

Brady: Intro -Hello, my name is Brady Holzer. I am a current first-year at Butler University. I am majoring in Biology. I am from Cedarburg, Wisconsin.

Millie: Intro - Hi, My name is Millie Robarge. I am a current freshman at Butler University. I am majoring in Chemistry. I have a complicated answer to “where are you from?” but I currently live in a suburb of Detroit.

I think each person’s story of COVID-19 is interesting, and so important to reflect on. I remember my pediatrician sharing a statistic during this time that stated that 50-75% of children were facing new mental health challenges during the pandemic.

Millie: Brady, what was one way that you feel your mental health was impacted?

Brady: Yeah, I would say, like most people, that my mental health took a toll. Growing up, I was a very extroverted person. I loved spending time with my friends. However, when the world shut down, and I couldn’t leave my house, that really affected me. There were workarounds to seeing my people, but nothing was like face-to-face. I struggled for a long time. I am happy to say that since then, I have been able to return to my childhood roots.

Millie: Thank you for sharing. Can you please share *Your* full story?

Brady: Of course. My story with COVID-19 starts a few weeks prior to the day of the shutdown on March 13th. My story begins in February 2020 in Washington DC. I was in 8th grade on a school field trip. I remember feeling very sick on the last day of the trip. This happened to be February 29th, 2020. 13 days prior to shutdown. I had a fever that wouldn’t break, a cough, a sore throat, and a constant loss of breath, amongst other symptoms. I had just thought I was sick with a horrible cold or the flu. Looking back, it can only be confirmed that I had Covid. Everyone on that school trip was ill with this random illness.

We then skip forward to March 13th. I remember my mom telling me to bring everything home from school. I shouldn’t leave anything behind because I may not return to school. That turned out to be true. At 2:00 PM, my school pulled all of us into the gym and told us we would be out of school for 4 weeks with hopes of returning in April. This was just not true. So I took everything home and proceeded to do online school until my freshman year. The shutdown, as I said before, was very rough for me. Being such a social person, being forced only to see my family every day was difficult. I soon adapted, and it became a part of my story.

Millie: What was it like going into High school during a pandemic? Middle to High school is a large transition as is; tell me about what it was like for you, especially during this time.

Brady: Yeah. It wasn’t as difficult as I thought. Granted, nothing had been expected for months at this point, so I didn’t even know what normal was anymore. My school district chose to be a 50/50 school. It was our choice to do online schooling from home via Google Meet and Canvas or attend classes in person. I decided to be in person. They also changed the daily schedule to only four classes a day per quarter. So, I would go to the same class at the same time every day

for 8 weeks at a time. I didn't know what to expect, but I had made some good friends over the summer before school started and had a support system going into these years of my life.

Millie: Thank you for sharing your experiences.

Brady: Now that I have shared my story, Millie - What is *your* whole story?

Millie: Yes, thank you for sharing, Brady. My story is similar to most in that COVID was a dark time for me. I really struggled with my mental health a lot.

To set the scene, we need to go back to sixth grade. Before then, I had already lived in three different states and attended 2 elementary schools. As I was entering the sixth grade, I knew I would be moving yet again. We were not sure when - we had to wait for the house to sell before we could pack up and leave. I spent most of that year wondering "*when*". Around spring break of that year - it was time to move. I would start school again after the break. I was going to a brand new school, completely across the country. I was somewhat used to it, yet the fear never went away. The new school brought some challenges and it was then that I really started to struggle with my mental health. I finished out the year, enjoyed my summer and then entered the 7th grade. The challenges were the same, yet I pushed through. At the end of the year - we found out we were moving again. This was the third time in three years. Again, it was challenging being the new kid, but some things shifted and I began to be a lot happier. I spent the summer adjusting to the mountainous Colorado before starting eighth grade. I loved it. School started. Everything was okay. I began making friends and establishing relationships. March of 2020 rolls around. I remember hearing about our 2 extra weeks of spring break and being so excited. I went home that day and began wondering what this thing was. As I looked into it further, I knew that it could be very severe, but I still thought that we would return to school after the long break. Little did I know, I would never step foot in that middle school again. Online school was really easy. We never even had to meet on zoom. We just had assignments.

I was so lonely. So incredibly lonely. I had just moved hundreds of miles away from family and friends, started to plant my roots, but shortly after everything was ripped apart. I knew no one. I was literally all alone. Summer came shortly after and like most kids, I was excited to be free of assignments and schoolwork. What I didn't know was that things were going to get so much worse for me. Without school to distract me, I could see how lonely I really was. I became even worse mentally. I was so fragile.

In the fall, I began highschool. I was new - again. Already being as fragile as I was, this made things so much worse. I knew nothing. It was all different and I had no concept of consistency. My first semester of high school was awful. I went from a person who was normally straight A's and perfection to nearly failing multiple classes. I had no more energy to be a person, let alone do schoolwork. I ended up making 2 C's that semester. Things eventually did get better though. I found myself again and turned things around post-COVID.

Brady: Thank you for sharing that with me. Since you are a cheerleader, what was cheer like during the pandemic?

Millie: After school was cancelled, all I could think about was what was going to happen with cheer. We had planned to still compete, not yet knowing what was to come. We had a comp that weekend and we were making plans to still go. It eventually did get cancelled. Our whole season was gone. We couldn't practice either. I was crushed. Cheer is everything to me. My outlet was completely gone. This absolutely made my time much worse. It felt like everything was just wrong.

Brady: What was it like growing up with younger siblings during the pandemic?

Millie: My siblings are 5 years younger than me and I love them dearly. I definitely saw major impacts from the pandemic on them, though. Before they had gotten out, my sister had recently been diagnosed with a learning disability. Watching both of them having to do online school was tough, but it was especially tough on her. Due to the nature of lockdown, she wasn't really able to get the resources she needed. Today, almost 5 years later, I still see both of them struggling in school because of the implications from the pandemic. Early education is important. They weren't able to learn properly. This goes for kids all over America but I watched it happen firsthand.

Brady: Thank you for your time!

Reflections:

Brady: For me it was important to look back on my time during Covid. While it was challenging to have to look back at the darkest times in my life, I believe it is important to go back and reflect at what our lives were like in the past and how we have grown as human beings since then. I decided to not go into too much detail of my story. I did this because this is still a very sensitive time for me due to some family events that had happened with my older brother. I was okay to share what I did but felt it would be better for me to leave some of the most personal moments private within my family.

Millie:

I think it was good to look back on COVID. It was hard to look back and see into that dark time. Even though it was hard, I do think that it actually was healing and helpful. I did not go in depth with everything that happened, but it is best to keep it that way. I feel comfortable sharing my experiences, yet I still did not find it appropriate to share everything. I still looked back at those moments, though, and that was most impactful for me. I think that keeping it personal was the most important for me.