

May 8, 2020

Santa Claus
123 Elf Road
North Pole, 88888

Dear Santa,

Hi there! Don't worry, this isn't a letter asking for stuff for Christmas; instead, I want to check in with you about this year. I know I'm probably much older than your usual writers, but isn't this nostalgic getting a letter from me again? The last time I wrote to you was probably when I was 12 back in 2006. Anyways, I'm pretty sure you've heard by now (you know, since you're Santa and all), but 2020 has been a mess. Due to the COVID-19 virus, everyone has been put in quarantine. Because of this, a lot of aspects of our lives have been drastically shifted which has made this transition incredibly challenging for everyone. I'm writing to tell you about my experience throughout all of this, so hopefully you have a big enough break from your work to read this letter filled with my complaints and achievements. Before I start, I have a lot of questions I hope to have answered whenever you respond: Will you be wearing a mask when you deliver gifts this year? Do any of the elves have COVID? And most importantly, how in the world do you manage to stay cooped up in your workshop for the whole year? Many of us can't even last a month without a protest. Keep these in mind when you write back, but right now let's get started.

Just like every student, I have had to make a huge transition in school. The semester started out like any other semester would: adjusting to my classes, studying every night when I'm not working, working out at least 5 days out of the week, the usual process. I was incredibly excited; I was genuinely interested in every single class I was taking, and I felt like I came back refreshed after Winter Break. Unfortunately, this rhythm was short-lived as it ended in March with the start of the quarantine. It all happened so fast that I couldn't believe it was even happening in the first place. Suddenly, we all found ourselves using this "random" app called Zoom in order to conduct our class sessions online. Additionally, some of our assignments were either pushed back or removed entirely. That may sound great but there were some assignments I was honestly looking forward to in order for me to develop new skills like building a mock syllabus for a class. However, the most challenging part wasn't the use technology or the assignments given but staying motivated. It's hard for me to work at home since I live with two brothers and my cat, so it's been difficult to complete my work. I have been working on my self-discipline more than any homework assignment this semester, but I still have a long way to go before I completely adjust to working/studying in my hectic household.

Unfortunately, I also had to accept a dramatic shift for my jobs. The easier transition was undoubtedly my job as an instructor at Score Academy. Because my job consists of planning and leading class sessions, creating worksheets, and looking over student work, it was easy to

transition our classes to online. Luckily, familiarizing myself with Zoom through school came in handy for work. However, a lot of my students are unable to meet with me online, so my paycheck has decreased. I have been working with new students as a way to maintain my funds, but there is still a noticeable cut in my paycheck. Although this transition at Score Academy was seamless, I can't say the same for my other job. Working at Cerritos High School as their dance director, it's ultimately impossible to work with them until the quarantine is over. It's very different teaching dance and holding dance rehearsals online compared to regular classes. The worst part of it all was the fact that the quarantine was issued in the middle of our dance competition season. Every year, we compete at numerous dance competitions throughout Southern California against other high schools. We were doing much better than I expected, placing at every single competition we entered. As we were preparing for our biggest and last competitions, Nationals and State Championship, we were informed that our dance season would be cut short because of the virus. Worst of all, I have seniors that will be graduating this year that will never get to experience their last National or last State Championship. Although I have another year as the director, those students are forever robbed of that opportunity. We still haven't completely healed from this as a team and I only hope this doesn't carry over to the next season. On top of being unable to complete the season, this job was my main source of income and I am no longer being compensated for it. I now only make \$375 a month from my instructor job alone since I don't have many hours there. Luckily, I have saved enough money prior to this pandemic so I should be fine until next semester starts. That still doesn't mean that this situation is okay in the slightest.

Before all of this, I honestly considered myself a homebody, but I now understand that I don't even remotely fit that definition. I don't like to party or go to big social gatherings, but that doesn't mean I only stayed at home. In fact, I was rarely home—I would leave my house at 9am and come back home at 10pm. Every day I had school, work, gym, sometimes two out of three, other days all three at the same time. It wasn't that I hated being home, I just had a very active lifestyle. I loved studying at coffeeshops or at the rec center at Cal State Long Beach—something about being out forces me to get my work done quicker so I could work towards going home. Unfortunately, the worst part of the quarantine is the absence of the gym. The gym is my ultimate source of happiness—nothing makes me feel as good as working out. I love constantly improving myself in something so strenuous; it's honestly essential to my life. Now that the gyms are closed, I feel this huge drop in self-confidence and energy. It has gotten to the point where I have been refusing to look myself in the mirror since the quarantine started. I have been doing my best to work out at home as much as I can but working out in such a crowded place has been much more challenging than I could have imagined. If I was truly a homebody, I wouldn't be having such a difficult time staying home as much as I am right now. Unfortunately, the title "Homebody" belongs to my older brother. His lifestyle has not changed at all throughout this whole thing. The only difference is he isn't working anymore but that just gives him more time to play video games which he doesn't mind. Since we share a room, I found privacy on my daily drives. Now that those are gone, I feel like I'm constantly being smothered with company. However, that doesn't mean I don't miss the company I used to surround myself with before.

