

COVID Days: A Memoir

by Susie Wang

I can't write about my childhood without mentioning COVID. It wasn't just a chapter; it was the whole book! Four years of my life. Gone, but not really gone. It's like a tattoo on my memory – permanent and inescapable. COVID didn't just happen to me; it shaped me. It was the backdrop to my teenage years, the filter through which I saw the world, and the reason I'll never look at a QR code the same way again.

Let me take you back to the online classes. Oh, the online classes! If there's one thing COVID taught me, it's that I have the attention span of a goldfish in a room full of shiny objects. Grade seven was supposed to be the year I learned algebra, geography, and maybe even a little self-discipline. Instead, it was the year I mastered the art of multitasking: Zoom in one window, video games in another, and a TV show playing in the background for good measure. I'm pretty sure my brain absorbed nothing but the theme songs of random Netflix series and the sound of my teacher's voice saying, "Can you hear me? Is your mic on?"

By the time COVID ended, my brain felt like a hard drive that had been wiped clean. I couldn't tell you what I learned that year, but I could recite entire episodes of television shows. It wasn't all bad, though. Those online classes gave me a front-row seat to the chaos of virtual learning. Kids forgetting to mute themselves, teachers accidentally sharing their screens with embarrassing tabs open, and the occasional pet making a cameo appearance. It was like a reality show, and we were all unwilling contestants.

But COVID wasn't just about online classes. Oh no, it was so much more. Remember the quarantines? If you were lucky enough to be in a class and experience a "close contact" with a COVID patient, congratulations – you hit the jackpot! The school would lock us up like prisoners, move us to a different floor, and leave us there for two weeks. No teachers, no lessons, just a bunch of kids with too much energy and not enough supervision. We turned the classroom into our own little world: soccer games in the aisles, ping-pong matches on the desks, and TV shows playing on the projector. It was like *Lord of the Flies*, but with Wi-Fi.

Of course, there was always that undercurrent of fear. We didn't know what was going to happen next. Would someone get sick? Would we lose someone we loved? The uncertainty was like a shadow, always there, even when we were laughing and playing. And then there were the QR codes. Oh, the QR codes! They were like our COVID passports, little squares that determined our fate. Green meant you were safe; red meant you were a pariah. Every morning, we'd line up at the school gate, phones in hand, waiting for the scan. If your code was the wrong colour, you were sent home, treated as if you had the plague. It was a weird time to be alive.

And let's not forget the lockdowns. The best (or worst) one was when our entire building was sealed off for three months. Three. Months. No going outside, no fresh air, just the four walls of our apartment and the endless loop of bad news on TV. I remember staring out of the window, watching the empty streets and wondering if the world would ever go back to normal. Going outside felt like a luxury, like something only rich people in movies got to do.

But here's the thing about COVID: it brought people closer. It separated us physically, but it forced us to connect in ways we never would have done before. Families spent more time together, friends found new ways to stay in touch, and we all learned to appreciate the little things, like a walk outside or a hug from someone we love. In a weird way, COVID taught us how to be human again.

So, yeah, COVID was a mess. It was fear and loss and boredom and chaos all rolled into one. But it was also my childhood. It's the reason I'll never forget the sound of a Zoom call disconnecting, the sight of a QR code on my phone, or the feeling of being locked in a classroom with my friends, laughing like the world wasn't falling apart outside. COVID changed me. It changed all of us. And whether we like it or not, it's a part of our story now. Forever.

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