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COVID-19 Journal | Ashton Whiteside

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Description: This is Ashton Whiteside's COVID-19 Journal. I am from Alabaster, Alabama and I started attending Jacksonville State University in the fall of 2019. I am currently a freshman but almost a sophomore. I am majoring in Early Childhood/Elementary Education. I stayed in Alabaster during the whole pandemic and I only left to go to the chiropractor, get groceries, or to take walks.

Ashton Whiteside

COVID-19 Journal

March 30, 2020

Two weeks. Two weeks and two days since my life got turned around. You always imagine how things are going to go in life, especially when you're looking forward to something. I can safely say, this is not how I imagined the end of my freshman year going down. I always thought I would be ending the year surrounded by my friends and celebrating that we made it, not getting told to leave campus and not come back for the rest of the semester. I never anticipated my time here being cut short. No one did. You never think something is going to happen until it's happening to you.

So here I am, sitting at my computer, soaking in my new reality. Am I disappointed at the sudden end to my freshman year? Of course. Would I go back and change it if I could? Absolutely. Unfortunately, that's not the case, so here is my goal in this time of uncertainty: make the most of everything. We don't know how this will end, or when this will end, or if this will end, so why not make the most of the situation? What I mean by that is why sit around doing nothing when you could be learning to cook or picking up a new hobby. Why sit inside when you can take a walk around the block? I don't want to look back at this time in my life and regret not making the most of the situation. Here's to making the most of unfortunate and uncertain circumstances.

April 1, 2020

I'm more often than not drowning in schoolwork. Especially on days like today when it seems like everything in every class is due within the next few days. With that being said, it's hard to pick up a new hobby when my day consists of schoolwork, schoolwork, and oh more schoolwork. However, I managed to pick up a small new hobby, listening to crime podcasts! Sounds a little weird, I know, but it's very interesting to see how things play out and what people's motives are behind the crimes. Even better, it's something I can listen to for a short break from my schoolwork!

The whole situation the world is in right now gets more and more real by the day. I personally don't know anyone that has COVID-19 and I'm terrified for the day that it happens. My mom is a nurse at the hospital in my hometown and has to work through this whole pandemic which is honestly so scary. I've always looked up to my mom for being so dedicated and such a hard work, but I especially look up to her in times like these where she puts her life on the line to help other people who are suffering. If you know someone who is/was a COVID-19 frontline

healthcare worker, give them a big hug and let them know how much you appreciate them because they're doing such a great job.

April 3, 2020

Governor Kay Ivey just issued a mandatory stay at home order. The only reason anyone is allowed to leave their house is grocery stores, pharmacies, get supplies to work from home or to accommodate distance learning, to buy gas, pet supplies and get take-out food from restaurants. There is a \$500 fine for leaving your house for any reason other than the ones I listed above. Everything is getting very real. I don't think this pandemic is going to go away as quickly as everyone thinks it will. This is only the beginning.

I move out of my freshman year dorm tomorrow. It's crazy that my first year of college was cut short due to a worldwide pandemic. It's definitely not how I imagined it but I'm rolling with it. I've learned to make the best of every situation and find joy in the hardships because I know that Jesus has it under control. I have learned to put my complete trust and faith in Him, especially in the midst uncertainty. Right now, before the stay at home order goes into place, I am sitting in my driveway with my boyfriend (6 feet away from each other) and just enjoying this time together, even if I can't be right next to him. It's little things like this that keep me going.

April 5, 2020

I moved out of my dorm yesterday. It was incredibly weird. Most people that were there were wearing medical masks, including myself. Of course, I know about the pandemic going on in the world, but it didn't become real until I saw the outside world with my own eyes. It's strange to think that this is going on all across the world, not just in Alabama or even just the U.S. I read yesterday that China is closing everything down again because of a second wave of COVID-19. Like I said the other day, this is far from over, it's only the beginning. It's hard to think that we all might be stuck in our homes for months. I know that millions of people are being affected by this way worse than I am but it's hard to think about how many plan and opportunities that the virus has messed up for me.

