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Weathering the Pandemic

Nicholas Traxler

How has the pandemic changed your daily life?

Nothing has been normal in my work and personal life since approximately March 14, 2020. I am approaching the six month mark of completely remote work, having seen my colleagues in-person less than a handful of times during this period. I spend a great deal of time on Zoom and Google Hangouts. I've been managing to keep some semblance of sanity by living with my partner in Madison, Wisconsin, from May 30 - June 12, and July 3 - September 5, 2020. Trying to manage to work remotely and care for/feed myself while living alone was a daunting and terrifying prospect. This post is dated August 31, so I am still in Madison. I look forward to returning (with my partner) to live in Northfield on September 5. I anticipate the continuation of remote work through at least the Fall 2020 term.

What positive things or unexpected moments of joy have come out of this experience?

The biggest silver lining for me has been my ability to live with my partner. He is a PhD student at UW-Madison. Were it not for COVID, we would have had to continue with a long-distance relationship. However, we've only spent a few weeks apart over the last six months. Being together with him has made all the difference.

What has been the hardest aspect of this experience?

I have struggled righteously with anxiety, depression, and PTSD for many years. Spending more time in isolation and consuming negative news on a daily cycle has exacerbated my symptoms. Dealing with my own personal mental health issues while also trying my best to stay focused on managing a difficult caseload as the Associate Director of the Alumni Annual Fund has taken all the skills, resources, and knowledge I've acquired over the years - and then some. Although my illness is present each and every day, I use mindfulness meditation, written reflections, journaling, exercise, and nutrition to keep my head above water. I have been and continue to be grateful for the support I've received from Carleton colleagues and volunteers throughout this ordeal.

What are you nervous and/or excited about for the coming academic year?

I hope students remain safe. I am excited to learn from my colleagues as we continue to create customized plans completely outside of the "business as usual" box. This is the final year of the Every Carl for Carleton campaign. I hope I can continue to help my cohort feel connected to Carleton in meaningful ways, encouraging our alumni to give generously of their time, talents, and treasure. I know Carleton can be the bellwether for other institutions as we grapple with institutional racism and the COVID-19 pandemic. We possess all the tools, talent, and time-honored traditions to see us through this period of difficulty. It's a privilege to serve Carleton during this turbulent time.

What is something you think should be preserved in public memory about this time?

Remembering the hard work, courageous conversations, flexibility to pivot, and dogged determination of all faculty, staff, and students. We've fearlessly faced each and every day, some days succeeding, and other days falling short. Each new day we pick back up and try our best - again and again. If we remain patient, this too shall pass.

What do you think we as a society should learn from this going forward?

Our community connections and support network have kept us all afloat. Although we don't all see eye-to-eye on every issue, we set up frameworks for thoughtful discussions that lead to conscientious conclusions. We are not out of the woods yet. There will be future civil unrest and pandemics to grapple with. Let us always remember that we never gave up - and let us stand highly resolved to never give up in the face of danger, evil, or injustice.

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences during the pandemic?

As so many millions have suffered through unemployment and grievous loss, I am so grateful for my role at Carleton. I am also grateful that none of my close relatives or friends have perished from the corona virus. No matter how the future unfolds, I will forever be indebted to Carleton for caring for me during this truly unprecedentedly difficult time.