insider's view of Russo-American relations. And although the political air between these two countries has never been 'rosy', COVID-19 certainly isn't improving the situation.

Around me, due to the virus, I can sense that the American people's distrust of Russia, and her citizens, is reaching Cold War-era highs. I believe that this general air of apprehension can be attributed to both rumors (coronavirus conspiracy theories) and a sudden remembrance of the Soviet Union's deceitfulness. Leading journalism agencies have lambasted the Kremlin for "Lying about numbers," and have, following President Putin's term extension, brought into question the transparency of Russia's political system. Additionally, questionable, cherry-picked, actions taken by the Soviet Union have been pushed into the limelight. Many people have taken the liberty of comparing the initial coverup situation in China to the Chernobyl disaster, announcing "Hey, why is the Chinese Government being shamed, when the Russians have been at this for much longer!?" On internet forums, discussions pertaining to mistrust and misinformation are popular, and although they have no malintent, these discussions are adding to the

steady increase in ethnic and racial tensions, which have, thus far, been so characteristic of this pandemic.

No, this is not how I had expected my senior year would end. I had not expected that a mere virus - a non-living organism - could have the power to undo years of social reforms. I had not expected that people would find comfort in the "blame-game." I had not expected that immigrants would have yet another reason to fear for their safety. But this is what it has come to. Oh, no, this is not how I had expected my Senior Year would end.