As always though, I am trying to make the most of the situation we are in. I've started finding new recipes and making them! Cooking has become a newfound love for me. It's a stress reliever as well. I can just get away from everything and listen to music or a podcast (Crime Junkie in particular) while cooking. This morning I made a big bowl egg scramble with a cup of iced coffee and it was delicious. If you ever thought about learning to cook or try a new recipe and you feel like you just don't have the time, just do it. It's so worth it. I know a lot of people who are going a little stir crazy just sitting in the house all the time but I'm doing pretty okay. I usually just keep myself busy with homework, reading, cooking, and tv. I am a homebody though, so it just works for me.

April 7, 2020

My boyfriend made me a blanket ladder for my room last week and I set it up yesterday and it's so cute! I also put my bedding from my dorm room on my bed at home. I'm trying to

make it feel a little more homey and cute in here, and I would have to say it's working. Last night I wrote letters to my college besties. If you miss your friends, I would highly recommend writing them letters. There is not a better feeling than to receive handwritten mail from someone you love. I also finished a book today!

I'm still trying to make the most of the situation but day by day it gets harder and harder. I just want to see my friends, and honestly, I never thought I'd say this, but I want to go to class everyday instead of sitting in front of my computer for hours. I will say this, never ever take your teachers for granted because first of all, they use their own time to help you become successful, and second of all because without them we wouldn't be where we are today. I really miss my teachers and if I could see them one last time and thank them for everything they do, I would. There are so many people that are becoming heroes in the midst of this pandemic and I would definitely say that teachers are amongst those heroes.

April 9, 2020

I learned something this week. Something I probably already knew but it just became very prominent to me this week. Taking time for yourself is so incredibly important. Your mental health is so incredibly important. No matter how much stuff you have going on, you have to take a break for yourself. That looks different for everyone too. For me it's usually just watching tv for a while but sometimes it's reading a book or taking a long hot shower. Maybe for you it's taking a long walk, or snapping, or painting, or writing. Find whatever works for you and do it because you deserve it whether you think you do or not.

I've been waiting for one of two things to happen since COVID-19 became our reality. One: our new reality finally settles with me and I realize that this is our reality, or two: it completely slips my mind what our reality is. Today the ladder happened. It sounds kind of bad on my part, I know, but sometimes it's hard to remember what's going on in the world when you're stuck in your own little bubble called your house. Honestly it still hasn't set in what is really happening in the world. I know that day is coming though, and I think it'll hit me very very hard.

April 11, 2020

Yesterday was such a good day. One of the best since this quarantine started. My family decided to go to a park to just get out of the house. First, we went to a popsicle shop (through the drive through of course) and got some popsicles! Also, my boyfriend works at that popsicle shop, so we got to see him too, so that was nice. Then we went to a park we've never been to that is just a bunch of trails to walk through. We brought our dog, and he loved it! He jumped straight in the creek. After the park we came home, ate dinner, and then played card games until it was time for bed.

Yesterday made me realize how important it is to go outside and exercise. I've kind of been in a slump and I honestly didn't know how to get out of it and going outside did the trick! Even today, I was having a pretty crappy day and I decided to go outside with my family and it just turned my day around. Two lessons: go outside and spend time with your family. I haven't

picked up a new hobby yet, but I have started digging into the Word more and it is so rewarding. Tomorrow is Easter, and I can't wait to celebrate Jesus all day!

April 13, 2020

If this whole corona thing blows over soon, then my brother is set to get married in a month and three days. One thing that you need to know about my dad is that he is rhythmically challenged to say the least. So, he isn't the best at dancing, or clapping even. I'm not trying to take a hit on my dad at all, I love him, you just needed to know this before I say the next thing. Tonight, my brother, sister, and I decided to try to teach him simple dances that basically the whole human race knows like the Macarena, The Cupid Shuffle, The Electric Slide, etc. It was...interesting but definitely the highlight of my day.

