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COVID disrupts travel plans to study abroad but creates other travel opportunities

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Margaret: How did you travel home at the end of the term? What was that experience like?

Angel: I took a plane home to Louisiana but wanted to be prepared so like, I had gloves and like, Clorox wipes, but didn't have a mask and seeing as many people who had maybe a bandana wrapped around their face, and maybe some people had a face mask, but since it wasn't that serious at that time, I don't think I saw many people with face mask but they had the gloves. Some had those surgical masks, and I felt people were looking at me like "why don't you have a mask" and I was just like, I didn't know, I should get a mask, but I didn't know where to get it. When I got home, my brother grabbed my suitcase and things to wipe and put it in the car. And then everything I touched, he made me like wipe it out afterwards. By the time I got home, my mom made me sit my things down in the foyer and told me to go take a shower...it was kind of packed then in the airports...basically it was almost like it was a regular flight home from Carleton pre-pandemic.

M: My flight was like, really empty, which felt odd. No one was wearing masks but there was no one. There was one lady who insisted she get extra Purell wipes from the flight attendant and then gave me one. All right, next question. Have you had any travel disrupted or have needed to cancel any trips due to the pandemic?

A: I had to cancel my study abroad trip. I was thinking about that yesterday. And I'm like, man, I was really supposed to study abroad. But um, yeah, I had to cancel my international flight that I couldn't get a refund on, so that was a bummer. And after paying the Visas and stuff and still getting emails like, oh, "American citizen going abroad" I felt, I'm not going anywhere, please stop. But besides that, when I went to Boston, I changed my flight like three different times. But the second time I went to change my flight, they say my flight was busy and I was wondering "Okay, what is busy?" And like, is that overbooked? So, I changed my flight because I was so uncertain, because I didn't want to get on a flight that would be jam packed with people because it's not safe during this time. But yeah, besides that, I haven't had any thing canceled, but the study abroad trip was the biggest thing.

M: Yeah, how did how did you kind of process that and how did it feel?

A: Well, I found out my trip was canceled the day before they sent out the email saying we were going to be online for half the term and I was devastated. I just remember I was at Olaf and with all the stuff on I just broke down crying in the bathroom. And because I had done all these things for it up until that point, like so many people I had helped me out getting money for flights and getting money for visas and stuff. I've been wanting to go on that trip since my freshman year. So it really was just so heartbreaking and I just really cried the whole night and the next morning I was like, okay, no, we're on a mission. I was like, okay, we're because in my mind, I was like, okay, we're going to be here. I'm gonna be here in the spring, so I have to start getting classes together. So I remember going to the registrar's office and trying to figure out what I can do. And then, that Thursday, I found out classes were, you know, we were going online, and it felt very devastating. And then we have to figure out how to get off campus as fast as possible. And it was just like, it was really upsetting because I was just everything in a matter of 72 hours had just completely changed...And I still hadn't processed it up even up until like, May, like right before I went to Boston and I was thinking "I would have been on a plane to Bahrain by this point." I

just kept thinking “I would have been doing this, I would have been doing that” or like, “I would have been on a plane back to Minnesota right now for work.” Like I wouldn't be you know, I wouldn't be home. So it just was like, it still hasn't hit me. It's starting to set in, obviously, because there's so much time but it's still just like, like I said, even yesterday, I was like, wow, I was supposed to be studying abroad. I don't think I'll ever fully process it. It's like, this time period won't be fully processed until, I guess after we're dealing with the pandemic, but even then, I'm not gonna fully process it until I'm an actual adult.

M: So you said you flew to Boston? What was that flight experience like?

A: The flight there wasn't bad. I had a connecting flight and it wasn't bad. It was really weird to see the airport, like, it was really weird to see like nobody in the airport. But I mean, by the time I flew back, it was like, there were a lot more people than when I flew to Boston. But that I mean, when I flew to Boston, it was a completely different experience from March to May because everybody had a mask and almost everybody had gloves. People had hand sanitizer wipes, all these things. And it was just a complete 180 of what I experienced in March because I mean, you had to have a mask get on the flight. Unless you're like a child, the children were kind of looking the other way. But it was just, it was really weird. But also it was nice, not having to sit with two other people next to you. When I flew to Boston, I was bougie, and I got first class because it was only like a couple of dollars more and I wanted a bigger seat. And I mean, there was like one other guy next to me and it was fine. When I flew back from Boston, on my first flight I had the whole row to myself, which is really nice, like you never get the whole row to yourself. Those two flights were fine compared to March when, you know, no one realized how serious it was or how serious it was gonna get.