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An Isolated Reflection

Madison M. Weber

St. John Fisher College, mw01347@sjfc.edu

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An Isolated Reflection

By Madison Weber

This was supposed to be the start of the “best four years of my life”—and for a while, it honestly was. The people, opportunities, and ideas I met at Fisher were nothing short of life changing. I’d never met that many people with similar goals, drive, and compassion. I truly felt like I was living in my prime; the prime that I had been promised my whole life. I distinctly remember walking back from Basil to Ward one afternoon and thinking, “Wow... This really wasn’t all hype. There’s no way life can stay this perfect”.

Flash forward mere months, and I’m typing this at 2am in the breakroom in the middle of my fourth consecutive 12-hour night shift at my local hospital. This break room is where the majority of my online schooling experience took place: I “zoomed” into finals here, studied my powerpoints, and recorded presentations. It doesn’t feel real that I used to have wall-spanning white boards and entire rooms dedicated to helping me focus; now I do my work between a stack of baby hats (I work on labor and delivery) and some extra blood pressure cuffs. Sometimes, since I live locally, I drive by Fisher and I can see Salerno and remember the hours I spent there in the breakout rooms. Always trying to finish my studying before Fishbowl closed, so that I could grab a Tropical Guava with raspberry smoothie. But here I am now, Fisher feeling like a distant memory as I write this between clinical rounds.

For perspective, I currently work as a patient care technician on a womens health floor, a psychiatric ward, and a COVID-19 hospital screener. My job now includes wearing the same mask for 7 shifts (about 84 hours) and heavy plastic face shields when I come in contact with patients. I’m a Freshman (now Sophomore) Nursing major and Spanish minor at Fisher. My ultimate goal is to become a midwife and help the world in that way.

I think that the strangest part of this for me is the odd sort of identity crisis I seem to be having. Am I a student? Am I a healthcare “hero” as the media and public seem to be blowing

me up to be? I'm only 18, but I'm working at least forty hours a week while balancing school. Many of my hours are night-shifts, and that is often not conducive to office hours or class times, but I knew I needed both so I would just go without sleep.

And yes, I know that nursing includes long and odd hours and I'm more than willing to make these sacrifices. I love my job and the amazing opportunities it presents me with; the opportunity to make a difference. They just aren't sacrifices I was expecting to make this spring. I took time off work for the semester for a reason; I wanted to have this time to be a student and just a student. I wanted to soak in every single study session and night out with my friends. Because these were supposed to be the best four years of my life, and they seemed like they were.

Everytime I open my phone or turn on the television I see ads, commercials, and posts praising me for my dedication and hard-work as a modern healthcare worker. Sure, on the surface it's nice and I genuinely appreciate the support and recognition. But it's also incredibly overwhelming and can even feel confusing at times. My friends and peers will send me texts thanking me for doing what I do and seem so genuine, but then I check snapchat at 3am in the middle of a long shift while wearing uncomfortable protective equipment and see they are all together at a party.

I wish I could do that. I wish my family didn't have to lysol the doorknobs after I came home. I wish I didn't keep bleach wipes in my car to wipe down everything I touched after I finish a shift. I wish I was just back in the dining hall that day with my friends when they sent the email that we had to leave and I wish that it never came.

You can tell me I'm a hero, but I'm not. I'm just an 18 year old girl who wants to be there for others in the highs and lows of their lives and make those a little bit better. I'm just as scared,

confused, and overwhelmed as the next person trying to figure this all out. I'm nowhere near perfect either. Sometimes I'll make it halfway to a patient's room before I realize I forgot my face shield, or sometimes I'll have to go in and redo a patient's vitals because I forgot to write them down the first time. How can I be the hero that I see in the commercials? I've spent the last 15 weeks trying just to pass statistics, and now I have to do that on top of being a hero?

I think the word "hero" may be soured for me because the same people that use the word are the people I mentioned that I can see on snapchat together. I'd much rather people be more dedicated to staying home than thanking me every time I put on my scrubs. Again, this is not to say I don't appreciate the kind gestures because I truly do and they make the long shifts more than worth it. But the word hero means much less to me than the potential true acts of appreciation that could be paired with it.

Yes, I work in a hospital and yes I'm surrounded by amazing people who help people everyday. But I'm also still young and dumb, and COVID-19 is taking away my opportunity to truly live this. My frontal cortex isn't fully developed yet, but I'm being put in situations where it really should be. I miss my friends, my professors, and my waxer just as much as the next person. I'm just as much of a hero as the person truly taking precautions and working to protect themselves and others. I hope I can feel 18 again sometime soon.