I am about to watch EngageJSU on Instagram Live and I'm super pumped! Digging into God's word has definitely kept me grounded and kept my head out of the gutter. Some days are harder than others at this point but honestly, I'm doing okay. I miss my friends and I miss the sweet little town of Jacksonville. I'm just looking at the light at the end of the tunnel. I know one day I'll get to see my friends again and I'll get to go back to Jacksonville, and I just have to hang on to that.

April 15, 2020

Today is one of my best friends' birthdays and I'm really sad that I'm not going to get to spend it with her, so I decided to do something special for her from me and our two other friends. One friend gave me the idea to send a stuffed animal to her as a hug from us since we can't give her one right now. So, I duct taped a box with pretty duct tape and inside I put a stuffed bear that was holding a heart that says "XOXO", some candy, some pens, a sticker, a note from all of us, confetti, and topped it off with a piece of paper that said, "Here's a hug from your girls! We love you". I can't wait for her to get it!

I am 1000% over online school right now. I cannot wait for it to be over. I have a million assignments due within the next few days and honestly, I have no motivation to do any of it. I only have 2 weeks left of school and I'm trying to push through but it's so hard. The statewide stay at home order is supposed to be over on April 30 (only 15 more days) and I really hope that's the truth. I just really want to be able to work this summer but if I don't get to, it'll be okay because I know that staying inside is saving people's lives.

April 17, 2020

Seven days. Just seven days left of school. Maybe less if all of my professors decide to give final exams next week. It's weird to think that my freshman year of college is almost over. It went by incredibly fast. It was such a good year. Sure, it had its ups and downs, but I met some of my best friends at JSU and nothing can top that. My friends mean the absolute world to me and I wouldn't trade them for the world. When people say that you'll meet your best friends for life in college, they really mean it.

Yesterday I heard about Trump's 3 phase plan to reopen the country. Basically, the number of people that have the virus has to decrease for 14 days before we even enter into phase one. During phase one, social settings with 10 people is permitted but social distancing should still be practiced. Numbers of people infected with the virus must be consistent or decreasing for 14 days straight before entering phase two. During phase two, social gatherings of 15 people are permitted but people should still practice social distancing. Again, the number of people infected with the virus must stay consistent or decreasing for 14 days before entering phase three. Lastly, during phase three everything basically goes back to normal but social distancing must stay in play and the number of people infected must decrease or stay consistent for 14 days in order for the country to reopen. So basically, this is far from over

April 19, 2020

I can officially see the light at the end of the tunnel that is schoolwork. All I have left is three exams, one quiz, one project, and one assignment. It sounds like a lot but trust me, it is so much less than what I have been doing over the last few weeks. Once I'm done with this semester, I will have about two weeks of freedom and then I have to start my summer class. It's just intro to theatre so it shouldn't be too bad but it's still school so I'm not excited about it.

I love my family but honestly, I am so ready to not be stuck in this house with them. The creative side of me started to come out today which was so nice because I hardly ever get creative anymore. I couldn't do anything creative today because I was working on homework, but now I have a bunch of ideas for when I do get the chance and I am so excited. My boyfriend's little brother's birthday is coming up and I'm going to make something for him, and I can't wait to give it to him! I am still just trying to make the most of this situation. It's hard but I'm surviving.

April 21, 2020

My brother and his fiancée decided to move their wedding date back a month since the original date didn't seem promising. We've all put our trust and faith in God since the beginning of this. We don't know if or when this will end but we know that God's timing is always perfect. Last week, my college pastor Jesse challenged us to seek God and not our future. God knows what we need, and we have to trust that he will provide us with those needs. So, I'm throwing away my anxieties and trusting that God is going to make everything okay in the end.