Although I don't like hanging out in big crowds, that doesn't mean I don't hang out with friends in general. One of my favorite things is to get lunch/dinner with some company. This can range from a one-on-one hangout to an intimately small group. I pride myself in being surrounded with inspirational, hardworking individuals. I feel like I need their influence more than ever now, it's just unfortunate that I can't receive that at this time. I especially miss those last-minute plans of meeting up somewhere to hang out and catchup. I have also been feeling this social disconnect through the absence of school. When in-person class sessions were halted, I was, of course, sad that I wouldn't have the college experience of immersing myself in a classroom this semester; however, there was one thing in particular that bothered me. As a first-year in the MFA program for Cal State Long Beach, this was the last semester I was able to work with my second-year MFA classmates. I have always looked up to them and their writing since I started the program, so it hurt to have that opportunity cut short. While they are all preparing for their graduation, I'm preparing to become a motivating second-year graduate student like they were. I feel like I had much more to learn from them, but I'll just have to take what I know and do my best for the incoming first-years next semester.

Despite all these transitions being very reasonable, life has been providing me with some extra obstacles to worry about. Now that everything is highly centered on technology, it's essential to have access to both a computer/laptop and the internet. Unfortunately, my internet at home is frustratingly inconsistent. It randomly drops and I can go either a couple of seconds without internet to even half an hour. It's tough when I'm doing homework, but it's especially difficult when I'm in a Zoom meeting with my students. On top of that, my laptop's left click function has recently stopped working. That means I need to use a mouse in order to get any work done. Although it's a minor inconvenience, it just keeps adding further frustrations to an increasingly difficult transition. Along with these technological issues, I'm also forced to conduct my therapy appointments online. Because of my depression, I regularly go to therapy; thankfully, my therapist is accommodating enough to transition our sessions online. That may sound fine, but that means that personal things I wish to discuss with my therapist and **not** with my family could be heard **anywhere** in the house. Most of the time, I talk to my therapist *about* my family, so it's been difficult trying to open up to her when my brothers are within ear-shot distance. However, I must admit that these issues could be worse. My house could not have internet completely, my laptop could have completely broken, and my therapist could have not transitioned to online sessions. Although these aren't ideal situations, I still have access to these things— thank God.

I know I spent this whole letter complaining about the unfortunate situation 2020 has provided for me, but I can't say that I *haven't* grown from this. Throughout these obstacles, I had to make the best of every situation. This hasn't been ideal for anyone, so I can't make excuses and submit to being lazy. I have forced myself to become motivated through small achievements: I should be proud that I woke up at a decent time, pat myself on the back for dedicating time to finishing homework, be grateful for the beautiful weather that makes it perfect to walk outside, and feel accomplished for working out at all in these conditions. I have learned to celebrate myself just a little bit more; although this doesn't necessarily help my physical self-confidence, this has positively impacted my mental stability. In addition to all of this, I have learned just how

much I have missed spending time with my family. I have come to appreciate every minute I get with them since I know this won't be permanent when our lives resume their eventual fast pace. Ultimately, this has stopped me from working myself to the ground. My therapist helped me reframe this quarantine perfectly: "Next time, don't wait for the world to stop in order for you to finally take a break." I need to become more comfortable with the idea of resting, and this pandemic has provided me with the perfect learning opportunity. I should appreciate all that I have accomplished this semester as well as praise myself for finally finding time to rest. I still have a lot more work to do before this semester is over, but I'm glad I'm finally getting the hang of everything before it's too late. Now, I feel like I can finish this semester the way I started it—on a high note.

Thanks for reading this Santa. I hope you're staying safe and healthy throughout all of this! I'm doing my best to place my health as a priority, so you should too. I'm praying that quarantine doesn't last all the way until Christmas. If it does, you better wear a mask as well as practice social distancing. I'll be looking forward to your response!

Sincerely,

A student who hopes quarantine will end by Christmas