

Essay by Manika Bansal

During the COVID-19 break, I haven't really done much else except study, spend time with my family, and binge Netflix. If I'm being honest, I have a lot going on right now. I have all my work for school and I have math classes outside of school, which are online now. On top of all this, I'm prepping for the SAT right now. I was planning on taking the SAT in May, but because of the lockdown, the exam got canceled. However, I want to take the test as soon as possible so I don't have to worry about it in 11th grade. That's why I have to keep studying and make sure I'm ready to take the test as soon as the lockdown opens and new testing dates are announced. I'm also doing two online courses at the moment. One course is about microeconomics and business, which I took purely out of interest and want to learn. The course is on edx.org and is offered by DoaneX. I'm almost done with it, but I think it has been a good experience. I'm interested in economics so it was nice to expand on the knowledge I had and learn about the different aspects related to it. The second course is called "Pandemics, Epidemics, and Outbreaks" and I took this course as a way to learn more about COVID-19. The course is on coursera.org and is offered by The University of Pittsburgh. It taught me about why outbreaks occur and how the different responses that are put into action when that happens, including legal regulations and how the local, state, and federal responses differ. It was enlightening to learn about situations like ours that have happened in the past at such an in-depth level and it really helped me understand more about COVID-19 and the regulations during the outbreak, as well as why some countries reacted the way they did.

Ok, I'm probably boring you with all these details about my studying. Let me talk about my family instead. It's been a bit of a change for us because my brother, who had gone to study in the UK, came back. This is actually an interesting story. At the end of February, my brother kept reassuring my parents that everything was going to be fine. He was insisting on staying in the UK, even after AES closed the campus and started to offer the online school. However, my aunt, who also has a son studying in the UK who she called back as soon as cases started to appear, wouldn't take no for an answer. She kept on calling both my mom and my grandma, insisting they make my brother come home. And of course, my brother had had his taste of freedom and didn't want to come back just yet. Eventually, he caved and booked a flight out. Turns out, the day after he booked the flight, the Indian government decided to send out a notice they were closing their borders in a week. My brother was on the second last flight out of London. And even now, my dad constantly tells my brother to thank my aunt because it really was she who pressured my mom to pressure my brother to return home. Anyway, since he left almost a year ago, the entire house — which, by the

way, consists of nine people including my brother — had gotten used to him not being around. Now that he came back, my dad, who usually blasts his music in the morning while he works out, couldn't because my brother's room is right beside our backyard where my dad works out. My brother and I don't like a lot of the same food, so my mom now has to cook a couple of different foods per meal. My brother's room was just a sitting area that we had converted into a room because he wanted his own room. So it doesn't have a bathroom, which means he has to share one with my parents. Speaking of bathrooms, at my house, we have to turn on the geezer to get hot water. However, now that summer's here, we don't need to do that because the sun warms the water for us. Since we don't have a temperature controlling thing and my room faces the sun most of the time, I can't take a shower until after 6 or 7 pm. Going back to my brother, he has to adapt as well. He got a taste of freedom and he doesn't like being back in the confining space of an Indian family. Our family is a little much as well. Our dad always wants us to spend time together and my brother and I both need space sometimes. Because we grew up in China, with only four people instead of 9, we aren't used to spending so much time with so much family. And after two years, we still aren't used to it. So it can get a little overwhelming for us, and that's when we need a break and need to be alone for a bit, otherwise, we end up getting cranky and snappy. But our dad doesn't understand that and always forces us to stay with family. In fact, it got so bad one day that my brother completely broke down and started crying. It was terrifying for me because I've never seen him like that. And that same day, he asked me to shave his head. In hindsight, I think he might've been having a mental breakdown of sorts, but it was still a lot of fun. Despite what people say, I don't think I was in the wrong when I went to visit my cousins this week. I went straight from my house to the car to my cousin's house and I was wearing a mask the entire time. I washed my hands as soon as I got to my cousin's house and changed my clothes. I hadn't seen my cousins in a really long time and my dad kind of forced my family to go, but we ended up having a lot of fun and lasting the entire day. It was what we needed in this lockdown. And I realize that every issue I've listed has been first world problems and a lot of people out there are going through much worse. I couldn't imagine knowing someone with COVID-19 and all the pain it would bring. There's actually an interesting story here. My aunt had a fever for almost a week and thought she had COVID-19. And this is the same aunt who was pressuring my mom to bring my brother back to India. Of course, our entire family freaked out. She decided to quarantine herself as well as her husband. She didn't meet her kids for 2 weeks. Until they finally got a testing kit and they came out as negatives. The way she freaked is something my dad brings up every day at dinner. What if she actually had COVID-19 though? As I said, I can't

imagine. And I don't think any of us know the true extent of this lockdown, of COVID-19, if a loved one hasn't gotten sick. It has to be incredibly scary.