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Road Trip Back Home

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“Could you explain your decision-making process at the end of winter term regarding how/if/when you should travel back home?”

“...every five hours...deciding whether to fly or drive. The only reason driving was even an option for me was because my brother went to school at Northwestern (University)...and he had basically bought himself a car...so it somehow worked out that my brother was going to have a car and we had the option to drive home, but there was a lot of decisions in terms of what would be safest. Driving would be easy, but we didn't want to stop at hotels all across the country and it took a while longer to drive. So we changed our minds, I don't even know how many times, and eventually decided to drive. So I went with one of my friends to Madison, Wisconsin with her parents, and then my brother met us there and we drove the rest of the way home.”

“Could you describe the duration of your trip? What did you do? Was it a fun experience? Were there any positives, any negatives?”

“...this is probably the only time we are going to drive across the country like this, so why not stop at national parks along the way?... we took an extra day or two because it was kind of out of our way to get to the parks. So that ended up being super fun...”

“I don't know how busy those places are usually, but it was pretty empty, and there was a toilet paper shortage everywhere. So, it was really interesting because a lot of the gas station bathrooms had all these signs up about not stealing toilet paper because it was a federal crime and they had cameras and you would be prosecuted if you stole the toilet paper. That was kind of amusing to me every time I went to the bathroom. All of the bathrooms seemed really clean and I don't know whether we just had luck with the gas stations or (if) they were cleaning the bathrooms way more than usual... the cleanliness left more of an impression on me than any dirty bathrooms, so that was definitely a surprise.”

“How many days did your trip take?”

“I think it ended up taking about four days.”

“So then where did you guys stay overnight?”

“For the first night we stayed at (friend name's) house in Madison, where Miles met me, and after that we stayed in little...I don't want to say motels, but we were trying to find mid-fanciness, mid-star hotels because we didn't want to get the lowest star in case their cleaning processes weren't going to be the greatest, but we also didn't want to drop a whole bunch of money on a hotel every night. So we kind of stayed in middle of the road hotels... We had a couple of family friends along the way...we could have stayed at their houses, and so we had contacted those people and asked if we could stay, but everyone was being very cautious, they didn't want to let college students, fresh from their campuses which were Petri dishes, into their house. So we thought that we might be able to stay with someone's family, but we ended up staying in hotels.”

“When I left Carleton and I started driving back home, I realized...I felt like I was in the real world, and realized what coronavirus actually was (and how serious it was). Did you

have a similar experience? Did it feel weird for you leaving the ‘Carleton bubble’? For me it became more real, the severity of the situation.”

“Yea totally, I mean I think it was kind of weird because on campus I was making an effort to wash my hands more, but I think at that time we didn’t know anything about masks or anything about really how it spreads through the air, you were just not supposed to be within six feet of each other. So Carleton felt more home when I left because I was just trying to wash my hands more...so it was kind of like ‘what am I going to do now’ kind of thing...We had the potential to spread the virus through all these places that we were driving through, so that was something we were really cognizant about...But also there was the possibility that we would spread anything by having our little carpool...but then when we were driving through South Dakota or really really rural areas, it was like coronavirus wasn’t even a thing there...so it felt more real, but also (summarized: when we went to these rural locations, people weren’t six feet apart and no one seemed to be concerned).”

“What was it like when you finally got home? I know that you didn’t just go back to regular life...I know that you were quarantining with your brother. So if you could just explain where you were for those two weeks? Did it feel weird STILL not being to totally be with your family?”

“(we have a lake house in Tahoe) It’s pretty secluded. My Dad had just gone on a solo trip to Europe...his trip was cut short because Trump had issued some ban of not letting people come back to the US, so my Dad really scrambled to get back as fast as he could. So, he had come back from Europe and was quarantining in the house (at Lake Tahoe) that we had available. So, he was only about eleven days in when my brother and I finally made it back home. So, he ended up in my Uncle’s garage or something for the last four days or so and my brother and I took over the second house that we had. I think like everybody...we didn’t really have anything to do, it’s spring break, there’s no classes, so there really wasn’t anything for us to do besides hang out with each other. Where we were it was spring time...but there was still snow on the ground. There wasn’t quite enough snow to do snow activities, so we didn’t go sledding or skiing or anything, but it was just enough snow to hinder stuff like hiking or mountain biking. So, we were kind of stuck in this weird situation where we couldn’t really do anything, but we did do a lot of cooking and that was fun to experiment...When it was finally time for us to go home, I felt really weird about it because I was excited to go home, but I was also like, what am I excited for? I was just going to go home and do nothing in bed. And, I knew that I wasn’t going to see any of my friends because I was concerned about their level of caution. From what I could tell, none of my friends were being very cautious. For me, the main thing was my Grandma, and I wasn’t going to let myself come in contact (and get my Grandma sick). So, I was excited to go home, but then I would stop and think for a second ‘why am I so excited? I can’t even go and see any of my friends, I’m just going to keep sitting at home.”

“During winter term finals, having to figure out your travel plans and on top of that still finish finals was so stressful (for me). Is there anything you maybe would have done differently those last few days? Looking back do you wish you would have spent more time with these people, or done this, or done that, or not get as caught up in something?”

“I don’t think that I would change anything...I was lucky that for my classes, the main projects were due the last day of classes...so I didn’t have a ton to do (during finals)...I was continually shocked that Carleton did not do anything in regards to our winter term finals, especially because not only was everyone trying to find out how they were going to get home and where they were going to go, but we were all of a sudden burdened with the responsibility of packing up our whole rooms...and so I think those three things, the combination was really stressful...I don’t think that I had the power to do anything to make it better...”

“What are your plans for fall term? Are you coming back to campus? Are you coming back to Northfield? How are you going to travel—fly, drive?”

“I am living with three of my good friends. It is in Northfield; we got a lease that is supposed to last for a year. We petitioned the college for the Northfield option where we would live off campus but still be able to participate in campus activities and use campus facilities. Two of my roommates had personal reasons that I thought were pretty compelling, so reasons why they would need to live off campus during Covid. So, we ended up getting denied by the college. They had gotten back to us much later than they originally said they would, so that was definitely frustrating. But we have a house and it is all swimmers. We are going to do all of our classes online. I think I am going to have to fly back. If I could I would drive, but I’m the only person that I know of in Reno that goes to Carleton and so I would have no one to drive with. I have a car, but it’s so old and broken down that it wouldn’t make it across the country—it’s about 900 miles for me, so I don’t trust it to make it all the way there. I don’t have any other option besides flying, so that’s what I’m going to do!