

*“Those who know me might tell you that I am a pretty private person. I don’t like sharing intimate details about my private, personal life. However, I have come to the conclusion that I want to share a small but profound chapter in my life. During a time of constant change, uncertainty, fear, sadness, frustration, oppression, and anxiousness people across the globe have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. I can only share my story, for I don’t know anyone else’s story as well as they do. But my hope through my sharing my story, those who read this will be given some positivity, love, and hope.*

*In March of 2020, I was near the end of my graduate career. My cohort and I were in the midst of writing, editing, and finalizing our final paper. Also, it was during this month that my spouse and I traveled to Pikeville to visit my mom for spring break. With great luck, our spring breaks fell onto the same dates. In the middle of our happy getaway from the city, we (and I mean all of us) received an email that would change our plans enormously. In these emails laid out the abrupt changes that our schools would be implementing. Our schools had decided that they would switch to all virtual learning due to the uprising and profoundness of the covid-19 virus. It was in this moment that we knew everything was about to change dramatically. In that moment my mom, spouse, and myself took the much needed time to figure out what was best for everyone. Questions such as, “what do we do?” or “will we get more details?” came up first. But then it dawned on me that no matter what answers we could come up with, my spouse and I would have to return back to Pennsylvania to finish out the academic term. Furthermore, my spouse and I had assistantships that we could not abandon. He worked for the University of Pittsburgh’s Public Health departments, and I worked in residence life at Robert Morris University. Hence, as our spring break come to an end, my spouse and I packed up all we had brought with us and headed back north. As we were driving away from my childhood home, I looked through the review mirror and I saw my mom. It was in that moment when I realized that I didn’t know when I’d get to see her again.*

*April came quite quickly. I finished and graduated with my masters degree, my spouse finished his first year and his assistantship, and I continued to work at my assistantship. April felt different in comparison to other Aprils. I know that doesn’t sound right, but it didn’t. There weren’t as many April showers; there weren’t as many birds chirping; there weren’t as many smiling faces (which one could argue that that was due to everyone wearing a mask). Graduation was also different. It was a mere thirty minute montage that the school created for all 2020 graduates. While it wasn’t what we expected or wanted, I like to think that we all knew that we achieved something great.*

*May was a time in my life in which I became broken. Now, I do not mean broken in the sense that I was harmed or physically drained, but more so this was a time that I wanted to cry every day but couldn’t because I knew that if I cried I couldn’t be the Anna that people needed me to be. I had students who needed me, for some had to stay on-campus due to different circumstances that hindered their chance of going home. I had co-workers that we’re constantly worried about (a) contracting the virus, and (b)*

*losing their position. I had a partner that needed me to stay strong so they could stay strong. I had family members that needed me to stay strong so they wouldn't have to worry. I know, I know...family will always worry, but if there is even the slightest chance that they could worry less, I would do anything to help in that.*

*As the pandemic seemed to hit new, astonishing heights and power, tensions, emotions, and fear grew larger. Therefore, I had to become stronger for others. However, in the midst of all this, I forgot to take care of myself. I had bundles of support from friends, family, and complete strangers without a doubt, but I did not really acknowledge it. Maybe it was my stubbornness. I honestly don't know, but by the end of May I hit a breaking point. I wanted and needed to go home, but I couldn't. The pandemic had reach a height that no one saw coming and it simply created this distinct barrier between where I was and where I wanted to be.*

*June, in all reality, wasn't too bad. Grocery stores, market squares, and other companies began to reopen. At this time, it seemed like things were slowly creeping back to some kind of normal, but that changed quickly. It seemed as though people began playing the grand game of Russian roulette. Some chose not to wear a mask. Some chose to host large gatherings. Work had gotten to a point in which we didn't know what we were doing because in all reality and in full transparency we didn't. Every day was new. Every day something else was needed or requested. It was as though we were on this constant roller coaster. Furthermore, I hated being away from my mother more than anything! Of course we talked every day, and we even began doing weekly, virtual Sunday brunch. Since my partner had been done for some time, he was able to travel home. His mother came for a small, but pleasant visit as well. However, it seemed as though I was in such a state that I knew that I had to go home! I needed to make sure my mom was okay. Of course I knew she was okay, but hearing and virtually seeing someone over a FaceTime call is not the same as seeing and hearing them face to face. I envied anyone who was able to travel home with such ease. Now, some might ask, "well Anna, you had the chance to go home. Your husband went home, so why didn't you?" My answer to that is this:*

*Given my certain circumstances, I couldn't go home. For one, I had a job in which I had to be on-call, I had to help with projects that needed to get done. I made a commitment to my work family. Furthermore, my partner finished school and his job much earlier than I did, so he had no mandatory obligations. I encouraged him to go home. He encouraged me to go home too, but I didn't want to risk my mother's or my own health if I was only to travel there for a day or so.*

*Oh July. July was a time that 1. I was happy that it was finally here (I'll tell you why soon), and 2. It was the beginning of another scary journey. During a brunch session with my mom, we decided that once I finished my position at RMU, I would get tested for covid-19 and depending on the results, I would come home for some time. Also, I began getting emails to interview for area coordinator positions which was quite exciting. When my position ended, I felt sad but happy. I was sad because a part of my life came to a close. I had met such wonderful people, and I knew I'd see them again*

*because my partner took over my position the very next day. However, I was so exceedingly happy because in a matter of days I'd be going home. I got tested, and within five days I received that phone call I had longed for. The results came back negative, I packed that night, and left the next morning. The drive home was, in a strange way, very bittersweet. Sweet in the amazing fact that I would be able to hug my mother after four long months, and bitter in the fact that I wouldn't be able to do all the things that I usually do when I come home. For one, mom and I couldn't go to our favorite restaurant. I couldn't go out to lunch with my girlfriends. When I pulled into the driveway, my heart filled with joy and warmth. I walked into the house to see my mother putting away groceries. She turned around, and I still in my mask rushed towards her and we shared a wonderful awaited hug.*

*It is now August and I am still home for the time being. I do not know where I'll be in the coming days. I might be back in Pennsylvania with my partner; I might still be in Kentucky; I might receive a job offer and have to move away again. Only time will tell. In the meantime, I will take it day by day and hope that good comes out of this unfortunate time.*

*I want to leave you with some thoughts. For one, hold your family as close as you can! You never know when you'll see them next. In life, family is permanent. Two, be kind! In this time we are so quick to judge and assume the worst in people, situations, etc. but we really don't know. Before you make that comment or predisposition, think before you speak. If you can't speak kindly or do something kind for another, then stay silent and move on. Third, be grateful. We don't know when our last day is. Every day is a new day, so make the most of it. Don't let anyone bring you down because you are great! You are strong! You are beautiful! You are loved! I hope that this small chapter in my life helps you in some way. It may; it may not, but thank you for listening to me. Thank you for letting me speak.*