School is almost over and I am so excited to get creative! I am making a graduation gift for my best friend and I want it to be super special. In order to make it super special I decided to reach out to all her closest friends and the people she loves the most to put something together without being together with her. She is such a special person and she deserves to have something special. Recently she told a bunch of her friends, mentors, coaches, and teachers that she wouldn't be who she is today without us in her life and I wanted to reciprocate that feeling and let her know that none of us would be who we are without her and the impact she has had on each and every one of us.

April 23, 2020

This morning I had to meet my brother's fiancée's dad to give him my brother's spare car key because he locked his keys in his car. It was a little aggravating having to drive 30 minutes out of my way and then turning right back around and driving 30 minutes back home, but it was nice to get out of the house. I also took the opportunity to stop by Walmart and Target to get a few things that I needed while I was out. The amount of people in Walmart without a mask or gloves on was insane. I don't understand why people wouldn't want to protect themselves right now. I understand that some people might not have a mask to wear but people are selling them everywhere, so you could definitely get one without a problem.

I'm down to one test and one assignment left in this semester and I'm pumped. I can't wait to just relax and sleep in and do what I want. I do however need to find a job this summer because I don't think that the summer camp that I was going to work at is going to be open. I'm really sad about that because I love those kids with all my heart and I'm going to miss them like crazy, but I know that something good will come from this whether I see it right now or not. Being stuck at home has become my new reality and it's kind of weird but honestly, it's starting to feel normal. I wonder if it will feel weird to go back to how things were before, if that even happens.

April 25, 2020

I slept in today for the first time in about a month and a half and it was fabulous. Last night I watched a movie with my sister since I haven't spent much time with her. After we watched the movie, we decided to make a drink that was in that movie and it was delicious! Today, my sister, dad and I all went to Walmart for a few things that my mom needed, then we went to our favorite Mexican restaurant and got food for dinner. My sister then made us all watch the Emperor's New Groove because I've never seen it. After that we all helped my mom make strawberry jam. Overall, it was a good past two days.

This is supposed to be the last full week of quarantine, but no one is really sure if that is true. I don't think I'll mind too much if we have to stay inside for a longer period of time, but I desperately need a job. I'm going to wait until after this week to get a job though. I'm just making sure I'm completely done with school before I get caught up in something else. Hopefully this will all be over before we know it.

April 26, 2020

Today was a really good day. I woke up this morning and watched church online. Then I made some yummy banana pancakes. After that one of my old best friends came over and sat and talked to me in my driveway for three hours which was so much fun. Also, while she was over, a local popsicle shop came through our neighborhood, so I got to eat a pop which was so tasty. After that I helped make dinner, and then pretty much just watched tv for the rest of the night. It was a much-needed rest day.

I asked my boss from last summer if she knew whether or not we were going to get to have summer camp this summer. She said that we will know more after Governor Kay Ivey

speaks on April 30th. I really hope we get to have it because that is my favorite job ever. Until then I guess I'm just going to hold my breath and hope for the best. It won't be the end of the world if we don't, and I can find another job but honestly, I just don't want to. I'll be grateful for whatever job I can get though.

April 28, 2020

I had a productive morning. I got up and worked out, made myself breakfast, and finished my very last test of the semester. I am officially done with my freshman year of college, and it feels wonderful. Now I am going to spend the rest of my day just enjoying life. I will most likely go tan, maybe read a book, paint a little, and probably watch some tv. I'm taking one summer class, so I have exactly two weeks to enjoy myself before I have to do school again.

Turns out that Governor Kay Ivey was speaking today instead of April 30th. A little bit of good news came from her speech. The state of Alabama is allowed to open up retail stores, but there can only be 50% occupancy. People can return to work if there is ten people or less as long as they can maintain a six-foot distance. Beaches are open for groups of ten people or less and they have to maintain a six-foot distance. It's not a lot but it's something and that's all that any of us are asking for. This goes into effect on April 30th and will continue until May 15th in which Governor Kay Ivey will reassess the situation. Hopefully we keep moving forward instead of taking a step back.